

Swiss Mercantile Society

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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.**Monthly Meeting held on 11th October, 1950.**

After disposing of the routine business of our monthly meeting during which we were informed that our membership had remained unchanged, that the Dinner and Dance at the Trocadero had been a successful function, and that both day and evening classes at our college were booked to capacity, Mr. W. Meier, our President, called on Mr. E. S. Tucker, Principal economist of the British Iron and Steel Federation, to address us on the Iron and Steel Industry. Our speaker did so with great clarity and with careful avoidance of technical jargon.

The post war period was difficult for individuals, as well as for firms and countries. The demand for iron and steel during this period was colossal. No extension of capacity was possible during the war, and maintenance of plant was purely nominal. The vast destruction during the war of shipping, industrial plant and property in general, and the arrears of maintenance, had to be made good. This was rendered more difficult by the switch-over to steel because of the shortage of timber. Exports of iron and steel had to be increased to the utmost to pay for the imports of raw materials and foodstuffs. Labour relations having been very good for many years, it was possible to introduce the extended working week of seven days. This enabled the maximum use being made of the existing equipment. During this period the industry changed over from coke to oil fuel, as this enables a larger output from the same furnace. By these methods the output of iron and steel increased steadily as shown by the following figures:

| | | | |
|------|------|--------------|--------------|
| 1945 | 11.8 | million tons | |
| 1946 | 12.7 | " " | |
| 1947 | 12.7 | " " | |
| 1948 | 14.9 | " " | |
| 1949 | 15.6 | " " | |
| 1950 | 16.5 | " " | (estimated). |

These results are all the more remarkable because of the difficulty of obtaining the requisite raw material in sufficient quantities. Whereas before the war America was exporting scrap, she was now competing for scrap in Europe and rich ore from Sweden. The intensive drive for scrap is only one means of maintaining output. New sources of rich iron ore have been found and are being mined in Sierra Leone and in French West Africa. These have largely contributed to solve the problem of raw material in the steel industry for the present.

It had been recognised for years that the iron and steel industry had to be subject to some form of public control. Before the war this had been carried out by the Import Duties Advisory Committee. This was succeeded by the Iron and Steel Board in 1945.

On 2nd October, 1950, the Iron and Steel Corporation of Great Britain was called into being under the Iron and Steel Bill. This corporation will take over 92 out of 500 firms at present constituting the iron and steel industry of this country. Referring the audience to various parts of a pamphlet which had been distributed to all present, Mr. Tucker pointed out that what was proposed at present, did not amount to the nationalisation of the whole steel industry, but only to a part, though a substantial part of it. For instance, while 51 out of 55 producers of iron ore, and 40 out of

43 producers of pig iron were to be nationalised, only 8 out of 94 producers of high speed steel, 6 out of 183 makers of bolts, nuts, rivets, screws and washers were to be taken over by the State, etc. — On the other hand, the bill authorises the Iron and Steel Corporation not only to take over any of the subsidiary activities at present carried on by the 92 firms to be nationalised, but to start production in any of the great number of other lines provided for in the very widely drafted memoranda of association of the same firms. These would bring the Government into competition not only with other firms in the iron and steel industry, but with such other commercial and industrial activities as the manufacture and marketing of badminton racquets, beer barrels (stainless steel), furniture, rope, hemp, beer, umbrella frames, to mention only a few of the many dozens of other manufactured articles.

Centralised research work, recruiting and training for the whole industry, which had been two of the outstanding services rendered by the old Iron and Steel Federation, could no longer be carried on in the same way when the nationalised part of the industry was competing with the non-nationalised section of it.

The impartial functioning of the Iron and Steel Board set up in 1945 to supervise the industry in the interest of the community at large was now denied to the Government. For 16 years prices had been fixed and supervised impartially on behalf of the Government which now had become an interested party. The new Corporation will clearly be in competition with

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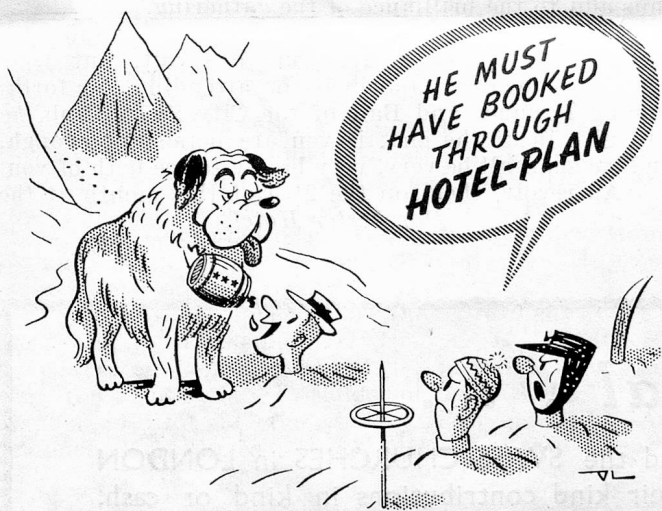
the private firms in the industry, and, if the Corporation choses, as indicated above, with those in many other branches as well. Yet it will be the Corporation which will fix the prices of the primary iron and steel production which the non-nationalised firms will have to pay for their raw material.

About the Schumann plan Mr. Tucker briefly stated his personal view that some concrete agreements were sure to be concluded at the end of the long negotiations which are about to terminate. When the shape of the new co-operative efforts in the iron and coal industry in Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, France, Italy and Western Germany became apparent and was judged to be satisfactory, it was probable that the industry in this country would join the Continental organisation on a basis satisfactory to all parties concerned. It was not a British custom to promise support of something which was only vaguely known.

After Mr. Tucker had answered a number of questions, we were shown a sound and colour film entitled "Great Achievement". This illustrated many points made by Mr. Tucker earlier in the evening, and showed the vast diversity of operations and aspects of the Iron and Steel Industry, from the mining of iron ore to the finished product.

Altogether a most instructive evening spent at Swiss House.

E.H.S.



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LE DOCTEUR CLAVADETSCHER A LEEDS.

Quel dommage que le microphone ait trahi le conférencier à Londres car nous qui, à Leeds, avons eu sa dernière conférence, le 19 octobre, nous avons pu apprécier ce qu'elle contenait de plus qu'une sélection d'admirables clichés présentés grâce à la perfection d'un projecteur unique en son genre. Il est bientôt apparu que le conférencier ne voulait pas seulement intéresser ou divertir, ni même renseigner et instruire mais, bien mieux, inspirer de sa conviction profonde que l'univers est une création harmonieuse où l'homme retrouve à chaque instant, devant la campanule desséchée comme devant la marmotte aux aguets, devant la masse écrasante du glacier comme devant l'innocente faiblesse de l'enfant, la raison d'être et le sens de sa vie passagère. Au contract de la souffrance humaine, le médecin aurait pu tomber dans un matérialisme pessimiste et poursuivre sa tâche bien plus par nécessité ou par inertie que par conviction. Il a eu la sagesse d'aller se replonger dans la nature pour y retrouver son équilibre, son sens des proportions et des valeurs.

Voilà pourquoi il a pu retourner à sa tâche quotidienne avec une foi nouvelle et s'en détacher pour quelques jours afin d'opérer en nous un peu de cette transfusion dont nous avions besoin. Nous lui en sommes très reconnaissants ainsi qu'aux trois sociétés qui ont rendu possible sa visite. Puissent-elles le faire revenir sans trop tarder avec ses clichés sur l'Engadine, car sans prêche ni sermon, il illustrera une fois de plus la sagesse du grand savant Pasteur qui disait: Un peu de science éloigne de Dieu, et beaucoup y ramène.

J.P.I.

XMAS GREETINGS.

We wish to direct the attention of our readers to the announcement in this issue.

In order to avoid any disappointment, we should be glad to receive orders, enclosing 6/-, as early as possible.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique (LONDON GROUP)

OPEN MEETING

Tuesday, November 21st, 1950, at 7.0 p.m.

Mr. A. F. SUTER, Hon. Vice-President,
N.S.H. (London Group) will speak on:

"AS A SWISS SEES THE ENGLISH"

and a film will be shown

"AMIDST POWDER SNOW IN THE JUNGFRAU
REGION"

**At the Vienna Café,
Berkeley Arcade, Baker Street, N.W.1.**

All Swiss and Friends are heartily welcome.