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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

An original aspect of Swiss economic policy.

Ever since the end of the war, the history of Europe reveals a strong tendency towards economic integration: in this connection there is much talk about reducing customs barriers and suppressing those measures which prevent the free circulation of goods.

At the very moment when this movement towards liberalisation is preparing to be invested with a concrete form, Switzerland finds herself facing a particular difficulty, for, in point of fact, her customs tariff is obsolete and requires a revision.

Switzerland's customs tariff is more than half a century old. It has never been revised since it was first established. This is due to the extreme slowness of our legislative procedures, a slowness which is undoubtedly a pledge of stability, but which sometimes prevents our policy from being adapted with sufficient flexibility to existing circumstances. For thirty years there has been talk of revising the customs tariff. However, it must be said, in exoneration of our government and parliamentary authorities, that the exceptional conditions in which the world has lived during the last thirty years have not been propitious for the elaboration of a new, lasting régime, neither in this domain nor in many others.

What is it that makes this customs tariff obsolete? In the first place, its nomenclature is based on a list of goods which were traded between the countries half a century ago. One need only think of the technical progress which has been achieved since then to be able to understand why this list does not correspond to the realities of to-day. This consideration alone would justify a revision.

Furthermore, whereas the great majority of the other countries calculate their rates of duty on the basis of the *value* of the goods, Switzerland calculates them in accordance with their *weight*. This system offers an advantage, in that the operations at the frontier are extremely simple, as all that has to be done is to weigh the goods, without having to bother with any examination of the invoices or verification of the contents. On the other hand, this system presents one certain disadvantage: even if the price of the goods goes up and even if the purchasing power of currency weakens, the yield from customs does not adapt itself automatically and arithmetically to the evolution in the cost of living. It remains stable. In this way, the fiscal aim of customs duties is attained to an ever declining extent. That is the reason why, right in the middle of the war, Switzerland instituted the turnover tax. The object of this tax, and its effect, is to make up the losses due to the old system of duties levied at the frontier, by means of dues levied within the country itself.

If one keeps these two facts in mind, it becomes clear that Switzerland will have to tackle the negotiations on the liberalisation of international trade in a position of definite inferiority to those countries which have adapted, gradually, their customs duties to new circumstances and to the changes which have taken place in the value of money.

Thus, a reform of our customs tariff is an urgent necessity. Proposals for it are to be submitted to the Federal Chambers very shortly, and it is hoped that the whole matter can be settled during the course of

this year. What will have to be done, is to create a situation which will lend itself to useful negotiations within the scope of the efforts undertaken in order to realise a generalised system of free trade. In this way, Switzerland will be better placed to play the role which is due to her in the important movement for European integration.

SWISS CLUB BALLOCH.
Report of Annual General Meeting.

The Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Club Balloch took place on Friday, 24th April, in the canteen of the British Silk Dyeing Company Ltd., Balloch.

After the usual delay the President, Mr. H. Berli, opened the proceedings at 7.50 p.m. After welcoming guests and members he gave a short survey about the happenings of the past year, which was very quiet, the summer outing having been drowned by the bad weather.

Both the minutes of the last meeting and the annual accounts, ably presented by the Secretary and Treasurer respectively, were approved with acclamation. The retiring members of the Committee, Mr. Berli and Mrs. Ziegler, were unanimously re-elected for a further term.

As on our National Day, the 1st of August, most of our members will be on holiday, it was decided to have an outing at the beginning of July instead, this taking the form of a bus trip to Edinburgh. A suggestion that we should meet more often socially was welcomed and the Committee were given the task of organising something suitable.

Our Hon. President, Consul E. Hofstetter, gave us some very useful information about the "Solidaritäts Fund". After a vote of thanks proposed by Mr. Bachmann, the President closed the business part of the meeting at 9 p.m.

After tea, as usual served very competently by the canteen staff, the President announced the winners of the annual shooting competition. Mr. Wirz was again the champion, winning the "Wanderpreis" for the second time in succession. Mr. Bachmann then showed some very fine coloured Canton slides, both of Switzerland and Scotland, and it was all too soon that the time to take leave came once more.

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PERSONAL.

We deeply regret to announce the passing away in Basle on May 17th, of Mr. Emil Siegrist, Managing Director of Messrs. Siegrist-Orel Ltd., and Silent Gliss Ltd., only a few days after having attained his 70th birthday, which was mentioned in our last issue.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, 12th June 1959. We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: J. D. Bernoulli, H. Müller, T. Bussman, E. Belart, E. R. Cottet, J. J. Boos, G. Ashley, Max Grether, Joe Christen, E. J. Howell, Henry Pfirter.