

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

PIERRE BÉGUIN.

“When Switzerland collaborates with Europe”.

Some two or three years ago, a goodly portion of the Swiss Press had made a great fuss about the trip to Paris of Mr. Max Petitpierre, the Head of the Federal Political Department, who went to the French capital in order to take part in the work of the European Organisation for Economic Co-operation. The newspapers had drawn attention to the fact that by virtue of an ancient and thoroughly Swiss tradition, it was expected of a Federal Councillor that he should remain at his post and that it was in no way part of his duties to engage personally in negotiations abroad. It had proved quite easy to give them the right answer. The meeting in Paris was a meeting of Cabinet ministers and it was necessary that Switzerland should be represented on the same level.

It would appear as if this whole business has been forgotten. Monsieur Petitpierre has just returned from Paris, in similar circumstances. Only a few lines were devoted in the Swiss Press to his journey, and there were no criticisms. From this, we may draw a very satisfactory conclusion, namely that public opinion in our country is now in favour of the principle of international collaboration; it realises how necessary this is, and it is far less fearful, than it was formerly, of such action compromising our neutrality. It may, in fact, be said that public opinion has now rallied to Mr. Petitpierre's policy, of which the formula is no longer just neutrality, but neutrality *and* solidarity.

Moreover, Mr. Petitpierre, during the three days that he spent in Paris, did some excellent work. For one thing, he was able to have some conversations with members of the French Government and obtained the renewal, upon the same terms, of the Commercial Agreement existing between these two countries, negotiations in regard to which had been at a deadlock for more than two months. For another, he put forward a proposal at the Council of Ministers of the European Organisation for Economic Co-operation, which aroused great interest. It may even be said that this suggestion of his forms the basis of the decisions which were taken finally.

It is an obvious fact that our country would have been very pleased if it had proved possible to go,

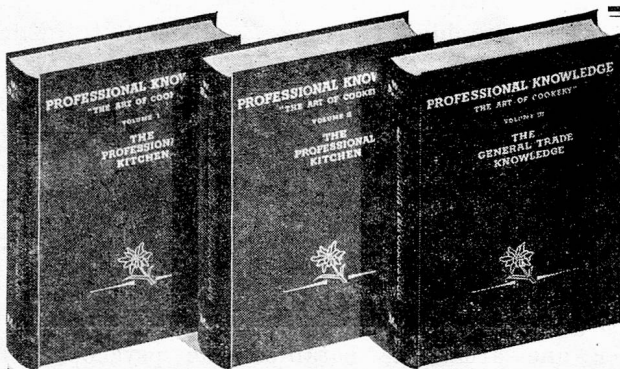
already, still further along the path towards the liberalisation of inter-European trade exchanges. In this respect, Switzerland has kept her engagements and has liberated 75 per cent of her imports, which are therefore no longer subject to quotas. She was, in fact, quite ready to increase this assessment to as much as 90 per cent, making reservations only in respect of agricultural imports. A great many countries would have liked to have followed her in this direction, for — and this is something for which we must be very thankful — there exists an increasing tendency towards the doing away with customs barriers and the intensification of trade exchanges, which constitute the sole means for stimulating a development in European production and for raising, at last, the standard of living of the populations of our Continent.

However, it proved necessary to take into account the backwardness still prevailing in certain countries, which have not been able to progress as far as ourselves. These are the countries which have not yet succeeded in restoring their economies, affected by the war or by political circumstances. It is not possible for them, without running the risk of immediate dangers, to engage, like the other countries, in the restoration of a liberal international society. But, they are most anxious to do this, as soon as the can.

And it is this aspiration which has been characteristic of the Paris meeting. It did not prove possible to take any immediate measures, but a definite aim has been established. Certain delays have been fixed. Thanks to the spirit of co-operation shown by everyone, the European market has now begun to be organised. Or, at least, to be more exact, it is now beginning to open up. And this also opens up fine prospects for Switzerland, for our economy is internationalised to such an extent that, in the long run, it can only benefit from free trade. This is the reason why the Swiss representative took such an active part in the work of the E.O.E.C., thus giving proof of the fact that we are happy to see Europe rehabilitated and to form part of it.

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