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COMMERCIAL NEWS

New Swiss postage stamps.

In accordance with custom, the Swiss Federal Postal Administration will issue a series of Pro Patria stamps on the occasion of the Swiss National Day, which is held on 1st of August. This series will comprise five values, of which four will continue the set of illustrations of minerals, rocks and fossils, which was started two years ago. The fifth stamp commemorates the 50th anniversary of the existence of the Swiss National Holiday Committee. Ninety per cent of the net yield from the sale of these stamps goes to the collection made on the National Holiday, which will be devoted this year to the technical training of young people, except for 10 per cent which is intended for the Swiss Institute for the Study of Art, in Zurich. These Pro Patria stamps will be sold from 1st June to 31st August 1960, their validity extending to 31st December 1960.

Swiss contribution to Angola's electricity supply.

It is to a group of works which are under the direction of the Oerlikon Engineering Company, at Zurich, among them being the Swiss firm of Escher Wyss, as well as some French firms, that an order has been given for the delivery of the electro-mechanical equipment of the big hydro-electric station of Cambabe, in Angola. This station is the first step towards the realisation of a vast combined group of plants, utilising the waters of the river Cuanza; it will comprise four units of approximately 90,000 h.p. each.

Switzerland exports fish.

It is a little-known fact that Switzerland, which has never been famed as a country for fishing, nevertheless exports quite a lot of freshwater fish. Thus, in 1959, Swiss exports of freshwater fish amounted to nearly 400 metric tons, which was 10 per cent more than in the previous year. On the other hand, Switzerland imported, in 1959, more than 14,000 metric tons of foreign fish, this being freshwater, sea and canned fish.

An interesting power station in the Grisons.

After only two years of construction work, a new power plant has been put into operation, near Lostallo, in the Canton of the Grisons. A number of interesting solutions have been adopted for the construction of the plant at Lostallo, which will make it possible to make it automatic to a large extent, and even to run it by means of tele-control later on. The electric equipment has been furnished by the Oerlikon Engineering Company, whilst the unit of Pelton turbines comes from the Mechanical Construction Works at Vevey; the firm of Brown Boveri, in Baden, has supplied the telemetric instruments, and the Albis Works at Zurich have installed the tele-control panels.

A battery-powered razor.

A Swiss precision watch factory, which has been producing electric razors since 1935, has now launched a new wire-less razor, which operates by means of a simple 1.5 volt torch battery, which is fitted into the case. This razor, which possesses a very elegant aspect, and which has been conceived in accordance with a model that has proved its worth for a number of years, can be used for shaving daily for one to two months with one battery.

Swiss flooring novelties.

Linoleum, or "inlaid" as it is called sometimes, is a material for covering floors which has been well-tested for a long time. Sometimes, however, its use is rendered difficult because of its being delivered in heavy rolls, which are 6.5 feet in width. In order to do away with this inconvenience, the Linoleum Factory of Giubiasco (Switzerland) now manufactures linoleum in 1 foot square tiles, the reverse side of which is not made of jute, but of bituminized cardboard, which adheres very easily. This form of linoleum is particularly useful for small premises and, in addition, it makes a combination of colours possible. The "Linasco" is another novelty produced by the same firm. This consists of a layer of linoleum of 1 mm. placed on a sheet of cellulose; it is intended for the casing of doors and walls in modern houses; it replaces paint, and has proved to be very advantageous in use, as the elasticity of the linoleum makes it almost impervious to knocks and blows of any kind, and it is practically everlasting.

Swiss firm makes contribution to surveying.

The speed and precision of surveying work carried out on the ground with the help of mensuration instruments, depends to a large extent on the kind of tripods used. The Swiss firm of Kern & Co. Ltd. have sought to perfect this instrument. The tripod, equipped with a head with a spherical surface, makes it possible to use levels without foot-screws, which makes the instruments lighter and more easily handled, more stable and easier to place horizontally on all kinds of terrain, which improves the levelling of the instrument. This is why this instrument has so rapidly won its way into surveying. The same firm has now produced, built on the same principle, a new centring tripod which facilitates and accelerates the setting up of the instrument, especially on sloping ground, owing to its almost automatic provision for the approximate levelling of the instrument as the centring operation is performed. In this new design, the supporting plate of the tripod, to which the instrument is fixed, bears on a head with a spherical surface and is rigidly fastened to the telescopic centring rod. Owing to this system a small fraction of a turn of the levelling knobs is sufficient to level the instrument precisely. In this way, both the experienced instrument-man and the beginner can quickly and easily set up on flat or sloping terrain. The time required, as compared with that for the standard tripod, is reduced by half, and at difficult stations, or with inexperienced personnel, the reduction is much greater.

Swiss National Fair.

The 41st National Fair will take place in Lausanne from 10th to 25th September 1960, at the Palace of Beaulieu, the premises of which extend over a total area of 1,320,000 square feet. More than 2,300 exhibitors will take part, and countless tried and proven products, spectacular novelties, agricultural machinery, industrial exhibits, products of textile and luxury industries, and the arts and crafts, will be on display in the 23 sectors of this important autumn fair, representing Swiss economy in all its unified diversity. This year's foreign guest country, Australia, will be taking part with an official exhibition organised by her government for the first time in Europe.

Jubilee in Swiss electrical-technical industry.

Fifty years ago a Swiss mechanic named Fritz Sauter established a small workshop for electrical appliances at Grindelwald, a village which is best known as a winter sports resort. The success of contact and relay clocks, made on an artisanal level, was so rapid that three years later the firm had to be enlarged and was then established in the industrial centre of Basle. It was Sauter who, during the First World-War, perfected the first electric boiler. To-day the firm of Fr. Sauter, Ltd. employs 1,300 persons and has branch establishments for the manufacture of its specialities in France and in Germany; its sales network extends over the whole world. In addition to apparatus for heating water, the firm's manufacturing programme comprises all the instruments of precision required for the checking and the control of electric power, such as relays, interrupters, thermostats, etc., for industry, the public services and private use.

Giant size pipes.

A firm which is established in the vicinity of Fribourg began, a short time ago, to manufacture tubes made of steel ribbons, soldered in spirals. The advantage of this system is that it makes it possible to produce large or small tubes, which can be used not only for canalisation purposes of all kinds, oleoducts, etc., but also for the construction of masts and of metallic structures. These pipes, which are extremely light, but strong, can be manufactured in

one piece, up to 157 feet in length. The principle of the manufacture is very simple: the steel ribbon, narrow or wide as required, comes in rolls, which are unrolled by a machine which proceeds immediately to roll them up again, this time in spirals which it solders at the edges, gradually as the work advances. As soon as the tube reaches the length required, the edges are soldered a second time. The border of solder thus obtained serves as a reinforcing casing for the tube.

No more scalding showers.

It is a well-known fact that the principal defect to be found in apparatus for mixing hot and cold water in bathrooms, is that it is very difficult — and precarious — to regulate the temperature. The shower very often changes suddenly from being icy to being boiling, to the great discomfort of the person using it. Ten years ago a brass-founding firm in Geneva invented an automatic watermixer controlled by a thermostat, which made it possible to obtain warm water possessing a constant temperature. This firm is now launching a new thermostatic mixer, which has been simplified and can be fitted to any existing installation. Moreover, in spite of the difficult role it has to perform, this new mixer is composed simply of an interchangeable cartridge for automatic regulation, placed in a rigid body and operated by a lever which forms the lid. Should anything go wrong, the cartridge of this "Kuglostat" — that is the name of the apparatus — can be changed in a few minutes.

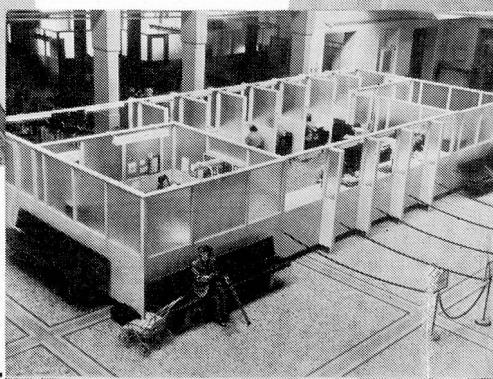


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Prospect for oil in Switzerland.

The SEAG, Swiss Petrol, Ltd., at St. Gall, has just started drilling for oil, near Küsnacht, on the banks of Lake Zurich. The SEAG possesses a share-capital of 2.33 million U.S.A. dollars, and concessions for prospecting for oil in a group of Cantons situated in the North East of Switzerland. Furthermore, the SEAG has the support of the Swiss Petrol Holding, S.A., an organisation which intends to finance the search for oil in Switzerland. In the opinion of specialists, a capital of approximately 11.63 million U.S.A. dollars is needed to be able to carry out successfully oil prospecting in Switzerland. Roughly 8.1 million U.S.A. dollars will be furnished by Swisspetrol, the remainder being provided by the regional groups and the foreign minority partners.

Checking the quality of Swiss watches.

Optional control of the quality of watches will henceforth be available to Swiss watch manufacturers. This is the first step towards the institution of an obligatory and general control of the quality of articles produced by the Swiss watchmaking industry. The manufacturers can now entrust batches of watches to the first three Control Centres, which have been set up in Geneva, at Le Locle, and at Biel, where they will be subjected to tests in respect of position, isochronism and temperature. Later on, other Centres will be opened at Solothurn and Neuchâtel, and then also in other localities. In this way Swiss watches will be able to strengthen their position on the world markets, as the purchaser will have the assurance of possessing a watch with a regular and precise movement, and which, above all, will have the advantage of preserving these qualities for a sufficiently long time. It is particularly in regard to the durability of the watches that the criteria which predominated at the establishment of the various norms of control have been fixed.

The longest road viaduct in Switzerland.

A new by-pass, 7,360 feet in length, has just been inaugurated in the Canton of Neuchâtel, for the purpose of diverting from the small town of Boudry the transit traffic between Yverdon and Neuchâtel. This new road includes a viaduct which is 1,340 feet in length, and is thus the longest in Switzerland. Its width is 34.5 feet.

Automation in Swiss railways.

In view of the fact that the traffic in the Main Station at Basle is increased steadily and is subject to a considerable amount of peak traffic, especially during the Swiss Industries Fair, the existing equipment was inadequate. The Swiss Federal Railways have now set up an automatic electric power signalling installation, which was put into service recently. This plant is the most modern in Switzerland.

A big industrial merger in Switzerland.

For some time past there has been talk of the taking over of the Swiss firm of Schlieren, at Zurich, which specialises in the manufacture of railway wagons and lifts, by the Schindler Consortium. This has now become an accomplished fact, after the General Meeting of the Schlieren Company. Eight hundred of the share holders of this company consented to the taking over of their shares by the Holding Company of the Schindler Consortium. This transaction was rendered necessary by the prevailing tendency towards the establishment of large economic units, with a view to more rational production. Moreover, competition abroad demands a concentration of sales efforts, and even, on certain markets, the maintenance of sales and production organisations.

New institute of social studies in Geneva.

The Board of Administration of the International Labour Office, in Geneva, has announced its intention of establishing in that city an international institute for social studies. This institute will make it possible for men and women who occupy themselves with social politics and with labour problems to enlarge their understanding of the social forces which prevail in the world of to-day. It will be financed by an endowment fund. Its work will only start when the endowment fund, of a minimum capital of 10 million dollars, has attained half this amount.

The right time underground or under water.

A Swiss watchmaking firm of La Chaux-de-Fonds exhibited, at the recent Industries Fair at Basle, a submersible chronometer capable of rendering valuable services to deep-sea divers, as well as to speleologists. This watch has a black dial, on which the time can be seen very easily under water, because its hands and the figures on it are large and luminous. Moreover, it possesses a movable rim, with an index-finger which when placed opposite the big hand at the moment when the submersion takes place constantly shows the time it is taking, and there is also a mobile index-finger intended for the control and graduation of the diver's coming up again, after having been down at a very great depth. The fact that this chronometer is anti-shock, anti-magnetic and absolutely water-tight, and is, moreover, very strongly built, makes it the long-desired companion not only of divers, but also of speleologists. It is also equipped with an automatic calendar.

Freeze-drying in Switzerland.

A new system of desiccation by means of congelation has now been in use for a short time in Switzerland by a big firm of manufacturers of concentrated soups. Through the action of freezing, the cells of the



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vegetables open and the extraction of water can take place more easily and without drying up the produce. As a result of this protective process of drying, it is possible to obtain a product that needs only to be cooked for four or five minutes, and which resembles as closely as is possible a fresh vegetable that one has just cooked. The colour of the product does not change, nor does its consistency, and the vitamins and other oligo-elements are preserved. Furthermore, it is not necessary to cook such products that have been dried by means of congelation for any length of time, whereas those vegetables which are preserved in accordance with the drying methods in use up to the present require to be cooked for fifteen or twenty minutes. For this reason, the concentrated sauces launched on the market a few months ago have obtained the greatest success in Switzerland.

A Swiss cement factory in the U.S.A.

A new cement factory has just been inaugurated in the small locality of Dundee, in the South of Detroit (U.S.A.), this being the most recent branch establishment of the Swiss Financière Holderbank. This plant, the building of which cost 25 million dollars, employs 130 men and has been kept fully occupied since the month of February. It is thought that this plant will be able to exceed, to a considerable extent, an annual capacity of production originally estimated at 8,000,000 metric tons.

A PROTECTED INDUSTRY: The Swiss Watchmaking Industry.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

The Swiss watchmaking industry has been enjoying State protection for nearly thirty years. This legal statute, however, will terminate at the end of next year. What has got to be decided now is whether this statute is to be maintained, whether it should be suppressed or whether it should simply be rendered more flexible, in order that it may be better adapted to new circumstances. Discussions on this subject have been going on for many a long month now, both in political and trade circles. The Federal Government has just published a Message to Parliament, in which it makes known its views on the Watchmaking Law.

When, in 1931, the world economic depression spread to our country, the Swiss watchmaking industry found its very existence threatened. The State, thereupon, decreed measures of protection, which have been maintained, and even reinforced during the course of the years. Now, the Federal Government is proposing that they should be made more flexible and is striving, with this end in view, to obtain the agreement of the circles concerned. What is the reason for this evolution?

First of all, the fact should be recalled that watchmaking is, in order of importance, the first among Swiss industries. It employs more than 60,000 workers. It is, primarily, an export trade and thus contributes, to a large extent, towards maintaining the equilibrium of our national balance of accounts.

At the time when the first measures of protection were taken — that is to say, in 1931 — the Swiss watchmaking industry occupied a very favourable position in the world. Switzerland possessed, more or less, the monopoly of high-quality watches. It was

this privileged position that it was sought to safeguard, and it has been safeguarded successfully over a number of years. For one thing, the watchmaking trade was organised by means of very precise collective agreements. For another, the establishment of new firms was made subject to an official authorisation which, for a long time, it was practically impossible to obtain. Finally, it was illegal to export any Swiss-invented machine for the manufacture of watches, and at the same time, it was illegal to export any watch parts.

However, the knowledge that they were safely protected by the State had the effect that the watchmaking firms were not sufficiently stimulated by the necessity of meeting foreign competition. The order which had been instituted led, only too often, to a state of immobility. This disadvantage alone would be a sufficient reason for rendering the régime more supple and for bringing back, progressively, the watchmaking industry to the law governing the freedom of trade and industry.

There is still another reason for modifying the present régime, and that is the foreign competition which is now making itself felt very strongly. Not only France and Germany, but also the United States and, more especially, Soviet Russia and Japan, have become serious competitors. The quality of their watches has improved steadily, whilst their prices are often considerably lower than those quoted by Switzerland.

Thus, it is necessary to take all these new circumstances into account. It would appear that the very best way to engage in the struggle would be to allow the laws of economic competition to function freely, i.e., to do away with certain protective measures and to promote free initiative. This recovered freedom for the Swiss manufacturers should be complemented by allowing them to collaborate with foreign firms. The entire evolution of Europe and of the free world is now proceeding in this direction and the watchmaking industry cannot remain aloof from it.

The Federal Government's Message to Parliament shows that our Authorities, as well as certain important leaders in the watchmaking trade, are in favour of such innovations. However, in order that they may get their way, it will prove necessary to overcome some stubborn resistance on the part of those who would like the legal protection now enjoyed by the watchmaking industry to be maintained.

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