

Switzerland's economic situation in 1941

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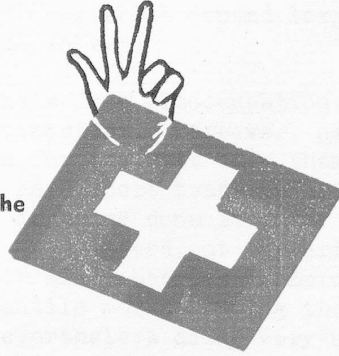
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SWITZERLAND'S ECONOMIC SITUATION IN 1941.

Up to now Switzerland has enjoyed the great privilege of being spared the horrors of war. Nevertheless, the war has had important repercussions on her economic situation. This is due primarily to the fact that Switzerland is situated geographically in the center of a Continent at war and has no access to the sea; secondly, the country is very poor in natural resources and consequently very dependent on its foreign relations. That is to say, that for Switzerland the duration of the war will of necessity be a period of transition, during which the country must endeavour to "keep going". From this point of view the year 1941 has been, under present circumstances and despite increasingly uncertain prospects of the future, a satisfactory one for Switzerland.

Swiss authorities have had to exert strenuous efforts to maintain the country's foreign trade. Total imports amounted to 2026.9 million Swiss francs as against 1,853.6 in 1940 and 1,889.4 in 1939. These figures, which represent import values, might lead to the conclusion that Switzerland's import trade has been maintained at the same level as in previous years. But, on taking into account the rise in prices which for certain products is considerable, it is evident that Swiss imports have in reality diminished by 25% to 30% in quantity.

In 1941 exports amounted to 1,463.6 million Swiss francs as against 1,315.7 in 1940 and 1,297.6 in 1939. Here figures show an increase in value corresponding to a small quantitative increase, as prices of export goods have risen only very slightly.

Thanks to these results and the heavy demand on the home market, Swiss industry worked well on the whole in 1941. Certainly there have been wide fluctuations of activity between one branch and another. The building industry for instance was relatively busy, partly owing to the extension of public utility works, especially for military defence; in fact, few dwelling premises were built, despite the housing shortage in certain big towns.

The machinery industry worked full time and in certain branches there was even a heavy demand for qualified workmen. The watch industry also showed satisfactory results and foreign markets manifest encouraging interest for products of this important branch of Swiss industry.

As regards textiles the situation varied in different branches of the industry: it was moderately good for wool and cotton, owing to increasing importation difficulties; not very good for embroidery, a luxury article for which there is but little demand just now. On the other hand, for the silk, and especially the rayon, industries the situation was excellent, as their products are used as substitutes for other textiles of which there is a shortage.

Finally, the chemical industry has had to exert great efforts to maintain its activity at a satisfactory level. Some firms have obtained good results, those for instance which have been able to manufacture new products to replace goods no longer obtainable abroad. Others have had many difficulties to overcome,

especially aniline dye plants which depend largely on their export trade and require imported raw materials.

On the whole, Switzerland's main preoccupation has been to find the necessary raw materials and means of transport. Moreover, as at present foreign powers only export goods in exchange for products they themselves require, Switzerland is endeavouring to develop her export trade in order to obtain raw materials and foodstuffs. Everything is being done in order to provide necessary means of transport. Switzerland must indeed, at any price, be able to maintain her commercial relations with all countries in Europe and overseas. In the spring of 1941 she founded a mercantile marine flying the Swiss flag. Despite its small tonnage this fleet is nevertheless doing very useful work in keeping Switzerland in touch with distant countries via Lisbon and New York, and it is one of the only fleets which can still connect the Old and the New Worlds. Another innovation of 1941 was the transport of goods through Spanish territory by a Swiss motor truck service which has certainly improved the situation as regard food supplies by counter-acting the shipping and rolling stock shortage.

Thus, thanks to all these efforts, it can be said that for a year of war, 1941 has proved relatively satisfactory. What does the future hold? No one can tell. For Switzerland can continue to live at her present rate only if she can obtain supplies. Every possible effort is being made to buy, to sell and to transport goods. But precautionary measures are also being taken in the event of the situation taking a turn for the worse. Agriculture is being intensified to provide the population with its daily bread. Scrap and waste materials of all kinds are being recuperated and the production of substitute products encouraged so that industries may be kept busy. The nation is accepting restrictions in every domain so that it can keep going. By arming herself with patience and courage, and despite hardships which still may come, Switzerland hopes to weather the storm and to reach the haven of happier days.

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

Intensive agriculture.- (Berne....) In order to ensure national food supplies, Switzerland is making great efforts to extend the surface of land under cultivation. The Government has recently decreed that all firms employing more than 100 workers must provide their employees with allotments so that they can produce their own potato and vegetable supplies as far as possible.

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Swiss forest exploitation. - (Lausanne....) The present shortage of coal and building materials normally imported from abroad has caused Switzerland to exploit her forest lands more fully. During the 1941-1942 season forest exploitation will be increased by 200% as compared with normal pre-war quantities.

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Census of the Swiss population.- (Geneva....) The first results of the census taken at the beginning of December 1941 show that Switzerland has now a population of 4.1/4 million inhabitants. The biggest town is Zurich with approximately 334.000 inhabitants. Berne, the capital, has a population of 130.000.

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The Swiss Industries Fair.- (Basle....) The XXVIth Swiss Industries Fair will be held in Basle from April 18th to 28th 1942. The list of exhibitors is already very encouraging and a new exposition hall has had to be built. As usual a great number of foreign visitors are expected.

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The most modern streetcar in the world.- (Zurich....) The authorities of Zurich recently inaugurated a new streetcar which may be considered the most modern in Europe. It is a four-axle car weighing only 12.9 tons with a transport capacity of 100 passengers instead of 60 as has been the case for cars of the same type until now.

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New covered market in Zurich.- (Zurich....) Zurich is an important receiving and distributing center for fruit and vegetables which are sent out from there to all parts of Central and Eastern Switzerland. It is planned to begin work on the building of a large new covered market in 1943. This scheme is of