

The swiss shoe industry

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THE SWISS SHOE INDUSTRY

by Dr. H. O. Wegst, Zurich

The Swiss shoe industry has been able, by means of the high quality level of its products and of keeping constantly ahead of fashion developments, to achieve considerable reputé and importance in export markets alongside other industries of the country far larger from the standpoint of output volume and numbers of employees. In many countries Swiss shoes are just as much a byword as Swiss watches, Swiss cheese, Swiss embroidery and other traditional products of industry.

Development of Shoe Manufacture

The transition from production by hand to industrial methods in shoemaking was complete by about the middle of the nineteenth century. The first Swiss shoe factory opened in Winterthur in 1847, and in 1851 the well-known pioneer of the Swiss shoe industry, C. F. Bally (1821-1899) started shoe manufacture at Schönenwerd. Working at first to a large extent on the traditional processes of hand-made shoes, Bally was successful, by breaking down the work into individual processes and by the adroit use of labour-saving machines, in building up series manufacture on a large scale. But at that time, with its thinking dominated by the idea of hand-made articles, the indigenous market was too confined to absorb the output of industrially manufactured shoes. The young Swiss shoe industry was forced to turn to exporting. Following encouraging sales successes in South America and Egypt, Swiss shoes began to find buyers in European countries too — mainly in England and France — and were able to hold their position against the local shoe industry with success.

At this period of blooming shoe exports and the increasing elimination of prejudice among home buyers against the "factory shoe", new shoe factories sprang up all over the country, some of them never getting beyond the stage of small workshops, while others — such as the still existing firms Walder & Co. A.G. (Brüttsellen), Strub, Glutz & Cie AG (Olten) and Henke & Co. A.G. (Stein am Rhein) — soon grew to a considerable size. The rise of the firm of Hug & Co. AG (Herzogenbuchsee) to become the second largest shoe manufacturers in Switzerland and the formation of the Schuhfabrik Bata AG (Möhlin) belong to the period following the first World War.

Within a few decades manual shoemaking was almost completely ousted by the newly arisen industry, which by the turn of the century embraced more than 60 works with 8,300 employees. Only for a few special lines — mainly in the direction of orthopaedic footwear — has manual shoemaking been able to remain alive to the present day.

Production Conditions and Structure of the Shoe Industry

Because of the steadily improving manufacturing facilities and of the growing demands made by consumers, the range of shoes on offer has broadened in a manner undreamed of. Whereas in the past by far the greater part of shoe production consisted of simple working footwear, manufacturing — especially in the case of ladies' shoes — has constantly become more and more aligned on to fashion angles, while at the same time special types of footwear have been created for an ever increasing number of applications.

Although under these circumstances only a few firms in any of the shoe-producing countries are in a position to produce every type of footwear, and specialisation in this branch of industry has gone a long way, the introduction of modern flow-line manufacture meets with many obstacles in the shoemaking industry. In addition to the general difficulties arising from the large variety of models and the diversity of the materials used in manufacture, in Switzerland there is the additional problem that because of the smallness of the home market many articles can only be made in comparatively short runs. Human labour and the skill of the individual worker therefore have a far larger importance in the shoe industry than in many other sectors with a more unified manufacturing range and correspondingly longer runs.

Notwithstanding these natural difficulties, technical development in the shoe industry has made very considerable progress in the course of recent years. In the progressive works the plant is replaced at short intervals, either for the purpose of saving labour or to increase output efficiency. That these efforts have been met with success is shown by the fact that production has been able to be raised by 81% with a labour increase of only 14%, compared with 1950 in both cases.

Shoe exports

As has already been explained, it was mainly success on the various export markets that was responsible for the rise of the Swiss shoe industry during the period before the first World War. The war and crisis periods that shook Europe during the following decades meant that many valuable foreign contracts had to be abandoned. The Swiss shoe industry was therefore compelled to direct its production increasingly to the home market.

For a number of years after the end of the second World War shoe exports were still limited by the restrictive import practices of a number of countries. As however, these unpleasant commercial restrictions gradually fell

away, Swiss export firms were successful within a very short time in picking up their old connections with abroad again or in finding new ones. It is a testimonial to the fashion and quality level of the Swiss shoe industry that in spite of the extraordinarily strong foreign competition and the highly unfavourable effect of the EEC discriminatory customs measures it has been able to increase its exports considerably during the last few years. The biggest share of this satisfactory export increase falls to men's and sports shoes, in particular the ski-boots regarded as a great speciality finding great interest among foreign customers, mainly in America and Canada.

At the same time, however, Switzerland has become an interesting buyer country for foreign shoe producers. Favoured by the liberal Swiss import policy, imports have risen considerably during the last five years, supplies coming for the most part from the surrounding EEC countries. The increase in competition on its own home market is a spur to the Swiss shoe industry to continue its efforts to raise efficiency.

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ELECTIONS IN ZURICH AND BASELSTADT FOR CANTONAL GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT

On Sunday, 9th April, the citizens of Zurich and Baselland had to go to the poll to elect their Governments and Parliaments. In Zurich the former *Regierungsräte* who agreed to stay in office were re-elected, and the two new ones are Dr. Arthur Bachmann (45), lawyer and Social Democrat, the youngest member of the Zurich Government, and Albert Mossdorf (55), Sales Manager, Liberal. Both are members of the Federal Parliament and have decided to renounce their mandate as National Councillors, as there are already two *Regierungsräte* of the Canton of Zurich in Parliament (Rudolf Meier and Dr. Walter Koenig), the maximum allowed in the Cantonal Constitution. The Socialists have been disappointed in their hopes to get a second member of the Government.

An unexpected victory was achieved by the "Landesring der Unabhängigen" with their gain of 13 seats (18 hitherto) in the Cantonal Parliament. The Communists have the same number with 2, but all the other Parties have lost 2 or 3 seats. The distribution is as follows: Socialists 48, "Landesring" and BGB (Farmers and Citizens) 31 each, Liberals 29, Christian Socialists 21, Evangelicals 11, Democrats 7 and PdA 2.

In the elections for the Cantonal Government of Baselland, the two present *Regierungsräte* were confirmed, and for the three retiring ones, the Liberal candidate Dr. Theo Meier (Lausen), Deputy Manager of the Cantonal Bank, the BGB candidate Pfr. Paul Manz (Rothenfluh) and the Christian Socialist Dr. Karl Zeltner (Arlesheim), *Bezirksgerichtspräsident*, were elected. Voting participation was 62.8%.

The 80 seats in the Cantonal Parliament, the *Landrat*, have been filled as follows: Socialists 26 (26 hitherto), Liberal Democrats 26 (26), B.G.B. 10 (7), and Christian Socialists 10 (11), "Aktion Kanton Basel" (friends of the *Wiedervereinigung* 7 (3), "Landesring" 2 (2), Evangelicals 1 (1).

[A.T.S.]

RECENT DEATHS IN SWITZERLAND

The following deaths have been reported from Switzerland:

Hector Schmassmann (89), Liestal, former *Grundbuchgeometer*.

Charles Richard (67), Saint-Prex, for 48 years in the service of the Canton of Vaud, in charge of the Cantonal Department of Agriculture, Industry and Trade; during both wars at the head of the Cantonal War Economy Office.

Georges Ditesheim (73), La Chaux-de-Fonds, former watch manufacturer; technical director of the Movado works and member of several watch industry organisations.

Prof. Dr. Max Zollinger (80), Zurich; Lecturer and later (1930) Professor of *Allgemeine Didaktik des Mittel-schulunterrichtes* at Zurich University; Honorary Professor since 1955; author.

François Durafour (79), Geneva, aviation pioneer; flew his plane from Avenches to Collex-Bossy in 1911; in July 1920 he succeeded in landing at 4,000m. on the Dôme du Gouter (Montblanc) in a "Caudron"; member of the first Swiss Air Force team of eleven at the beginning of the first world war; he piloted the first passenger flight from Paris to Geneva in 1920.

Dr. Werner Lauber (79), Lucerne, former Judge of the Federal Insurance Tribunal; author and husband of the well-known Swiss writer Cecile Lauber.

Colonel Paul Schlaepfer (71), Sursee, builder; President of the Lucerne cantonal *Gewerbeverband* from 1943 to 1966; for 25 years member of the Cantonal Parliament; President for nine years of the Swiss *Verwaltungsoffiziersgesellschaft*.

Professor Edouard Poldini (71), Geneva, Lecturer on Geophysics at Geneva University since 1945; Professor since 1951 and at Lausanne University since 1963; author of various works on geology.

Miss Lise Gujer, "Gruoba", Sertigtal (Grisons), well-known artist; made her name by weaving artistic tapestries to the designs of the late Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (Davos).

Pater Dr. Laurentius Casutt (63), Fribourg, Professor of Theology, writer and priest.

Madame Augustine Epéron (104), Rolle, the oldest inhabitant of the *Suisse Romande*.

Dr. Jules Chuard (76), former Director of the *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce* in Lausanne (teacher there since 1921); Commune Councillor and member of the Cantonal Parliament; President of the Swiss Society for Commercial Education.

Rudolf Klaesi (86), Basle, prominent *Auslandschweizer* in Egypt before retiring in Basle.

Wilhelm Klein (79), Schwyz, for nearly 50 years Manager of the Schwyz tramways and later of the *Verkehrsbetriebe*.

Johannes Itten (78), Zurich, for many years in charge of art schools in Vienna, Weimar, Berlin and Krefeld; since 1938 Principal of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* and Museum in Zurich; in charge of the Zurich Textile School; founder of the Museum Rietberg; well-known also as author.

National Councillor Walter Klingler (68), St. Gall, journalist; from 1923-1956 Editor of "Wiler Boten"; since 1939 in the Cantonal Parliament and since 1959 National Councillor.