

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss textiles [English edition]  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss office for the development of trade  
**Band:** - (1951)  
**Heft:** [1]: 25th anniversary of Textile suisses

**Artikel:** The cotton industry  
**Autor:** Wiegner, A.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798754>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 01.04.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# IN SWITZERLAND

are not known and bought, and there are many firms with their own mills abroad. The silk industry and trade are therefore particularly susceptible to crises, especially since the home market, less affected by market fluctuations, only takes up a limited part of the output. Thanks to the variety of its production and the great number and diversity of the markets open

to it, the Swiss silk industry can however make the best possible use of the opportunities for business presented. It has survived crises and successfully come through periods of difficulty and will certainly know how to succeed in the future particularly now that the emphasis is placed on liberalisation and a more elastic organisation of trade.



## THE COTTON INDUSTRY

*by Dr. A. WIEGNER, President of the Paritary Commission of the Swiss Cotton Industry, St-Gall*

Switzerland is a small country in the heart of Europe, without access to the sea and not possessing any natural treasures worth mentioning apart from its resources of electrical energy. An area of 16,000 sq. miles and a population of 4.75 million inhabitants make it one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, for a large part of the country, which is so famous for its natural beauties, is composed of unfertile mountains and lakes. Nevertheless, the standard of living of its inhabitants is at the moment the highest in Europe and is only beaten in the world by that of the United States. How is this possible?

Considered as the oldest democracy in the world, Switzerland has always defended its principles of liberty, which enabled the early development of its trade and industry. Without raw materials, without a seaboard of its own, it has only been able to attain a high standard of living by exporting considerable quantities of finished products of a high standard of workmanship. With the raw materials it imports, Swiss industry manufactures products of a very high quality, the greater part of which is re-exported; machinery, watches, chemical and textile products, all have acquired world-wide fame because they come up to the highest technical requirements and satisfy the most refined tastes.

Of Switzerland's textile industries, cotton plays by far the most important role. More than half of its 20,000 looms work for export. The raw material, imported from all producer countries, is transformed in Swiss spinning, doubling and cloth mills and finishing establishments into a great variety of fabrics. Let us mention among these the fine novelty fabrics, resulting from the very finest finishing processes, such as organdie, which was invented in Switzerland, voiles and fashionable colour-woven and printed fabrics, poplins, furnishing fabrics, handkerchiefs and even fabrics for industrial use, all of which have carried the good name of the Swiss cotton industry to every continent.

The high wages demanded by the very advanced standard of living make it more difficult to compete on world markets. The limited home market and the

diversity of the needs of the foreign consumer do not allow manufacture to be carried on rationally in large quantities. Therefore the Swiss cotton industry has to find its own solution in order to be able, in spite of everything, to offer its products at competitive prices, while at the same time adapting itself to the changing demands of fashion and the foreign consumer. This result is only possible at the price of a very highly developed rationalisation of the work, which allows a small-scale production to benefit by the industrial advantages of production on a large scale. Without taking any of the mobility away from Swiss production, the most modern methods of the scientific organisation of work have had to be applied. Nevertheless, in spite of very modern up-to-date machinery and a completely rational organisation, Switzerland's cotton industry would not be able to do without skilled manpower; and the manual skill of the workers and their sense of quality, handed down from generation to generation, are indispensable to the manufacture of fabrics of a beauty and a perfection such as are found to-day in hand-printed fabrics for example.

Both official and private experimental and research laboratories are continually trying to obtain more and more perfect results. Close contact with world fashion centres and continual market research make it possible continually to create new fabrics corresponding to the trends of the day and the desires of the foreign buyer. A sales organisation of Swiss export firms reaching out all over the world makes it possible to sell products wherever there is a demand.

Historically, the cotton industry is the oldest in Switzerland. Until the end of the 18th century, work was carried on exclusively in basements. Women and children spun by hand. Industrialisation proper began more than 150 years ago, with the installation of the first mechanical spinning mills. The cotton industry was at its peak from the industrial point of view before the first World War. Since then, the number of machines and workers has decreased, but production itself has not declined because the continual increase in the number of operations carried out automatically by machine and more rational industrial

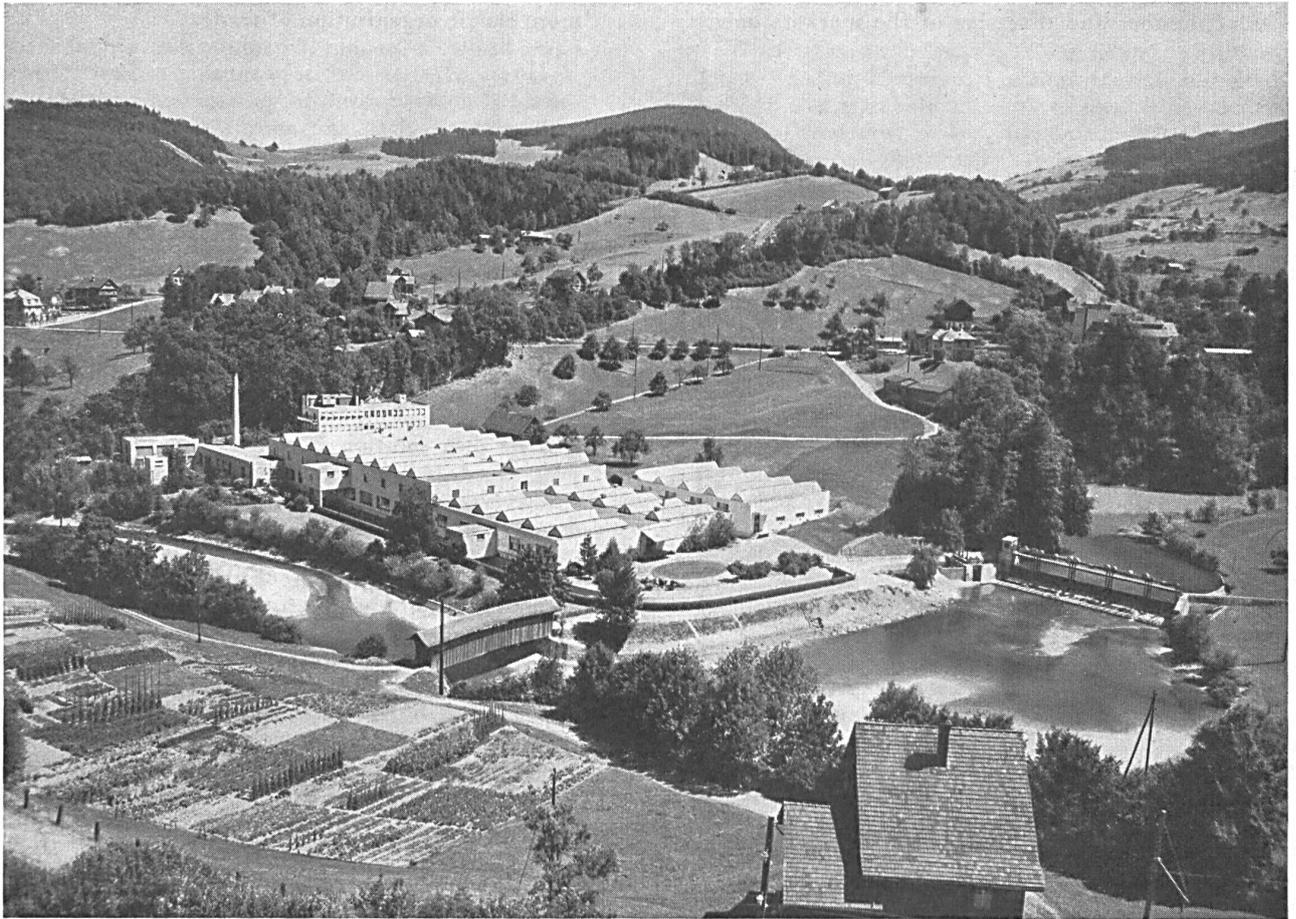
## THE TEXTILE INDUSTRIES IN SWITZERLAND

methods have increased output per machine and per worker.

The most difficult period for the Swiss cotton industry was during the great world economic crisis which began about 1930. As a result of the devaluation of the pound and the dollar and the increased growth of Japanese competition, prices on the world market sank so low that the cotton industry, having

and to equip them with modern plant with a very high output by investing considerable sums in them.

Post-war exports have also had their difficulties. The so-called policy of «austerity», so disastrous to Swiss industry, has caused many countries to adopt discriminatory measures against the importation of the products of the Swiss cotton industry. The Euro-



exhausted all possibilities of reducing its expenses any further, was obliged to work at a loss in order to keep its factories running.

In spite of this, the modernisation of equipment went on during these years of crisis and attempts were made all the time to adapt prices to those on the world market, which continued to go down, by constantly rationalising working methods.

The second World War struck the cotton industry another very severe blow. The allied blockade hit it very hard and many spinning mills could only work at 20 % of their capacity, as a result of the shortage of raw material. It was only some time after the end of the war that the pre-war capacity of output could again be reached. The Swiss cotton industry has made good use of these last few years to renew its buildings

pean Payments Union has brought a certain relief in this field; nevertheless to-day, as before, it is the exaggerated customs duties exacted by many countries which are still hampering the export of Swiss products, for even the best and most rationally produced goods cannot be exported when prohibitive customs duties paralyse world trade.

The Swiss cotton industry hopes that it will be possible in the future to make certain relaxations in this respect. Each country has its own specialities, but it is only if trade is freed by removing customs barriers and other obstacles of commercial policy, that each country will be able to offer the others articles in the production of which it excels and in this way to contribute to raising the standard of living throughout the world.