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COMMENT

HOW BRITISH PRODUCTS SELL IN SWITZERLAND

It is no secret that the relative importance and abundance of British-manufactured goods on the world market have significantly diminished over the past ten to fifteen years. This is due to the emergence of other industrial powers, particularly Japan, as powerful competitors offering cheap and reliable goods. One field in which competition is allowed to play almost unhindered, thus presenting a true picture of the appreciation of foreign products, is that of motorcars. Britain's position on the Swiss motorcar market has steadily declined over the past four years. The Swiss, who had hitherto bought the highly popular Ford Escort model from Ford UK, have recently switched to German suppliers. The Swiss Ford sales organisation heralded the event with a publicity campaign which was implicitly critical of British workmanship.

The *Daily Telegraph* of 9th March referred to the event. Its Motoring Correspondent wrote:

An advertising campaign in Switzerland stressing that the Ford Escort cars sold there were coming from Germany, and not from Britain, has ended.

A Ford spokesman in Britain said that the campaign was only a short one, due to last for a few days (it lasted in fact for several weeks, Ed).

Only about 2,000 Ford Escorts are sold in Switzerland each year, half of them built in Germany, the other half in Britain. In November the decision was taken to supply the Swiss market for Escorts entirely from Germany.

The Ford Motor Company in Zurich launched an advertising campaign to boost sales of the six-year-old Escort. It carried the line: "Great news: For Switzerland the Ford Escort is now constructed in Germany". The advertisement hailed the decision to supply the Swiss market entirely from Cologne as a guarantee of quality of impeccable finish.

Switzerland, which has no motor industry of its own, is traditionally the most competitive market in Europe. Britain sold 20,240 cars last year compared with 26,450 in 1971.

Ford of Britain sold 4,700 cars, mostly Escorts and Cortinas, compared with the German Ford Company's 16,000.

The British Ford spokesman said: "With German-speaking Switzerland it is obviously a plus to advertise a car as being made in Germany."

"We're on very good terms with the Swiss Ford Company and nobody here regards their advertising as being intended to have a "dig" at Britain."

One would like to agree with the Ford spokesman, but it is more than likely that the emphasis laid on the German origin of the new Escort and the emphatic association between this fact and the car's quality was intended as a powerful argument by the advertisers, who also campaigned in French-speaking Switzerland. The German-Swiss have traditionally made Germany their first suppliers of motorcars. This is more as a result of habit, geographical convenience and good sales organisation than of particular affinities towards the Germans. The average German-Swiss and French-Swiss are probably more attracted towards Britain. By that token, British car-manufacturers should enjoy more "goodwill" from the Swiss market. That they sell increasingly badly is because they are no longer considered as good value for money as their competitors. They are generally more expensive taking account of the extra amount which customers must pay for "optional" appliances. Spares are considerably more expensive than for Japanese and other European cars. Owing to the different standards

that have been in use in British industry, repairs take usually longer and are more expensive. Finally, the general public generally agrees that British cars are more prone than others to cause trouble. The British themselves turn increasingly to foreign cars, and the Swiss, who have no nationalistic axe to grind in this matter, can't be expected to react otherwise.

SWISS EVENTS

DIPLOMATIC PREMIERE

Mr. Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department, will inaugurate a new première of Swiss diplomatic practice: He will convene all the Swiss ambassadors and chargés d'affaires in Arab countries in a special three-day working conference in Cairo during the first week of May.

Ambassadors assembled in Cairo will be those in Cairo, Addis Ababa (who is also accredited in North and South Yemen), Algiers, Bagdad, Tel Aviv, Amman, Beirut, Tripoli, Rabat, Jeddah, Khartoum, Damascus and Tunis. The Egyptian Government has voiced no objection to the presence at the meeting of the Swiss ambassador in Israel.

Topics to be examined during this unprecedented meeting are expected to be the relations of Switzerland with the Arab world in the context of the middle east conflict; cultural and economic co-operation; and problems faced by the Swiss living in Arab countries. Our Foreign Minister will be accompanied by Ambassador Thalmann, Secretary of the Political Department, Dr. Bindschedler, Head of the Legal Division and Mr. Marcuard, in charge of technical co-operation.

The meeting will be held from 29th April to 6th May. Earlier, Mr. Graber will pay a three-day official visit to Egypt during which he will meet Mr. Mohammed Hassan el Zayyat, the Egyptian foreign minister. The last visit to Egypt by a head of the Political Department was that of Giuseppe Motta in 1937. King Fouad of Egypt had visited Switzerland in 1923.

Mr. Graber's initiative appears to be part of a general expansion of Swiss diplomatic presence abroad. This development was exemplified by Switzerland's participation in the Helsinki preliminary talks on a European Security Conference, and on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Communist countries such as North Vietnam and East Germany. Relations with the Arab world have remained somewhat fresh. Although the Government has remained ostensibly neutral, Swiss public opinion strongly leans towards the Israelis. The Wuereligen air disaster and the hijacking and destruction of a Swissair jet in the Jordanian desert has not helped to improve relations, neither have the many differences with Colonel Boumedienne's Algeria.

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MONETARY CRISIS

The Federal Council decided not to take any new monetary measures in the face of the February-March monetary crisis. While all the foreign exchange markets of the European Community and other countries such as Japan were closed, the Zurich market was one of the few in the West to remain open. Following the 10 per cent dollar devaluation and new pressures against the American currency two weeks later, the dollar fell as low as 3.07 Swiss francs. The pound hardly fared better and was exchanged for as little as seven francs. On the other hand, Swiss francs were in great demand in London and dollar-franc swaps dominated the monetary scene there for several days at the end of February. Mr. Nello Celio, Head of the Finance Department, reiterated his decision not to set up a double money market, one intended for ordinary commercial transactions and the other for floating capitals not used as international payments.

APOLOGY. We should like to apologise to all our readers for the delay of publication of this issue of the Swiss Observer. This was due to technical circumstances beyond our control. Everything is being done to resume punctual delivery and we hope to have the situation back to normal for the 27th April issue.

Parliament is to debate in March a revision of the Swiss unemployment insurance system. The main point of the new law will be to increase (from 48 francs to 80 francs a day) the loss of payment against which workers contracting unemployment insurance policies will be covered.

It can reasonably be assumed that Switzerland will not be faced by massive unemployment in the near future. With an average of a hundred unemployed in Switzerland last year, or 35 per million active persons, the problem will probably not be treated with urgency by Parliament. Figures for unemployment may in fact be slightly higher because official statistics only take account of registered unemployed.

Still, there is much talk of a reform of the present unemployment system. This is one of the main demands of the Swiss trade unions. They themselves run about thirty unemployment insurance funds and hope thereby to keep some of the influence they are otherwise losing through a gradual decline in membership. Although the trade unions are against a merger of the 153 unemployment funds, which together manage 540 million francs and payed out only a million francs in 1971, they support the idea of making unemployment insurance obligatory — which it now is only in Geneva.

The Office for Industry of the Department of Economy is currently reviewing an overhaul of the foundation of unemployment insurance. Instead of considering this institution as a means of

alleviating, by a kind of alms-giving, the social harm of a liberal and competitive economic system, the office hopes to give insurance. According to the present thinking of the office, unemployment insurance should cover against the loss of a job (nowadays usually due to mergers and the disappearance of old trades) not by paying out benefits, but by helping the insured to learn a new trade or move to another area offering better job opportunities. The office thus hopes to fight off unemployment by promoting complete fluidity and adaptability of labour. This is an economist's dream but a Swiss manager's nightmare. Such a scheme could yet help to increase the already high level of job turnover suffered by every sector of Swiss business. It would require the setting-up of obligatory unemployment insurance. But this is still very far off.

NEW SWISS BANK NOTES

Switzerland will be printing its own banknotes from 1976 onwards. The Swiss National Bank announced that all denominations of above 50 francs, which are at present produced by the De La Rue Company, England, will be produced by the printing firm of Orell Fussli, who are at present making the 10- and 20-franc notes. This transfer has been decided mainly on reasons of security and improved rationalisation. The 10- and 20-franc notes will be progressively changed and the pattern of the new notes has already been determined as outcome of a national contest.

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