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SWITZERLAND AND TECHNICAL PROGRESS.

The Swiss people have one virtue that no one will deny them: that is, that they are often foremost in technical advances, or at least that where technical discoveries have been made abroad the Swiss have the knack of developing these discoveries very successfully. For example, in the 19th century when road haulage was replaced by the railway, the Swiss built a large number of railway lines which diverted transit traffic to Switzerland and made it the chief communications centre in Europe. Again, we have been very successful in the field of aviation, so that Switzerland has become a very important airways centre — this, although our national airline, Swissair, is at present in a very bad way financially. And similarly, Swiss industry has never been in a position of inferiority whenever a technical invention has been realised. This flair for keeping up-to-date, and this adaptability to constantly changing circumstances, have been very largely responsible for Switzerland's prosperity. The general economic situation of our country is internationalised to a very great extent and our material success depends principally on the high quality of our products: a country in our position can't afford to lag behind other countries. It must be up-to-date.

Knowing all this, it may seem surprising that one of the greatest technical triumphs of the present day *Television*, is still unknown in Switzerland, although it is very much in the public eye in America, London and Paris. There is not a single television receiving set, let alone a television transmitting station, in the whole of Switzerland. It does seem that we *are* very much behind in this respect, for all we are doing is local experiments in television. Although these experiments have been conclusive, there is no prospect of any rapid spread of television in Switzerland.

But in this field we do have to distinguish between general considerations and local ones. Swiss industry is certainly well aware of television and perfectly capable of putting it into practice within a very short time. We are certainly not behind other nations in experiment and laboratory tests, but our own particular circumstances are a hindrance to an imminent transition from experiment to achievement and from theory to practice.

The fact is that all over the world television has only become a reality in very big towns or in regions where several towns lie within easy reach of each

other. The reason for this is that in one respect television is much less powerful than wireless transmission of sound, which has an immense radius of action whereas television is only possible over a much smaller area. It is of course easy to get over this difficulty by increasing the number of television transmitters, but this is only financially possible over highly-populated areas, which Switzerland does not possess. Television receivers are still comparatively expensive, in any case very much more expensive than ordinary wireless receiving sets. And so it is not a sound financial proposition to set up a television system except in regions where density of the population is exceptionally high, that is, in regions where there is a particularly high proportion of people who can afford to buy a television set. This is the case in large cities, but not in a country like Switzerland, whose biggest towns are few in number and have a comparatively small population.

Another serious difficulty is that although Switzerland is a very small country she is also a mixed one: if we did set up a television system here, we should have to build three studios right away, one for each language spoken in the country.

These obstacles are big enough to make it impossible — as the Swiss Federal Council declared recently — for us to have television before another four or five years have gone by. But in spite of everything, private enterprise and a number of official bodies are looking into the matter. As soon as there is a big enough demand steps can be taken towards satisfying it. So that the lack of television in Switzerland is not due to a lack of imagination or initiative, but is due to the small size of the country and the absence of very big towns there. But we are sufficiently advanced to be able to set up a technical organisation of very high quality, when the time comes for it.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, August 25th, 1950.

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