

Letter from Switzerland : Switzerland continues actively to develop her hydraulic resources

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Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - (1959)

Heft 1335

PDF erstellt am: **14.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686533>

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

Switzerland continues actively to develop her hydraulic resources.

Switzerland is a great consumer of energy: firstly because she depends for her livelihood on the conversion of the raw materials and semi-manufactured articles she imports, and secondly because her industrial activity has been increasing rapidly during the last few years. She is unable, however, to satisfy more than a small part of her needs from her own resources — less than 30 per cent in fact.

This means that Switzerland depends to a great extent on other countries for her supplies of energy. First, and above all, she has to buy oil fuels, which at present meet the needs of almost 40 per cent of the country's consumption of energy, and next coal, although obviously not in such large quantities as previously.

Although the Swiss sub-soil does not seem to be completely lacking in fuels of fossil origin, these deposits — whose existence is still merely hypothetical — cannot be expected one day to satisfy the country's total needs. And, even supposing they were actually discovered, there still remains the question of their accessibility; in this respect experience in this country up to now would tend to show that they would not be easy to exploit.

Therefore Switzerland, without completely abandoning her search for oil or fossil materials, attaches great importance to her production of electricity pending the harnessing of nuclear energy for industrial use, which unfortunately does not seem to be for the immediate future — in spite of the progress already achieved in this field.

Swiss production of electricity, approximately 99 per cent of which is hydraulic in origin, has developed considerably since before the war. In fact, whereas during the hydrographic year 1938/1939 it amounted to 8,000 million kwh, it rose to 10,000 million in 1945/46 and to almost 16,000 million kwh in 1956/57. During the same period, however, consumption has not only increased too, but risen more sharply in fact. From 6,000 million kwh in 1938/39 and 8,000 million in 1945/46 it jumped to almost 15,000 million kwh in 1956/57.

We notice therefore that the margin between production and consumption is at present very small, and it only needs an unfavourable hydrographic year for the consequences to be felt immediately. As it is, every winter Switzerland has to import a certain number of kwh. Admittedly, in summer the position is reversed: she exports the surplus of her output.

If the national economic evolution continues at the same pace as during the last few years, the country's power requirements are bound to increase to a corresponding extent. Without showing undue optimism — or undue pessimism, depending on one's point of view — one may reasonably expect them to have doubled within the next ten years. The development of the country's hydraulic resources is therefore a matter of vital necessity, and Switzerland is dealing most energetically with the situation. During the period from 1st October 1956 to 30th September 1957 twelve new or transformed power plants, each contributing an annual increase of output

of over 10 million kwh, were put into operation, while on 1st October last some twenty projects, comprising almost thirty electricity works, were still in process of construction. The output of electricity in 1964/65, by which time the projects at present under way are expected to be completed, can already be put at some 24,000 million kwh. Obviously in the meantime other projects will have been started.

Such a programme naturally involves a big financial effort. The investments required for the next twenty-five years are estimated at some 12,000 million Swiss francs, which works out at an average of 500 million a year. A programme of this magnitude is necessary, however, since upon it depends the economic future of the country.



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