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ASSURANCE ON OIL GIVEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

The Swiss Government has assured its people that it will not permit them to become too dependent on any single source of oil.

The statement served to quiet fears expressed in some quarters that the Soviet Union could become a major indirect supplier of Switzerland's oil needs.

The fears stem from the fact that Switzerland will be drawing crude oil from a pipeline project that has as its chief architect Enrico Mattei, president of Italy's big oil combine, E.N.I. (the national petroleum agency).

Signor Mattei's purchases of Soviet oil have often been attacked as serving Soviet interests to the detriment of the West.

The E.N.I. pipeline will start from Pegli, the Italian oil port near Genoa, and cross eastern Switzerland to reach refineries in West Germany. The three Swiss cantons involved reserved the right to use the pipeline themselves when they granted the right of transit.

A branch of the same pipeline will cross the Alps through the St. Bernard road tunnel, now under construction between Italy and Switzerland, to supply a refinery at Collombey in the south-western canton of Valais.

This refinery, now in the first stage of construction, will be Switzerland's first. It is expected to be completed in early 1963.

The Swiss Government indicated in its statement that it did not think that the pipelines and refinery would make Switzerland dependent on one source of supply.

Having no oil of its own, neutral Switzerland wants to prevent being cut off from all supply sources in time of war. Most of Switzerland's imports of petroleum arrive by way of the Rhine River.

The Government conceded that the situation could be difficult if the Collombey refinery were to get all its 2,000,000 tons of crude oil from one source and sell all its output to the Swiss market. Under such conditions, the Government said, "the single source in question would have such a share of our market that a sudden cut-off in shipments would cause supply difficulties."

The three cantons — Ticino, St. Gallen and Grisons — had specified in granting the right of transit that they would be under no obligation to accept any particular supplier for the oil brought in through the pipeline.

But the statement said that "if, contrary to all expectations, the situation should develop in a way that would make our oil supply depend on a single source, the Government would take the necessary measures."



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NEWS AT

Federal

For the second time, Mr. Paul Chaudet, of Vaud, has been elected President of the Confederation, this time for 1962.

A vine-grower from Lavaux, Mr. Chaudet is by the number of years he has spent in the assembly dean of the Federal Council, and has also been in charge of the military department since 1955. Mr. Jean Bourgnicht, of Fribourg, has been elected Vice-President of the Federal Council, and he will succeed Mr. Chaudet as President of the Confederation next year.

* * *

Mr. Walter Bringolf, of Schaffhausen, president of the Swiss Socialist Party, and Mr. Ernst Vaterlaus, of Thurgau, a member of the Radical Party, have been elected president of the National Council and president of the States Council respectively. The vice-presidents are Mr. André Guinand, Radical, of Geneva, and Mr. Frederic Fauquex, Liberal, of Rixensacker.

* * *

The directors of the Touring Club of Switzerland have announced that they will fight against the establishing of speed limits on the new Swiss super highways now under construction. Their opinion was formed after studying traffic conditions and regulations in other countries, where, they claim, the tendency to place speed limits on auto-routes is disappearing.

* * *

Backed by an official agreement, a consortium of Swiss banks has just granted a loan through the Central Bank of Chile amounting to twenty million Swiss francs to take effect immediately.

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Italian industrial officials expressed concern recently over the "suspended" talks between Swiss and Italian officials regarding regulations for social insurance and immigration regulations for Italian workers employed in Switzerland. For the present, neither Swiss nor Italian officials are willing to predict when talks might begin again. And no marked changes in the employment of Italian workers in Switzerland have been noted.

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Last november, the biggest fruit depot in Switzerland was inaugurated at Sion. It is a very up-to-date depot capable of holding 300 wagons of fruit. When it is completely finished, it will hold some 550 wagons, i.e., over 5,000 tons of fruit. It will consequently be of the greatest economic importance for the big fruit-growing region of the Valais.

* * *

Switzerland recently signed a trade treaty with Tunisia agreeing to give technical and scientific assistance as well as protection and encouragement to capital investment in this North African republic.

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Cantonal

Five hundred Christmas parcels, sent from Bienne and Neuchâtel to addresses in Zurich and other parts of East Switzerland, went up in flames at Zurich's main station just before Christmas. The parcels had been loaded aboard a Post Office wagon attached to an express train from Lausanne. It arrived in Zurich with the wagon trailing smoke. It is thought that the heating system in the wagon, unmanned after Bienne, became overheated.