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COMMERCIAL NEWS

Jubilee in Swiss Industry.

The porcelain factory Langenthal S.A. is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. The beginnings of this firm were modest and not without risks. There was a penury of specialised staff, as well as of raw materials, and for more than a century Switzerland had no longer possessed a porcelain factory of her own and was entirely dependent on foreign supplies; it was, therefore, a matter of creating a porcelain industry, right from the bottom. Nevertheless, the venture proved successful, and it now employs nearly eight hundred employees and workers. Its production, which is very varied, comprises table ware for private households and for hotels, as well as porcelain for industrial use. These products are to be found not only on the domestic market, but also in a good many foreign countries.

New type of carriages for Swiss Railways.

Having decided to stick to one type only of carriages, the General Direction of the Federal Railways has now opened a competition for ideas on this subject among the various Swiss firms specialising in the manufacture of rolling stock, for the purpose of creating new 3rd class carriages. As a result of this competition, two Swiss firms have just delivered the first two prototypes of the new railway carriage. The particularity of these new models resides in the fact that the two doors are placed over the bogies, instead, as was the case formerly, between them. It has proved possible to build a type of bogie which leaves sufficient space for the carriage steps, so that the most comfortable part of the carriage can now be reserved for the travellers. Another important innovation consists in the installation of heating by means of hot air which will pass in front of the windows, preventing the formation of steam and of ice on the windows. The same system can be used in summer to provide the carriages with fresh air.

Swiss cost of living.

The Swiss index figure for retail prices stood at 173, at the end of February, 1956. It had risen slightly, in comparison with the figure for the end of the preceding month, as had also the Swiss index figure for wholesale prices, which had gone up to 216.8.

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Switzerland's foreign trade in February.

Swiss imports in February exceeded 500 million francs in value and had increased by more than twenty millions as compared with the corresponding month in 1955. Exports show an increase of nearly 34 million francs in value and attain a total of 464 million francs. Switzerland's traditionally unfavourable trade balance registered a further increase of 25%, during the two first months of 1956. It is Switzerland's imports from European countries which have advanced most. Exports are characterised by a noteworthy development in respect of Swiss sales to France, to the Federal German Republic and to the United States.

Switzerland's Customs receipts increase.

Concurrently with the evolution of Swiss foreign trade, the receipts of the Customs Administration have also increased, attaining the sum of 56 million francs for the month of February, 1956. After deduction of the share due to the Cantons, the Customs receipts of the Confederation for the first two months of this year have gone up by more than 10 per cent.

Switzerland's participation at international Fairs.

For the first time, Switzerland has participated in the International Agricultural Fair at Verona, where she exhibited sixty-five head of prize cattle.

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The Italian Prime Minister, Antonio Segni, as well as the Minister of Agriculture, Emilio Colombo, visited the Swiss Pavilion, which had been organised by the Swiss Office for Development of Trade.

Switzerland was also represented at the Royal Spring Fair at Utrecht. Queen Juliana of the Netherlands inaugurated this Fair and paid a visit to the Swiss Pavilion, where she was received by the Swiss Minister and by a Director of the Swiss Office for Development of Trade. Swiss official participation made it possible to offer a glimpse of the activities of the chemical and metallurgical industries, of the St. Gall embroidery industry, and of watchmaking and wine-growing. The fact that Switzerland is the country of tourism par excellence was also recalled.

Belgian loan in Switzerland.

The Belgian Minister of Finance submitted to the Council of Ministers the Draft Bill of a Law authorising him to grant a State guarantee to a loan of 60 million Swiss francs, to be issued in Switzerland, for the Belgian Congo. This loan will be for a duration of twenty years. It will be issued at par and will bear an interest of 4%. Its amortization will begin as from the ninth year and will comprise twelve lots of five million Swiss francs each.

New Swiss Customs facilities.

In view of the enormous development in tourist traffic, more especially in that of the road, the Swiss Customs Administration has decided to grant a certain number of customs facilities to those persons who reside in Switzerland and are returning from abroad. Henceforth, it will be possible to import,

free of duty, goods intended for personal use, the value of which does not exceed 100 Swiss francs. This measure, which does not, of course, relate to the so-called "frontier traffic", will facilitate, to a considerable extent, Customs formalities during the peak season for tourists.

Conference of European Transport Ministers.

The European Ministers of Transport are to meet shortly in Paris, under the chairmanship of Mr. Lepori, the Head of the Swiss Department of Posts and Railways. This conference should put the finishing touch to a whole series of questions relating to the international policy of transport by rail, by road and by water. It will deal, in particular with the European Society for financing railway material, the EUROFIMA, now being constituted.



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