

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

Switzerland looks to her industrial future.

It is only as a result of repeated efforts and constant endeavour that the Swiss export industry has succeeded in reaching its present high technical level. Today it is once again faced with new problems — problems common to the industries of other countries too — two of which are of particular importance to it.

First of all there is the problem of finding and keeping up a supply of new *technical recruits* for industry. Whereas in the United States 136 new engineers are turned out annually for every million inhabitants, the countries of western Europe average 67, Switzerland for her part not being able to exceed the figure of 62. Although obviously such figures cannot be taken at their face value without probing more deeply into their real significance, it is none the less true that the shortage of qualified engineers, which is being made even more acute by the large number of new graduates leaving the country to take up posts abroad, must, for the sake of the country's industrial future, be made good as soon as possible. Among those who have grasped the full importance of the question and are taking active steps to find a solution, let us mention the Old Students' Association of the Federal Institute of Technology, which published an open letter in the Press addressed to the youth of the country, as well as to those responsible for their training and education, in order to draw their attention to the opportunities offered by a career in engineering.

Contrary to the generally accepted opinion, the present state of prosperity is not alone responsible for this shortage; the causes are to be found rather in the rapid advance of mechanisation and automation. We are on the threshold of a period which will require more and more highly qualified technical staff. Therefore Switzerland, which must — and also wants to — remain an industrial power, will leave no stone unturned in her efforts to ensure a continual supply of qualified recruits.

Closely related to this problem is another that is very much in men's minds at the moment: that of the *peaceful use of nuclear energy*, on which, again, Switzerland's future, like that of many other industrial nations, depends. It has in fact been shown that the day will come when the production of traditional sources of energy, even developed to their utmost, will no longer satisfy the continually growing demands of industry. Switzerland, too, faces the same prospect. She is dependent on other countries for oil and coal, and although she is well supplied with hydraulic resources, these are already beginning to prove inadequate. It is only natural therefore that both the Government and certain industrial circles have sought to develop the study of the production of atomic energy. Work has already started on several projects for atomic power stations. In this connection mention must be made of the "Joint Commission for the Study of the Production and Use of Nuclear Energy" set up in 1956 by thirteen concerns in western Switzerland and followed last July by the establishment in Lausanne of the "Nuclear Energy Co. Ltd."

At the same time it has been felt necessary to draw up new legislation to cover this field. Thus, for

example, the Federal Council recently submitted to the Swiss Parliament a Bill concerning a new article of the constitution regarding atomic energy and protection against radiation. The Bill submitted, which will be voted on this year, contains numerous clauses, some laying down the part to be played by the State in this new field, others concerning the support to be given to research and the training of the necessary qualified scientific staff.

Quite obviously, in the race for the peaceful use of atomic power, Switzerland cannot hope to succeed alone. She must naturally limit her scope and seek above all to co-operate as far as possible with other countries. An agreement to this effect has already been signed with the United States. Others are being considered, in particular with France, Canada and Great Britain. They will concern the exchange of information and specialists, as well as the acquisition of the necessary materials. Furthermore, Switzerland has joined the International Agency of Atomic Energy — as well as the European Centre for Nuclear Research, which has moreover set up its headquarters on the outskirts of Geneva. Finally, Switzerland will be organising, for the second time, the United Nations Scientific Conference on the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Taking into consideration not only the work that has already been accomplished but also the spirit of co-operation that fires atomic scientists on both the national and the international levels, one is immediately impressed by the satisfactory evolution of the situation. But it should not be forgotten that in this field, even more than in others perhaps, the training of qualified technical staff is indispensable, which brings us back once more to the solution given to the previous problem, a solution which — and this cannot be stressed too strongly — is of vital importance for the country's industrial and economic future. Switzerland knows that she cannot afford to lag behind in the industrial field, from which nearly half her active working population draws a livelihood. She will therefore do everything in her power to overcome the present difficulties.

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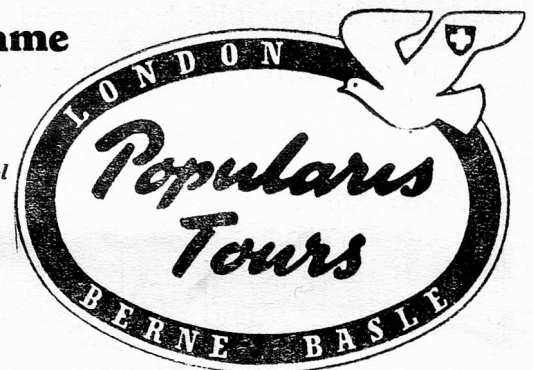
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