

New Swiss instrument for precision technique

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EXPORT AND OTHER FIGURES

The Swiss trade balance deficit sank from 2,621 to 2,075 million francs in 1968; import value 19,424.9m. and export 17,349.5m.

Last year, Switzerland bought goods to the value of 11.5 milliard francs from Common Market countries and exported for 6.3 milliard.

Watch exports totalled 2,316.7 million francs, an increase of 6.7% over the previous year. The largest increase was achieved in developing countries (up to 22%), whilst in America the increase was only 4.9 and in Europe 1.4%.

Swiss capital abroad totals over 80 milliard francs, from which over 1,800 million in interest flow back into Swiss economy. On the other hand, some 280 million has to be paid in interest to foreign investors in Switzerland.

707 Swiss went abroad last year as student trainees, (390 to France). 778 foreigners went to Switzerland, the largest contingent was (336) from Germany.

A new record was reached at the Basle Stock Exchange in 1968, when the turnover rose to 9.52 milliard francs from 6.97 in 1967.

The volume of advertising in Switzerland went up by 20m. francs in 1967; 122 firms about whom a survey was made, handled orders to the value of nearly 490 million francs. Last year's figures may easily be even higher.

Switzerland is the country with the greatest newspaper density. 334 papers for barely six million inhabitants, which means a circulation of one copy per every 2.27 inhabitants.

The Swiss Union of Employees' Federations (VSA) has 13 member organisations, totalling nearly 126,000 employees. The Swiss Mercantile Society is the largest with 65,220 (130 fewer than the previous year).

The Swiss cement industry produced over 4.3 million tons last year (Record year was 1966 with 4.4m. metric tons).

In 1958 the Swiss Petrol Union was liquidated. At that time, there were 7,000 petrol stations on their register. The number is the same today. 5,750 sell internationally well-known brands, some 600 offer a national or regional kind, and about the same number sell unbranded petrol. In 1958, the average sale per station was 122,000 litres, and last year that figure rose to 285,000 litres.

Swiss timber — using firms consume about 3 million cubic metres of timber a year, two-thirds of which are accounted for by small sawmills and one-fifth by paper mills. 87% is Swiss, the rest comes from abroad. Timber comes third in quantity, after liquid fuels and coal. 100,000 tons are exported.

The textile and clothing industry employs one-sixth of all industrial workers (135,000). Its annual production value is 3.5 milliard francs. Exports total 1.5 milliard, and the industry is the fourth largest export industry in the country. Over 3 million pairs of shoes were exported in 1968 at a value of 112.5m. francs, an increase of 18%.

Last year, the Swiss used over 15kg. of soap and washing powders of all kinds per head of population.

(A.T.S. and O.S.E.C.)

NEW SWISS INSTRUMENT FOR PRECISION TECHNIQUE

A Lausanne manufacturer, making special alloys and tools, recently produced a new type of precision tweezers, which will render invaluable service in a great many technical and scientific fields. These tweezers are guaranteed stainless and non-magnetic, resistant to corrosion and distortion. In addition, the tips, made of a special high resistance alloy, are unbreakable and almost impossible to wear out thanks to their extreme hardness; furthermore, these tips, which are soldered to the body of the instrument so as to be absolutely inseparable from it, can be heated as often as required to 1,000 degrees centigrade without losing their hardness, that is to say without becoming soft or brittle. This instrument is particularly suited therefore to all the fine welding jobs that have to be carried out frequently in electronics, as well as for use in biology, chemistry, medicine and microscopy. "Solvax" tweezers, which satisfy the requirements of the Swiss Horological Research Laboratory, are at present the only ones of their kind on the market; they are cheaper in the long run than ordinary tweezers for, in spite of their higher price, they last ten times as long.

[O.S.E.C.]

REVOLUTION IN MILK MARKETING

The problems of packaging and preserving milk for private consumption have only just been solved, the disposable packaging so far available being unsatisfactory for one reason or another (inconvenient shape, not sufficiently strong, etc.). Consequently, a few years ago, a big dairy company in Geneva commissioned an engineering firm in the same town to devise a mechanical packaging meeting very severe requirements of manufacture, hygiene, handling, transport and use. They succeeded in solving the problem with the "Mécapack" bottle recently tried out on the Geneva market. The automatic machine of entirely Swiss design and construction consists mainly of a turntable on which, in a single revolution, the bottle is manufactured by injection of polyethylene at 200°C and immediate blowing, then filled with pasteurised milk without stopping the turntable, next sealed and fed onto a conveyor belt where it is finally dated and conveyed directly into special stainless steel baskets and from there onto loading trays and into trucks for distribution. The whole operation is carried out under the strictest aseptic conditions, since the bottles are moulded at 200°C and immediately filled and sealed. In addition, the bottles are strong enough to be stacked one on top of the other to a certain height without damage and their shape has been designed with a view to rational handling, packaging and transport; they can be held in one hand without losing their shape, and emptied without a drop being spilt; the bottle is easy to open and the opening is closed by a cap protecting the contents from pollution. It is no longer necessary to keep a stock of empty bottles and the raw material takes up forty times less space than the bottles when full. The entirely automatic "Mécapack" machine provided with electronic controls is very simple to clean and requires only one person to supervise its operation. It is capable of filling 2,500 one-litre bottles of milk per hour. The "Mécapack" system produced after several years of intensive research, taking into consideration the suggestions of consumer organisations, provides the perfect answer to the problem of packaging milk for consumption.

[O.S.E.C.]