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TECHNICAL and ECONOMIC ITEMS

HOW TO STEADY A LIMPING TABLE

For ensuring perfect steadiness on uneven ground, industry offers at present only furniture and appliances equipped with adjustable legs requiring painstaking manual adjustment. The system presented at the Geneva Inventors Exhibition by a Swiss Technical Research Company is designed to ensure the desired adjustments automatically, without any intervention on the part of the user. The mobile legs of a stand (table, ladder, etc.,) are connected to each other by a special differential, enabling the legs to adjust themselves to the surface on which they are to rest, and then automatically locking the whole mechanism once the stand is properly levelled and firmly planted on the ground. From then on, the stand behaves as if it had fixed legs. The example of a table, provided with two fixed legs and two mobile legs making allowances for the unevenness of the ground, illustrates perfectly the main idea of the invention: the two mobile legs work on a differential in which the relative movement of the stand corresponds to the average. Once the table is firmly in position, it is easy to lock the legs; when the legs are free to move, a push-rod mechanism allows them to move longitudinally, taking with them a number of ball-bearings placed in the corners. The latter then behave like a liquid caught between pistons. As soon as all four legs rest properly on the ground, the ball-bearings lock together

and thus block the whole stand. On lifting it up again, the system automatically unlocks. The application of this invention are many: tables, chairs, ladders, bicycle or motor-bicycle stands, cinema projectors, etc.

UNEMPLOYMENT

There were 106 fully unemployed in Switzerland out of an active population of three million last year. The figures have therefore remained practically unchanged with respect to 1970 and 1971, when unemployment stood at 104 and 100. This represents the lowest unemployment rate ever achieved in Switzerland and elsewhere in the world.

GROWING EXPORTS

According to the OECD, Switzerland is third in the world export league. Figures for 1971 indicate that the proportion of exported goods in the gross national product amounted to 23.5 per cent, a ratio only surpassed by Belgium (42.3 per cent) and the Netherlands (37.7 per cent). Next in the league came Sweden (22.2 per cent), Canada (20.6 per cent), Austria (19.0), West Germany (18.0), Great Britain (16.4), Italy (14.9), France (12.6), Japan (10.7) and the US (4.1). This list applies only to developed countries.

A NEW DATA TERMINAL

Applied Research Laboratories (Lausanne) recently presented a data terminal of original design. This new model is an input/output device offering many advantages: The transmission speed is high, and wide rolls of paper can be used. In addition, the replacement of a large number of mechanical components by electronic circuits ensure a high degree of reliability, enabling the terminal to be operated twenty-four hours a day. Finally, the apparatus can be completed by a reader and a paper-tape punch. This unit is designed for application as a computer input/output terminal, as a terminal in on-line data processing and numerical control. Mass-production of this terminal was launched in Switzerland at the beginning of this year.

SWISS WINES ABROAD: FEW, BUT GOOD

Although only a minute proportion of Swiss wine production is exported, it is subject to very strict checks. This is a perfect illustration of the tradition of quality that Switzerland has always insisted on instilling into its foreign trade. Out of a total wine production of a million hectolitres in 1971 (one hectolitre is equivalent to about 22 imperial gallons) Switzerland only exported 7,000 hl. The major part of this, about 60 per cent, went to Common Market countries, the remainder being divided among the rest

of the world. In order to preserve and safeguard the good name of the product, the Federal Commission responsible for checking wines for export has been set up. It comprises federal officials and representatives from Agronomic Research Establishments and the Exporters. It carries out a twofold evaluation, one chemical, the other with regard to taste, on numerous samples. Depending on the case (96 to 97 per cent of them), a certificate is then issued. This entitles the product to benefit by an export subsidy and acts as a certificate of origin in Common Market countries. In the event of a dispute, a Commission of Experts already exists — but its services have only been called for once in the past seven years. This would tend to show that exporters wish to maintain their position abroad by exporting only their finest products.

SWISS WATCH TRIUMPH IN THE FIELD OF THE INFINITELY SMALL

As a result of a co-operation agreement signed a few months ago, two watch firms at La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchâtel) Portescape, manufacturers of step-by-step motors and A. Imhof Co. Ltd, have just presented the smallest quartz movement for clocks in the world. The range of application of this entirely new electronic device extends from small travel alarms to big mural clocks as well as various counters. Made for subsequent insertion in a case, this quartz electronic calibre is particularly remarkable for the very reduced dimensions of the movement. The protective cylinder, 55 mm in diameter and 22 mm in width, contains all the parts: a 1.34 V battery (giving a running life of over one year), a quartz vibrating at 32,768 cycles, an electronic frequency divider bringing the number of vibrations down to 1 per second, a control circuit, a transducer a step-by-step motor and a train of wheels for indicating the seconds, minutes, hours and date.

SWISS BRAKES FOR SPANISH TRAINS

67 new electric suburban trains in Spain are to be equipped with Schindler-type hand-operated brakes, as the result of a decision by the Spanish State Railways (RENFE) and the Spanish Secondary Lines (FEVE). Schindler Waggon Co. Ltd of Pratteln, Switzerland, have authorised Frenos Calefacción y Senales Co. Ltd, Madrid, to manufacture this new kind of brake under licence. Brakes of the same model have already been mounted on rolling stock both in Switzerland and Portugal. The Swiss Federal Railway are fitting them on the prototypes of trains presently under assembly.

57th Swiss Industries Fair April 7-17, 1973 Basle



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