

Commercial news

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1952)**

Heft 1185

PDF erstellt am: **10.07.2024**

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COMMERCIAL NEWS

Switzerland and the Schuman Plan.

In the course of the present session of the Swiss Parliament a National Councillor questioned the Government on the position of Switzerland in relation to the Schuman Plan. M. Petitpierre, Head of the Political Department, gave a very detailed answer and described the intended organisation of the new institution.

It is not yet possible to foresee how the Schuman plan will affect the Swiss economy and to know whether it will have for consequence that her supply in coal and steel will become more difficult. It is clear already now, however, that the conditions in which Switzerland negotiate with the producing countries will be altered. The member countries of the community supply three quarters of the coal, iron and steel imported by Switzerland.

As soon as possible Switzerland will have to open negotiations with the High Authority to settle the questions hitherto dealt with bilaterally with the member States. She will have to fight any tendency to discriminate against her, whether as regards distribution or prices. The Federal authorities are ready to meet any such contingency. They are keeping in touch with the Swiss interested circles, among which are the transport companies. Before knowing in what spirit the agreements relating to the Schuman Plan will be carried out it is difficult to assess their value. The creation of the European coal and steel community can be a happy event for the continent if it promotes co-operation among the six signatory States. On the other hand, certain fears might arise lest the plan should result in creating a weapon against non-member countries.

The Economic Situation.

It appears from the inquiry made into the situation of the Swiss industry in the first quarter of 1952 that the number of employed workers has receded by 0.4% since the end of 1951, but that it is still greater by 5.1% than the figures for the first quarter of 1951. As compared with the average for 1938, employment has risen by 38%. The prospects for future activity

were still thought good or satisfactory by 58% and uncertain by 32% of the firms approached.

Foreign Workers in Switzerland.

There are at present over 132,000 foreign workers in Switzerland, out of which 51,000 are men and 81,000 women. By comparison with the number recorded last year there has been an increase of 36,800. As to the occupations in which the foreign workers are engaged, housework is again at the top of the list. Next come the hotel industry and agriculture with 13,859. These three groups account together for 73,741 foreign workers. There are also many of them in the metal industry, the textile and apparel industries, in the building and wood working trades and in scientific and artistic professions. Italians are the most numerous (70,168). Germans take second place with 28,000 workers, and there are 22,000 Austrians.

Trade between Switzerland and Argentine.

Swiss exports to Argentine have risen from 69 million francs in 1950 to 103.5 million in 1951. This increase is due to the Argentinian Central Bank having increased the possibilities for importing Swiss products. On the other hand, Swiss imports from Argentine did not reach the expected level because many of the traditional Argentinian products were not available, so that Switzerland was forced to look for other sources of supply. This explains why trade



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between the two countries in 1951 has for the first time shown a balance in Switzerland's favour. It amounted to 15.8 million francs.

The Export of Swiss Books.

Swiss exports of books were slightly below their previous level in 1951, decreasing from 18.7 million francs in 1950 to 18.5 million francs last year. This drop is primarily due to import restrictions in several countries. Exports to Western Germany were reduced by 10%, while deliveries to Eastern Germany are still negligible. A certain increase is noted in the exports to other eastern countries, such as Hungary and Roumania, but there is a marked decline of sales in the American markets. In order to make up for this deficiency efforts must be made to increase sales in other markets. It may be mentioned that in 1951 the export of Swiss books to Japan was six times, and to China twelve times, as high as in 1950.

Swiss Cheese and Watch Imports into the United States.

The report of a special commission of members of the American House of Representatives and the Senate states that import restrictions with regard to Roquefort and so-called Switzerland Swiss Cheese should not be ordered, as these products are sold in the United States at prices from which it clearly appears that they do not compete with American cheese. Swiss cheese exporters hope, therefore, that the American Agricultural Department will immediately abolish the restrictions on imports of the said cheese.

In the watch sector, the situation seems to be much less favourable according to a statement of the president of the Swiss Watch Makers' Association. The steps undertaken by certain American watch concerns in view to raise the customs duties on watches and movements seem now to take concrete shape and the American Commission for Customs Tariff is believed to prepare the increase of the said taxes. The final decision lays, however, with President Truman.

A New Universal Lathe.

The Oerlikon Machine Tool Factory has introduced a new universal lathe on the market. Its main advantage is in a mechanism allowing a free adjustment of revolutions per minute by means of a scaled drum fixed on the sliding carriage. Another advantage is a continuous adjustment for feeding. The new regulation is easily handled, saves time and increases output.

Switzerland's Share in Ceylonese Industrial Development.

Ceylon's plans for industrial development include the construction of steel plant. The Government has now asked Professor Durrer, President of the Louis De Roll Steel Works in Gerlafingen, Switzerland, to assist in the planning and the executing of this work. The Government also asked for tenders concerning the construction of a caustic soda, chlorine and hydrogen plant. Notwithstanding heavy international competition, the order went to the Louis De Roll Co. in Zurich, which had previously built a plant for the production of fatty alcohols in Ceylon.



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