

The week at home

Autor(en): **Nef, Max**

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THE WEEK AT HOME.

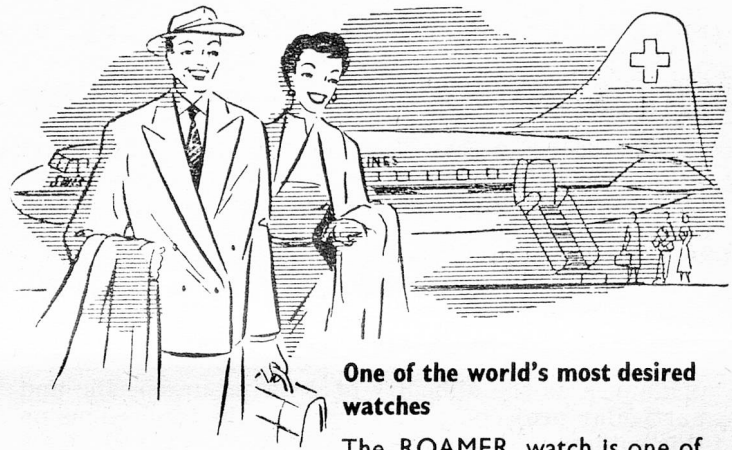
By MAX NEF.

Although the Summer Session of the Federal Parliament has only just opened, a number of Committees, set up by the two Chambers, had already started six weeks ago the preliminary work on some of the most important items on the Agenda.

Thus, the competent Committee set up by the National Council (the Lower House) has been engaged in examining the Popular Referendum submitted to Parliament on the question of the introduction of the 44-hour working week. The Committee came to the conclusion that this Initiative should be rejected: for one thing, because it only took into account workers employed in factories, and for another, because it did not sufficiently take into consideration the requirements and the prerequisites of Swiss economy. There exists in Switzerland the tendency towards carrying out a reduction in working hours by degrees and in accordance with the specific needs of the various branches of economy. This is possible by means of agreements concluded on a voluntary basis between employers and employees, and has already proved successful in a number of cases. In spite of the existence of this possibility, the question has now been raised in Parliament as to whether it would not be more fitting to introduce into the Swiss Constitution new provisions regarding the regulation of working hours. In this case it would be necessary for Parliament to draw up a Draft Bill on this subject and to submit it, as a counter-project to the aforementioned Popular Referendum, for the approval of the electorate. In accordance with the Government's proposal, however, the Preliminary Advisory Committee, set up by the Lower House, has now rejected this solution, having reached the conclusion that the existing constitutional provisions suffice for the time being.

Another social problem, namely that of the creation of a Federal Disablement Insurance, has moved a step towards its solution, in that the Government has established the guiding principles for the drawing up of a Draft Bill for the relevant Federal Law. According to these directives, the financing of the Disablement Insurance will take place in such a way that one half of its cost will be borne by the Confederation and the Cantons, whilst the other half will be assured by means of a 10 per cent increase in the contributions paid towards the Federal Old Age Pension and Survivors Insurance by its members, that is to say by virtually the entire Swiss people.

Some statistics that were published recently give a survey of the building activities in Switzerland during 1957. These figures are of considerable importance for the evaluation of the future development of the labour market, and from them it becomes apparent that the total expenditure for building in our country during the last year attained a new record of 4,500 million francs. We learn from them also that it was only owing to the importation of almost 100,000 foreign workers, and also thanks to the highly mechanised activities in the building trade, that it proved possible to carry out the building programme. The building projects announced for the current year are somewhat less extensive, in so far as the building of private housing units is concerned,



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than was the case last year. On the other hand, public building projects are somewhat more considerable, especially in so far as the construction of power plants and road-building are concerned.

In regard to the extension of the Swiss road network, which for many years to come will remain one of the most important and comprehensive national and economic problems to be faced by Switzerland, the legal basis for this work will be established by means of a new Constitutional Article. The Swiss People will be called upon to vote on this Article on 6th July. The chief problem which lies in the way of the modernisation of our road network is not so much the question of finance as the difficulty of drawing up specific and particular projects, and, above all, the discussions on this subject with the private and public owners of the land which comes into question. In view of the fact that good arable land is growing more and more scarce in Switzerland it is quite understandable that there are many who are opposed to seeing a good piece of farming land swallowed up by a high-speed auto-road. However, in consequence of the increasing number of road accidents, and also because of our tourist traffic, nothing remains but to make the necessary sacrifice.

A GUIDE TO EXPORTERS.

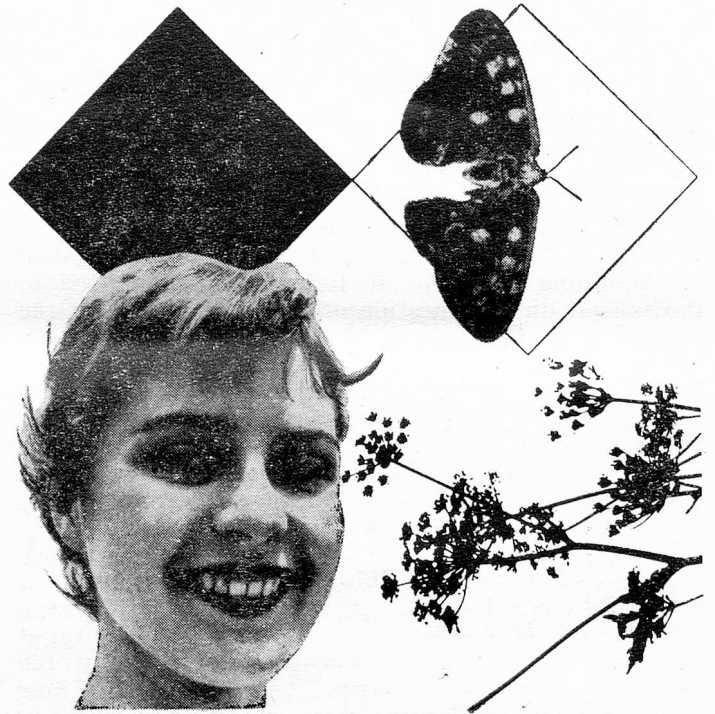
The Swiss Bank Corporation, in pursuance of its aim to give service to the British commercial community, has once again issued the now familiar annual Handbook *British Exports and Exchange Restrictions Abroad*, this being the 12th post-war edition of a most interesting and useful publication.

The mechanics of foreign trade bristle with difficulties of every kind, and the exporter is faced with a bewildering array of regulations and restrictions which are tending to become increasingly burdensome. They vary, of course, from one country to another and are subject to frequent changes. The individual trader can hardly be expected to keep track of them all, and expert advice is therefore of great importance.

Here it is that the usefulness of a reliable guide such as provided by Swiss Bank Corporation comes in. The information it conveys is clear, comprehensive and up-to-date. Every country in the world is listed with the regulations and restrictions it imposes on its imports. These enactments are explained concisely yet in detail. Furthermore the book explains the nature of the documents the exporter is required to furnish (import licences, certificates of origin, consular and commercial invoices, insurance certificates, bills of lading), financial procedure and so forth.

The book also provides information on the functions of the various international bodies such as the E.P.U. and other monetary and trade organisations. In the appendix foreign exchange rates are tabulated for rapid reference.

At a time when British industrial and commercial activity is concentrating on the export drive, the Swiss Bank Corporation's publication cannot but be of considerable value. They are to be congratulated on the initiative and painstaking research that underlie the compiling of their book.



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