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COMMERCIAL NEWS

American Enquiry into Swiss Watchmaking.

It is now already more than two years since the United States decreed an increase in the rates of customs duties levied on imports of watches, in order to protect the American Watchmaking Industry, considered as being indispensable for the national defence of the country. It will be recalled that this measure aroused lively protests on the part of the Swiss, and the question is being freshly examined, at the present moment, by the American Government. Indeed, the American Office for War Economy is now conducting an enquiry into the importance of the watchmaking industry for national defence, and has entrusted this work to an expert. In order to be able to study, on the spot, both the Swiss watchmaking industry and the problems concerning exports of watches to the United States, the American expert recently came to Switzerland for a few days' stay. He had conversations with the representatives of the watchmaking industry, as well as with the competent services of the Swiss Administration. It is to be hoped that the results of this enquiry will provide all the clarifications desired and will render possible a resumption of normal relations in the Swiss-American watch trade.

No improvement on the Swiss Labour Market.

As was the case during the preceding months, the Swiss Labour Market in August was characterised by an acute penury of man-power. The number of totally unemployed persons, in the whole of Switzerland, only amounted to 650, whilst the demand for man-power had become still greater, attaining as it did the figure of 6,400 vacant jobs.

New Italo-Swiss Route to be opened soon.

Some Swiss and Italian initiative syndicates recently signed a convention, at Turin, providing for the construction of a road tunnel under the Great St. Bernard. The matter in question is an agreement concluded between two private groups, which have submitted to their respective Governments extremely detailed and carefully studied plans for the piercing of a tunnel, approximately six kilometres in length. It is proposed to have the entrance to the tunnel at an altitude of 1900 metres, but, owing to the presence of a covered approach road, some two kilometres in length, this new Italo-Swiss route will be utilisable

all the year round, whereas, up to the present, the Col of the Great St. Bernard could only be used three or four months a year. The work of construction is estimated at more than 43 million Swiss francs, which is a considerable sum, but which will be easily amortized through the introduction of a tollage. Moreover, there will be a number of indirect economic advantages resulting from the opening up of this new international transit way.

Switzerland's Cement Industry.

In Switzerland, there exists a branch of industry which is very little known to the public and is totally unknown abroad, because of the very small part it plays in Swiss foreign trade. The industry in question is the one producing cement, which, at the present time, groups together seventeen factories, employing some two thousand persons. At first glance, these figures may appear to be very modest, and yet the whole of the Swiss building trade, which during the present year will put up buildings to the value of four thousand million francs, depends on these seventeen cement factories. Indeed, if Swiss exports of cement are very small, imports of this product are practically in-existent. In 1955, sales of cement exceeded two million tons and the annual consumption *per capita* of her inhabitants, places Switzerland at



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the head of all the countries of the world, with an average consumption of more than 420 kilos of cement per inhabitant. The big hydro-electric dams, most of which are being constructed in the Alps, absorb an appreciable quantity of this cement, and it is interesting to observe the influence which they have exercised on the means of transport. Up to about ten years ago, the whole of the cement was conveyed in paper or jute sacks. Since 1947, however, metal containers have been used for this purpose; such containers are used solely for transporting large quantities of cement by rail, by road, or even, in certain cases, by telfers. This new method of conveyance has taken root very rapidly, and at the present time more than one-third of Swiss cement is being transported in this fashion.

Swiss Foreign Trade in August 1956.

Swiss foreign trade, in August, has again exceeded the figure of a thousand million francs, thus showing a considerable increase in comparison with the corresponding period for the previous year. Swiss imports exceeded 625 millions in value, and exports 450 millions. In this connection, it is pointed out that exports of watches and of machines continue to advance and to develop in a more rapid fashion than is the case in regard to the other branches of industry, although these, taken as a whole, show very satisfactory results. For the first eight months of the year, already, the progress achieved attains a thousand million Swiss francs, so that it would seem as if the

record figures for last year will be surpassed, both in respect of value and of quantity.

In the Swiss Watchmaking Industry.

A Swiss watchmaking factory in Langenhof has just installed a gigantic illuminated clock on one of the chimneys of its plant, a clock which is probably one of the biggest, if not quite the biggest in the world. Fixed at a height of 35 metres above the ground, the clock's face has a diameter of more than eight metres and one can easily see what time it is at a distance of more than three kilometres. Neon tubes light up the figures and the hands, during the night, and it is unnecessary to stress the fact that this clock comes up to the reputation enjoyed by Swiss clocks and watches throughout the world.

Swiss Telephone Service Working in High Altitude.

It is not known, in general, that, since July, 1955, one-tenth of the telephone calls between Zurich and Berne, on the one hand, and the Tessin, on the other, have taken place by means of radio-telephony, relayed over the Jungfrauoch. Some years ago, already, the Swiss Administration of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones conceived the idea of deflecting half of its telephone traffic across the Alps, by means of wireless telephony. Thus, five years ago, work was started on the Jungfrauoch, for the establishment of a station for guided-wave telephony, which was put into commission fourteen months ago. The plant is situated at an altitude of nearly 4,000 metres. Access to it is gained by means of a one kilometre-long gallery (partly excavated out of the ice), and an underground funicular of 420 metres, helps to overcome the difference in the level, which amounts to 250 metres.

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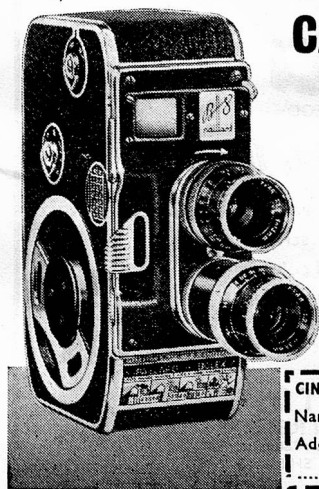
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