

Technical items

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State Councillor Louis Guisan, President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, who reckoned that the better-off members of the Swiss community abroad, earning over 50,000 francs, were not likely to be interested in the scheme offered to them last year. But Mr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad, said that 80 per cent of 5th Switzerland earned less than 30,000 francs a year.

New subscriptions to voluntary Old Age Insurance following the appeal launched last year totalled 14,000 — a relatively small figure. There are now 39,000 Swiss abroad subscribing to Voluntary Old Age Pension. They pay 13 million francs a year and receive 97 million in exchange.

Other themes, such as the Swiss Solidarity Fund and the problem of compensating those Swiss who have lost their livelihood abroad were also discussed. A comprehensive report on this Assembly will be published in a forthcoming issue.

ROCHE FACES DIFFICULTIES IN GERMANY

Hoffman-la-Roche, the Basle-based chemical giant, is having trouble in West Germany. The Federal Cartels Office in West Berlin has been conducting an enquiry into the firm's pricing policy in the Federal Republic following the price-cutting orders given last year by the British Government on the drugs Valium and Librium marketed in the UK. In the belief that these two highly popular tranquilisers were overpriced, the Government had ordered Roche to cut their prices by three-quarters, and an action by the firm is still pending at the High Court.

Roche could have similar trouble in West Germany. The Cartels Office is however, also examining the prices of competing products. Roche completely disagrees with the office's findings regarding the market impact of the two drugs. While the West German authorities claim that they take well over half of the market, consisting of sales at pharmacies and to hospitals, Roche says the percentages amount to 10.5 per cent for Valium and 2.4 per cent for Librium. The Cartels Office also complains that the drugs are dearer in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. Roche answers by recalling that these prices have never been raised since Valium and Librium were introduced on the West-German market ten years ago.

Roche has an important subsidiary in West Germany. With 2,000 employees, it recorded a 400 million D.M. turnover last year, making it one of the highest earners per employee in the European chemical industry. This point was also put forward as an argument by the Cartels Office but the General Manager of the firm, Mr. Dietrich, said that this was due to its high level of investments and efficiency.

TECHNICAL ITEMS

SWISS LICENCES FOR JAPAN

The Industrial Electronics Co. Ltd. (AGIE), at Losone-Locarno (Ticino) considered as one of the world's leading firms for the construction of electro-erosion machines, has granted the licensing rights for the construction of two types of machine from its electro-erosion range to the Hitachi Seiko company, a branch of the Japanese group Hitachi. To start with, the Swiss firm will supply the necessary generators, it being imperative that these satisfy the highest technical standards. The purpose of this co-operation is to widen the Swiss firm's participation in the Japanese market. The Ticino firm also hopes by this means to be able to offset the limitations on output caused by the current tension on the labour market in Switzerland. The AGIE licences will enable the Swiss firm's Japanese partner to complete its manufacturing programme, which is based in part on the construction of electrolytic machine tools. The possibility of stepping up co-operation between the two firms with regard to the sale of machines is still under discussion. Founded in 1954, AGIE now has nearly one thousand employees. It exports over 90% of its output.

MACHINE TOOL NOVELTY

Wishing to concentrate its activity in the field of cable-making and electro-technics, the Cable and Wire-Drawing Works at Cossonay (Vaud), has decided to sell the majority of the share capital it holds in Tarex-Manurhin Co. Ltd., Geneva, to Premax Co. Ltd., Machine Tools Factory, Geneva. The activity of Premax Co. Ltd., a firm specialising in the field of programmed automatic lathes, will then include Tarex Co. Ltd. (Geneva), P.T.P. SpA (Tortona, Italy) which manufacture automatic lathes, gear grinders and cutters, as well as Produmatic Co. Ltd., (Châteauneuf-en-Thymerais, France), specialising in modular automatic lathes, and Fimu SpA, Italian machine tool foundry (Carbonara, Scrivia). The activity of the Geneva factory will be considerably increased as a result of its integration in the Premax group. The group's turnover amounts to some 60 million Swiss francs and the number of employees to over 800.

NON-POLLUTING POWER STATION

Within the framework of its participation in the fight against pollution, Technicair Co. Ltd. (Geneva) has received a big order from the Elektrizitätswerk of Basle for the installation of two high capacity SF electrostatic filters in a power station situated in a residential part of the town. After the units already installed in Berne and Geneva, these filters, some 39 feet high, will process 400,000 cu.m/h of air

at 200°, in this way capturing the polluting elements given off by the combustion of heavy fuel oil. The dust content at the exit to the filters will be distinctly lower than the minimum laid down by federal recommendations. The dust collected in the filters will be conveyed to silos by means of an entirely new system of high pressure pneumatic transport.

SWISSAIR: 21 MILLION FRANCS FOR WATER PURIFICATION

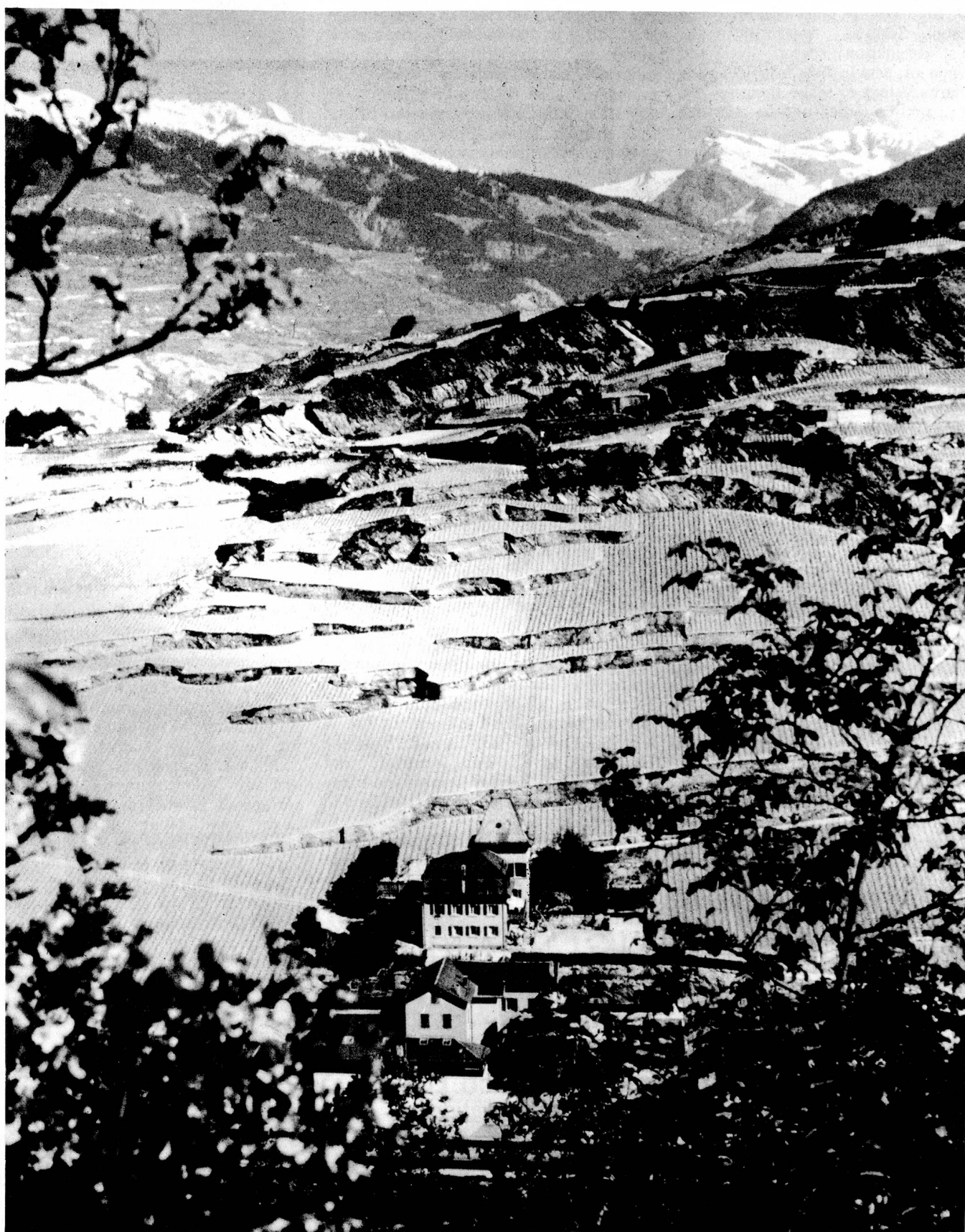
Swissair has decided to build a water purification plant at Zurich/Kloten airport. This plant, which will cost some 21 million francs, should be operational in 1976. It will be used to cleanse the water of all organic and inorganic elements from the technical departments of Swissair, in accordance with the most recent legal regulations. The water will be recycled in a closed circuit for re-use. In this way, Swissair's technical department will be able to effect a big reduction in its consumption of precious drinking water. In addition, this plant will help take the load off a local water purification plant. The new water purifying plant works according to the principles of electro-flotation (purification) and inverse osmosis (desalination), which have already proved their effectiveness in the United States and Germany. It is the first time however that these processes have been applied one after the other. Swissair has already tried out these processes in its own experimental plant for some time now. Patents have been taken out in several countries.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Although it has no direct access to the sea, Switzerland occupies a leading position in the construction of *diesel marine engines*. In 1973, 257 ocean-going vessels were equipped with engines built under Swiss licence. The Swiss firm and its licensees supplied 36.6% of the total world output of these engines in 1973, as compared with 33.9% the previous year.

Within the framework of the 3rd International Packaging Exhibition Swisspack 1974, held in Basle from 14th to 18th May this year, prizes were awarded for the best packagings of the year. The firm *Klausfelder Packagings Co. Ltd.* at Vevey won the 1974 Swiss Technical Oscar for a folding box with an insulating layer for ice-cream; brand new in conception, this packaging combines cardboard and expanded polystyrene.

In 1973, 13,320 private homes were built in Switzerland, i.e. 9.3% more than the previous year. This figure represents just under a sixth of all *new accommodation* built last year. From the housing census in December, 1970, until the end of 1973, the number of private homes increased by over 36,400; they thus number over 409,000.



Scenery from the Valais