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COMMERCIAL NEWS

The cost-of-living index in Switzerland.

During the month of April the cost-of-living index in Switzerland, which wavered slightly at the beginning of the year, started rising again. At the end of April the Swiss index for retail prices was 176.9, that is 2 per cent higher than at the same time last year. The wholesale price index also went up to 224.4, a rise of 1 per cent in one month. Although the rise in the cost-of-living is not very marked, it has been a constant rise for more than a year, and, with important wage increases which have recently come into effect, it does not look as if it will become stabilised.

The activity in the building industry in Switzerland.

The Swiss Government delegate for future labour employment has just made a new and urgent appeal to those concerned to put a brake on building construction. Construction plans for this year amount to 4,700 million Swiss francs, which is ten per cent higher than the equivalent figure for 1956. It is interesting to note that the increase is not in private projects, but in public construction work, which has gone up by more than 1,800 million francs. The appeal was therefore addressed to public authorities especially, and above all to the communes and cantons, to urge them to show moderation and not to aggravate the inflationary tendency and the rise in prices which is now going on in Switzerland.

The Swiss foreign trade.

In April 1957 Swiss imports once again passed the 700 million franc mark, whilst exports remained above 500 million francs. Swiss foreign trade is therefore maintaining its level, but imports continue to rise at a greater rate than exports, although the latter maintain a satisfactory level. Once again the Swiss balance of trade has a heavy deficit. Already in the first four months of this year it has exceeded 800 million Swiss francs, which is almost as much as the figure for the whole of 1955. Imports are up to nearly 3,000 million Swiss francs for these four months, whilst exports have just passed the 2,000 million francs mark.

The customs incomes of the Swiss Confederation.

In April the Swiss customs authorities received customs duties to the sum of 80 million Swiss francs.

This is considerably more than for the corresponding month in 1956. Following the rise in Swiss foreign trade customs duties have gone up during the first four months of this year, reaching a total of nearly 240 million francs, that is a rise of about 15 per cent.

An interesting novelty in the European railway traffic.

Recently the railway companies of seven European countries, including Switzerland, decided to build up a network of special trains between seventy of the most important European centres. At the beginning of June these new "Trans-Europe Expresses" were put into service. They are all of the same make-up; more than 100 yards long, they each have a 2,000 h.p. diesel engine, three first class carriages, with 114 seats, and a dining-car with 32 seats. They are able to reach a speed of about 90 m.p.h. and, for example, do the run between Basle and Paris in only five hours. Two important Swiss firms built 5 of the trains, and so once again Switzerland has been called upon to collaborate in this rail transport innovation.

The development of the Geneva-Cointrin airport.

At the international airport of Geneva a new runway has just been put into service which is 2,600 metres long. This event coincides with the starting-up of a new air link between Geneva and Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo. The service, run by a Belgian

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New locomotives will increase the traffic capacity of the Gotthard line.

The Swiss railways have decided to buy 24 new locomotives for the Gotthard line. Because of the great traction power of these engines auxiliary engines can be dispensed with. The new locomotives will raise the efficiency of the line by about 30 per cent and will enable the speed of goods trains to be increased from 22 m.p.h. to 40 m.p.h.

The development of the Swiss wool textile industry.

In 1956 exports of the Swiss wool industry reached 85 million Swiss francs, which is an increase of more than 24 per cent on the previous year. On the other hand, last year Switzerland imported nearly 29 million lbs. of raw wool and combed wool at a cost of 145 million Swiss francs.

Apprentice school against technicians shortage.

In all industrial countries there is a shortage of technicians and qualified craftsmen, and in Switzerland, as elsewhere, private enterprise is paying particular attention to this problem. In conjunction with the building of a new factory, the Société Genevoise d'Instruments de Physique (a Geneva firm making physical instruments) has increased the size of its new apprentice school. The school, which was founded as long ago as 1935 and provides practical and

theoretical training, has been enlarged so that the number of apprentices, which is now 45, can be increased to 80. The apprentices undergo a four-year period of training, and at the same time do practical courses in the factory itself. At the end of this time they are ready to work as qualified craftsmen in a factory for high precision machine tools.

A Swiss firm as engineering adviser in Iraq.

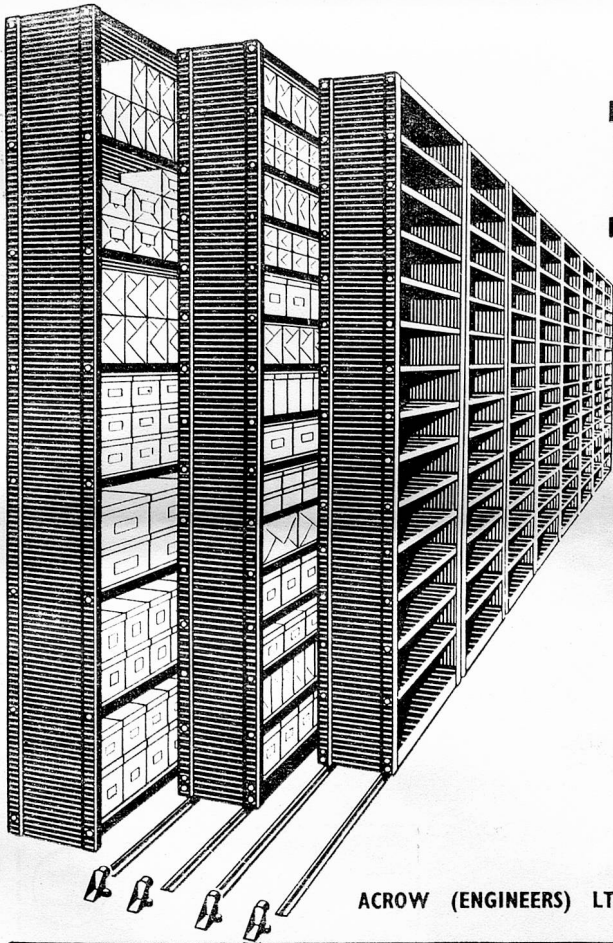
The Iraqi Government Office of Development has appointed a Swiss firm as engineering advisers for a rayon factory which will be constructed in Basrah. This new factory should produce 2,500 tons of rayon and 1,500 tons of staple fibre per year.

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