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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF..

The flight from the land is also a problem in Switzerland. It is obviously much less of a problem in the lowlands, where land offers a good chance of profitable farming; in these plateau lands the problem is of quite another order: there is not enough farm land to go round. It is in the mountain areas where men are leaving the soil because climatic conditions are so tough that making a living out of a tiny plot of stony ground and facing up to long winters is discouraging them — and their hard-working women-folk.

The authorities in Switzerland are anxious to stop this flight from the land by trying to arrange things so that the people of the Swiss mountains can earn a decent living. There are various reasons for encouraging men and women to stay in their mountain valleys. One of these reasons, the authorities feel, is that the present structure of the population should be kept as far as possible. Obviously, town conditions are more attractive in some ways than the hard, lonely life of the mountains, where even improved transport has not made access easy. Working hours in the city and factory are shorter than on the farm, and in the present economic boom the earnings are higher than from farming. Young people especially feel the attraction of the bigger towns.

A lot has already been done to help by the establishment of small factories in fairly remote regions, but enormous numbers of jobs have become available for local populations on the construction work in dam building. These construction jobs not only offer chances of work to local people but bring money to the mountain villages through the spending of the outside workers up there. Another important contribution financially comes through taxes, water rates and other forms of revenue paid in by the hydro-electric firms to the often impoverished treasuries of the communal councils. This means that local jobs like road-building and renovation, and general improvements, can be carried out on a scale which would have been impossible before.

But one day all the dams will have been built; and in any case as soon as work is finished on a hydro-electric plant few people remain in the uplands to look after it, and possibilities of local employment are almost nil. And after big earnings on construction work it is hard for a mountain farmer to settle back to working the soil again. A start has been made on this problem by the communes themselves, some of which have pooled their resources from the money now

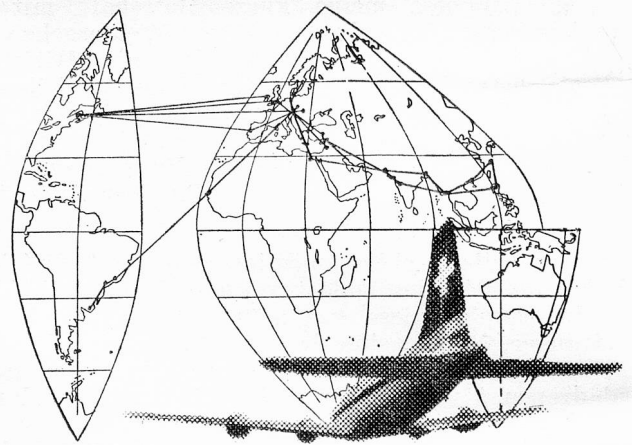
coming in, in order to give young people technical training, and research is going on about finding well-paid and lasting jobs for such qualified workers who could thus remain in their villages. This kind of project will provide permanent and lasting solutions; temporary ones which have been operating for some time now are for example facilitating the running of a household with many children, or lowering the cost of living in one way or another.

A few days ago the Federal government submitted two draft bills to the parliament, which are intended to prolong the operation of existing measures and to increase benefits paid by the state.

One of these bills concerns subsidies paid on transport costs of food and essential commodities which have to be taken up from the plains to the mountain villages. These sums viewed from the Federal standpoint are negligible, but they mean a lot to the consumer who is thus able to get his food at the same price as the city man.

In addition there is the government proposal about an increase in family and children allowances to be paid to farmers working their land independently in the mountain regions. Besides the increases it is intended to raise the income level at which benefits begin and thus make it easier for more families to share the allowances.

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