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BUSINESS IN SWITZERLAND

Marine Diesel Engine Manufacture in Switzerland

In 1912 Sulzer Ltd. (Switzerland) equipped the cargo ship "Monte Penedo" with two two-stroke diesel engines. This was the first time that a big ocean-going vessel had been fitted with engines of this type; these 4-cylinder engines, each developing 850 h.p. at 160 r.p.m., were installed in the stern, which was also an innovation for the time. The "Monte Penedo", which was later re-christened the "Sabara", kept these engines for 30 years of uninterrupted service.

For fifty years Sulzer Ltd. have specialized in marine diesel engines, which they have continually improved and brought up to date. Quite recently this firm received an order for an engine of this type rated at 9,600 h.p., at 119 r.p.m., for a cargo ship to be built in Argentina. This vessel, with a net displacement of 8,250 tons, will have a speed of 17 knots. (OSEC).

New Multi-Purpose Recording Tachometer

A Swiss firm has just produced a new recording tachometer, very modern in conception, which represents in fact the very latest in apparatus of this kind. The result of considerable technical experience in this field, the sturdy and extremely precise Zenith recording tachometer is particularly useful for lorries, taxis and utility vans, for it records not only the speed, but also the actual hours of service of the vehicle, as well as signs of irrational driving such as sudden accelerations and braking, exceeding of speed limits (warning light), etc. In case of accident, it gives irrefutable proof of the speed at the moment of collision. It can also record the driving times of three different drivers using the same vehicle in turn.

Very shortly, this appliance will be fitted with an indicator showing the number of revolutions of the motor so as to determine the optimum moment for oil changes, a daily totalizer and a system of recording the number of revolutions while idling. In addition, a special switch is provided for the automatic control of the vehicle's central lubricating system.

Zurich-Kloten Airport Buildings to be Enlarged

Only nine years after its construction, Zurich-Kloten airport is already too small. This is not surprising if one considers the really amazing growth of air traffic, especially since jet planes were first put into operation. Whereas in 1951 the number of passengers passing through Zurich airport annually was in the neighbourhood of 500,000, the figure is now three times as great. Consequently, plans have been made for a big expansion. Roughly speaking, the size of the airport, including the terraces and restaurants, will be trebled. At the same time all premises and the departments they house will be brought up to date and improved. The approach roads will be completely modified by the construction of a motorway between the city and its airport. In addition, like Geneva-Cointrin, but at a later stage, it is planned to connect the airport to the rail network directly by rail. This project, work on which is to start in 1963, is expected to be completed by 1967 and to cost 47 million Swiss francs. (OSEC)

Automatic Regulation of Oil-Fired Central Heating

The ideal oil heating system possesses not only a boiler thermostat and a room temperature thermostat but also a special gauge fitted outside the building. This gauge is connected to the central adjustment panel and transmits to it indications concerning any changes in the outside temperature. In fact, it is important for the heating to be adapted to any change in the atmospheric conditions right away without waiting for this variation to affect the inside temperature of the house. Up till now such a system was too complicated and too expensive for small heating plants. But thanks to the new appliances put on the market by a Swiss firm, which are both easy to mount and inexpensive, this gauge is now within the reach of owners of even quite small buildings, and will enable them to reduce their fuel bills considerably.

The whole apparatus consists of an electronic regulator, an exterior gauge and a boiler thermostat. The regulating switches, which make it possible to set the temperature desired with considerable precision, can be fitted separately, in one of the rooms of the apartment. Furthermore, if the system is connected up to a clock movement, it is possible to arrange for it to switch automatically from a normal temperature to a lower one during the night, and vice-versa. This type of regulator, called "FW24", is suitable for either the simple type of heating system worked by successive switching on and off of the oil-burner, or that regulated by a motor-driven mixing valve. (OSEC)

HOW TO PROGRESS YET MARK TIME

By HAROLD WINCOTT

I spent last week away from most if not all of it all, looking at the Swiss economy in general and the Swiss watch industry in particular. On the Swiss economy in general, there is not a great deal novel to report. Switzerland, in common with most of Europe, has been suffering from the problems of too much prosperity, overfull employment, a tendency for incomes to outstrip production, a widening gap in her visible trade, some loss of reserves, rising prices, and so on.

What is unusual — but very typical of the way they run things in Switzerland — is the manner in which the authorities are trying to cope with the situation. The whole effort is being based on voluntary action. The banks have been asked to restrict credit. Industry has agreed not to take on more labour — either Swiss or foreign (the proportion of foreign workers in Switzerland is very high — 700,000 out of a total population of 5 million) and to limit its investments. Working hours will not be further reduced. Government at all levels is to try to contain its spending.

It remains to be seen how all this will work out: the Swiss T.U.C. is not too enthusiastic about the programme. But at least this may be said — the remedial measures have obviously been framed in a way which will do the least possible damage to outside trade: they may indeed help other countries by encouraging Swiss investment abroad. And given the high level of discipline and co-



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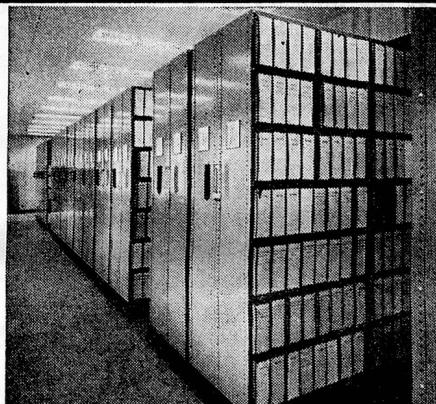
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operation which characterise Swiss economic life I would guess that voluntary measures have a better chance of success in Switzerland than in almost any other country.

97 PER CENT OF OUTPUT EXPORTED

So much then, very briefly, for the general background. What about the Swiss watch industry? It is an awkward industry for those of us who like to dogmatise about economics. The industrialists who claim that export trade is possible only when it is based on a secure home market will find it difficult to explain the extraordinary success of an industry which exports, direct, no less than 97 per cent of its output. I did indeed hear one of the biggest manufacturers of quality watches saying that the Swiss market was important to his company. It only exported 90 per cent of its output!

The Swiss watch industry upsets too the commonly held idea that labour relations are bad in old industries because of deeply entrenched interests, restrictive practices which are relics of bygone conditions, and so on. The industry dates from the sixteenth century, when a corporation of watch makers was established in Geneva. Yet, when you ask people in the industry when the workers last came out on strike, they look at you rather blankly, and one chap says he thinks it may have been 1918 and another says "Wasn't there some trouble in the early 'thirties?" In fact, labour troubles just don't exist in modern Switzerland.

Again, if you are one of those people who argue that only big industrial combines can compete successfully in the modern world, you have to explain how an industry which has 2,200 individual units employing on average fewer than 40 people in each factory or workshop can nevertheless produce nearly half the world's watches and clocks, with an annual value of £85m. and make itself responsible for 15 per cent of the Swiss export income. These figures, of course, disguise the fact that there are quite a number of very substantial companies in the industry — all privately owned, incidentally — employing several thousand workers, housed in splendid factories and tremendously "capital intensive". Nevertheless, the Swiss watch maker of whatever size is essentially an individualist.

And yet the industry is in its own way very highly organised — at least the larger elements in it are — under the Chambre Suisse de l'Horlogerie. There is, for example, the Fédération Horlogère, to which the 500 or so makers of jewelled lever and cylinder watches belong. There has been a good deal of rationalisation of the manufacture of components, suitably under the group Ebauches S.A., which allows many of the smaller units to avoid the heavy capital expenditure involved in the production of parts and to concentrate on assembly.

This odd combination of individual enterprise and centralised organisation has its advantages and disadvantages. There is only one union for the whole of the industry, and negotiations on pay, hours and so on are conducted centrally — as and when necessary; there is no question of an automatic annual wage claim — between this union and the employers' federation. Yet the units in the industry, even the largest of them, are small enough for relationships within a factory to be kept on a personal basis. There are in consequence, no demarcation disputes: given the necessary skills, which most of the employees possess in abundance, workers will switch cheerfully from job to job to help maintain the production flow. Automation has reached astonishing proportions, with one man responsible for nine machines, yet this causes no difficulties

with the employees. if the working week is fixed at 44 hours, that's that: overtime is virtually unknown. Because of this, and despite a high turnover of labour, inevitably, among the women workers, there is no question of "poaching" labour with offers of overtime working.

RESEARCH RESULTS JEALOUSLY GUARDED

On the other hand, although there is centralised research and development, the strongly individualistic temperament of the employers tends to make them conduct their own research and development as well, and to guard its results jealously. And there is no doubt in my mind that the industry as a whole is facing a period of still further rationalisation. As a complete layman, I was astonished to find some people in the industry in a ferment as to its future. To me, square that I am, a watch is a watch, and even more heinous, something you wind up each night before going to bed.

But to most Swiss watch manufacturers the self-winding watch is now standard. (Incidentally, the first self-winding watch was made, by a Swiss of course, in 1775.) Now all the talk is of electro-mechanical watches, run on batteries, and electronic watches, incorporating transistors. And it's not just talk; they have these things, although not in quantity production. But even these don't satisfy the really forward-minded Swiss. The real break-through, they'll tell you, will come when someone perfects, for quantity production, a watch without a balance wheel. Sorrowfully, they'll add, a device like a tiny tuning fork, with magnets to provide the necessary vibrations, was dreamed up in Switzerland and then developed, although not to the stage of commercial production, in the United States.

AWAITING THE TRULY AUTOMATIC WATCH

To some of the manufacturers, this is all sheer gimmickry, with which view, again as a layman, I'd agree. Yet I sensed elsewhere a deep sense of uneasiness about these new developments. Switzerland has led the world in making watches for centuries — and still does so. But in recent years countries such as Russia, Japan and Germany have developed considerable watch industries of their own. I heard one Swiss manufacturer speaking enviously of the set-up in the Japanese industry where a literal handful of companies produces 90 per cent of total output. At the back of these forward-thinking people's minds is the nagging fear that one day one of these "new" industries, or the United States, will make the break-through and perfect, for quantity production, the truly automatic watch.

I did indeed during my visit come across some feeling that the Swiss as a nation are going to the dogs like the rest of us. There was some head-shaking because women now vote in three of the 22 cantons. (They don't, of course, have any say in Federal affairs.) The tea break has begun to appear in a few factories. There are football pools and a sort of bingo (both very mild affairs: so mild indeed that real, down-to-earth casinos just outside the Swiss borders flourish — on Swiss patronage). For myself, I doubt whether the contamination is serious. A nation which conducts a referendum to approve, by a large majority, the adoption of a system or compulsory technical testing for all watch and movement manufacturers in order to protect the good name of its products in the world's markets seems to me to be likely to maintain its position longer than most of us.

(Reprinted by courtesy of the editor,
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