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Fifty years in the Service of Switzerland's Silk Industry

After fifty years of professional activity, Mr. Th. Niggli, Doctor of Laws, Vice-President of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry, has announced his intention of retiring from active participation in business affairs. « Swiss Textiles » has always had a kind friend and helpful adviser in Mr. Niggli, who has been ever ready to put his great professional skill at our service to help us in our task of publicity and information. That is why we wish, by giving here a brief résumé of Mr. Niggli's successful career of fifty years, to join in the homage that has already been paid to him, while at the same time wishing him many years in which to enjoy a well-deserved retirement.

The Editor

Mr. Th. Niggli studied in Lausanne, Berne and Rome ; after graduating with the degree of Doctor of Laws, he spent a short practical period of training at the Secretariat of the Swiss Union of Arts and Crafts, and in 1899 was appointed to the post of leader of the Secretary's Office of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry. This was an entirely new field for him but he quickly became acclimatised, particularly since, at that time, conditions of production and trade were very much simpler than during the war and the years immediately after. Weaving was largely carried out on hand-loom, and rayon was still unknown as an industrial raw material. But from the very start he had to contend with customs barriers, deal with commercial treaties, establish contact with Swiss and foreign customers and become familiar with the conditions obtaining on the raw material and finished product markets. The gradual disappearance of hand-weaving and the importance assumed by rayon brought about great changes in the silk industry ; possibilities of profit which had formerly depended on the price of raw silk, always subject to heavy fluctuations, were now determined by other factors. The two world wars caused great upheavals bringing new problems to be solved, and contributed to

increasing for Swiss industry the importance of the home market.

Mr. Niggli was one of the founders of the International Silk Union whose activities were interrupted by the last war, but which was revived two years ago under the name of « International Silk Association » and assumed its final form in Zurich in 1949.

During the course of his fifty years of service, Mr. Niggli had occasion not only to represent the interests of the silk industry and subsidiary industries to other professional groups and authorities in Switzerland and abroad, but also to perform an enormous amount of executive work in the course of personal dealings with many firms on both sides of the frontier.

The most agreeable personal qualities which matched his professional conscience were the keynote of Mr. Niggli's long and successful career, together with the clearness of his ideas and his extreme care to get to the bottom of things. His advice has always been listened to, abroad as well as in Switzerland. Among his activities of half a century, mention must also be made of his work as a publicist. His knowledge of textile matters enabled him to render valuable service with his pen to the silk industry in numerous articles and publications.

Switzerland's Foreign Trade and Textiles

Considered as a whole, the year 1949 has been marked by a return of Switzerland's economy to more normal conditions. The devaluation of foreign currencies which occurred in the autumn has not influenced foreign trade in any appreciable manner. The resultant fall in the price of imported goods has been completely or partially offset by adjustments of prices in the supplier countries. Here are the totals for Swiss foreign trade compared with those of last year and of 1938.

<i>Total Exports</i>			<i>Total Imports</i>		
<i>in millions of Swiss Francs</i>					
1938	1948	1949	1938	1948	1949
1316.6	3435.5	3456.7	1606.9	4998.9	3791.0

Thus the deficit in the balance of trade has decreased and is no more than 334.3 million Swiss francs for 1949.

In textiles, the situation was favourably influenced by the conclusion of a trade pact with Western Germany.

It should also be noted that exports of Swiss textiles have increased wherever any liberalisation of trade has occurred, which proves that Swiss textile products are still very much in demand abroad.

Swiss Export of Textile Products

	<i>in millions of Sw. fr.</i>		
	1938	1948	1949
Cotton yarn	23.6	27.3	51.2
Cotton fabrics	58.9	79.1	98.1
Embroideries, resp. lace (import.)	26.0	62.0	63.6
Rayon and staple fibre yarn	20.2	41.5	55.7
Silk and rayon fabrics	30.7	79.9	83.7
Woollen yarn	5.3	4.0	15.7
Woollen fabrics	3.2	6.0	17.6
Hosiery	8.0	20.2	32.8
of which stockings	(0.4)	(3.5)	(15.1)
Ready-made clothing (for ladies, gentlemen and children)	3.1	13.0	10.7
Totals	179.0	333.0	429.1