

The Litvinov mill is a multi-storey building which, contrary to modern practice, is almost entirely walled with glass to provide illumination throughout the day, but which probably leads to heavy heating costs in the savage winters experienced in this part of the Sudetenland of the Czech Republic.

Top spinner's Czech venture'

An on-the-spot report by Peter Lennox-Kerr

There appear to be two European attitudes towards modern textile manufacture. On the one hand there is a widely held view that one should turn to Asia and the Far East as a source of both textiles and textile machinery. In contrast, an alternative line of thought favours looking 'closer to home'.

By relocating in Eastern Europe, and often acquiring existing plants which can be rapidly modernised, West European textile producers are able to react more quickly to the changes in the market as well as deliver by road to virtually any European destination – and there is the added appeal of lower labour and social costs in these emerging countries.

The attraction of the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe is that there is a pool of skilled, educated labour available at what still are appealingly competitive wage rates.

Opportunity

Schoeller Textil, Düren, is one of the few remaining German cotton spinners in the Rheinland.

CEO Leopold Schoeller saw an opportunity to establish a spinning business in Litvinov, formerly Oberleutensdorf, in the Czech Republic, and close to the German border. He acquired a cotton mill which, before expropriation in 1949 was operating as E. G. Pick. The Pick family had long since departed for

the United States.

As with so much industry acquired at that time, very little was ever done either to modernise or expand, so that when Schoeller Litvinov k.s., came into being it inherited a mish-mash of equipment, some modern and still producing, while in the spinning department the ring frames were essentially examples of the blacksmith's art, but a blacksmith from Tashkent! Now the last of these machines has been scrapped, making room for modern high production ring

spinning and OE equipment.

Managing director, Georg Hartmann is the only German national in the plant and he is justly proud of the progress already made. Pointing at the remains of the Tashkent ring frames, he said: "Of course we had problems in the beginning when we had to switch from those to these," indicating the new Zinser linked ring frames feeding Schlafhorst Autoconers, while on the floor above the Schlafhorst Autocoros rumble. There are twelve 1028-spindle Zinser frames.

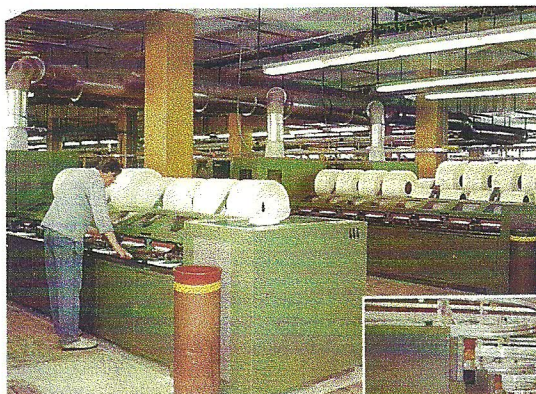
Investing

The renovated plant currently has 20,000 ring spindles and 1,200 rotors and since it was acquired by Schoeller in 1994 some DM 25 M. (£10 M.) has been invested in new production equipment: Buildings come later.

At the outset of the redevelopment of Schoeller Litvinov, the plant was equipped with: 20,000 ring spindles; 1,300 OE positions; 2,880 two-for-one spindles; and 1,200 Hamel 2000 spindles.

This represented an annual production of 4,600 tonnes equal to a turnover of DM 36 M. (£14.5 M.).

Initially it was hard for



Above: The combing department at Schoeller Litvinov is entirely Rieter with lap forming and combs all being of Swiss origin.

Right: The 12 Zinser 1028-spindle ring frames are linked to Schlafhorst clearer-rewinders which produce packages of completely cleared, knotless yarn.

