

City Swiss Club

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stop his campaign against the "interests" on behalf of the Swiss consumers who are the customers of Migros. Only recently his Independence party won a thumping victory on the polls in the Canton of Vaud in a referendum to determine whether the Migros co-operative should be permitted to do business there. The referendum was necessary to circumvent Swiss laws prohibiting the spread of chain store merchandising. Mr. Duttweiler's "chain store" is different from others, because it is a co-operative, and, as he says proudly, his customers own all the shares in it and can "fire" him at any time.

Duttweiler's rise as merchant and politician, has been spectacular. In his youth he left Switzerland to become a coffee planter in Brazil, but on his return here was struck by the terrific difference between what Swiss consumers were paying for coffee and what Brazilian planters were paid for it. He started trying to bridge the gap for the benefit of the consumer, figuring there would be a lot more money in the business. Besides that, he could stay home, and he likes living in Switzerland better than Brazil.

He started his business in 1925, and not having enough money to rent stores, he bought five Model T. Ford trucks, and a small quantity of groceries, and carried his stores to his customers' doors. He was out to solve the distribution problem, he says, primarily as a problem in transportation. He made his mark-up only 8 per cent. on all products, and found that with prices sometimes 30 per cent. less than those of his competitors he still was making a profit.

Since then his fleet of five Ford trucks has grown to one of 117 trucks — mostly three-ton size — and his Migros has acquired 116 stores. The better to supply his customers he has gone into manufacturing with cheese and chocolate factories.

Six feet tall, weighing well over 200 pounds, with thick grey hair and eyes that twinkle behind thick spectacles, the merchant to-day is fifty-eight years old, — brimming over with vim and fight.

He talks with a chuckle about the time he was

finned for breaking an anti-chain store law and the housewives of Switzerland clipped in to pay his fine. He talks with a laugh about his political opponents, who, he says, "don't like new ideas."

"We have new ideas," he says, "and they come to them in time." He takes credit for a recent act of the Swiss government enabling the Swiss once more to buy gold francs in exchange for paper ones, even though gold coins still are withdrawn from American coinage. "We Swiss people like to have gold coins," he says, "and are willing to pay for them. The government makes a profit by selling them. Perhaps in America you people wouldn't understand the way we feel about gold. But here in Europe in the last few years a lot of people saved their lives because they happened to have a few gold coins which they could carry with them when they fled from their homes, and those gold coins were good anywhere."

Duttweiler shows the same capacity other political leaders show in other countries, of identifying his economic theories with the cause of righteousness. "We've always got to fight for peace and liberty and justice," he says. "Take my plan of free exchange of francs and dollars. People say the United States wouldn't like it; that they would take reprisals against us; and maybe abrogate our trade agreement. That would be bad for the United States, just because it is a big country, to try to tyrannize over a little country that dared to value its money at what it is worth."

"We've always got to fight against the idea that force makes right, and that's against the Hitler that's in everybody, in Germany, in Switzerland and the United States. There's too much Hitler in people. We've got to fight against the Hitler idea."

CITY SWISS CLUB.

A report of the Monthly Meeting of the City Swiss Club, which took place at Brown's Hotel, on Monday, January 13th, 1947, will appear in our next issue.



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