

Federal mosaic

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FEDERAL MOSAIC

The State accounts for 1965 showed an excess of revenue over expenditure of 31.4m francs for the federal administration and of 447.5m for the whole account, which brought the Federal Debt down to 3816 million francs. Experts believe that expenditure is rising so rapidly that this is the last time the federal accounts showed a surplus. Already some brakes have been pulled; it will be remembered that the military budget was cut by 100m. francs at one foul swoop; subsidies are hoped to be cut by 150m francs. The PTT services used to work well, and their accounts now threaten to become deficient (from a previous report in the S.O., it may be remembered that 19m francs was all they were able to make last year as compared with 90m). The consequences are and will be increased postal rates, a rise in taxes. Water protection, national road construction, help to universities, social housing—there is no hope of reducing the burden; the neglect in the prosperous 'fifties now has to be paid for dearly.

The overstepping of the credit allowed for the "Mirage" aircraft (half a milliard of the citizens' money) caused a storm in Parliament and country. It had the effect that Parliament has become aware of its responsibilities; members realize that it is not enough to check the accounts and financial report once a year. **Tighter supervision** will be necessary. 'Verwaltungskontrolle' was on the agenda of the parliamentary summer session. The two Chambers did not completely agree as to how far such supervisory control should go. But changes will be made. There is at present too much bureaucracy, too many details and too many papers and forms.

In July, the report on activities of the finance delegation of the Federal Parliament was published. In it, the problems of stricter control over State spending was dealt with. A lot of work is being done by the members, and whilst working methods can be improved, the chairman of the commission considers that the basic conception is sound. In 1965, over 470 observations and ideas regarding finance control have been submitted to the commission by the 'Finanzkontrolle'. It considered 1825 decisions by the Federal Council, and all this involved correspondence, meetings, consultations.

The whole question of tighter controls brought about the proposal that the **Federal Constitution** should be totally revised. Since the 'seventies of the last century, articles after articles have been replaced or added, and many consider it high time that a new Constitution be worked out, discarding the unsound, preserving what has proved valuable. National Councillor Peter Duerrenmatt and Councillor of States Dr Karl Obrecht put forward well-founded Motions, eminent politicians and legal experts are supporting the call for total revision. The New Helvetic Society amongst others are in agreement, and Prof. Imboden from Basle appealed to the

universities to cooperate in the work (St Galler 'Hochschultag', May 1966). The suggestion that the vast amount of preliminary work should be finished within eight years—in 1974, the centenary of the present Constitution will take place—is a rather frightening thought. The Federal Council has agreed in principle, and ways and means will now have to be studied in order to arrive at a clear and sober evaluation of the true Switzerland of today and to create the new law demanded by the new position.

In the meantime, a new revised issue of the federal laws is being prepared by 1974. The Swiss Penal Code is also being partially revised.

The **Federal Council**—after the holiday break—is back at work. The decisions the Government have to take in the near future are manifold and far-reaching. Will there be toll taxes for the use of road tunnels so costly to construct? What will their attitude be to the report by Prof. Joehr and his commission on long-term financial planning and on the findings by Prof. Stocker's special commission on the reduction of subsidies (140m francs)?

The findings of the two commissions give an alarming picture of deficits amounting to milliards of francs. It is estimated that by 1974, revenue will be 9151 milliards and expenditure 11,054 milliards of francs. A new commission under the chairmanship of Councillor of States Dr Rohner (Altstetten) has been formed to study new sources of revenue.

"Will she, won't she?" was the heading of a short article in the "Economist" in March, in which the chances were considered of **Switzerland's entry into UN**. Her attitude to the world organization of nations, it stated, had been coloured by the unhappy experience of the League of Nations, which Switzerland had joined in 1920. In 1935, she found it impossible to apply economic sanctions against Italy in the Ethiopian conflict, and Switzerland reverted to complete neutrality three years later. Left-wing opinion in Switzerland seems to favour membership. Mr Wahlen, however, had opposed the idea of UN membership, conceding, though, that Switzerland might be able to play a moderating role in UN. At the moment, Switzerland's attitude is wait and see. The debate in Parliament when the report on activities by the Federal Political Department was discussed showed anew that the question will have to be studied how much international ties can be reconciled with the principle of neutrality and the basis of Swiss policy of armed neutrality. In Parliament, Federal President Schnaffner stated that Switzerland would do nothing rash with regard to her position in Europe, but that nothing would be neglected either which could further integration.

Another subject which has occupied Government, Parliament and the responsible citizen is the **introduction of the 44-hour week** for the **Bundespersonal** of the PTT and SBB. It was held that it

was the wrong moment to reduce working hours when everything had to be done to release foreign labour and increase productivity. The reduction will cost PTT 22m francs a year because 1100 more people will have to be employed. Parliament has decided to introduce the 44-hour week by end of May 1968—a compromise which is not a complete victory for the federal personnel. It took the National Council two days to debate the proposal, and the vote was 96:71. In the final voting, it was accepted by 122:1. The consequences will be costly, and as the Swiss Chamber of Commerce stated earlier in the year, the demand was not justified when more than half of all the employees in private economy still work 46 hours and more a week.

The federal law for the **protection of nature**, countryside and valuable buildings caused a debate in Parliament which showed that the new generation, too, is concerned with preserving what is good and of value. It is still the Cantons and Communes which are responsible for taking the necessary measures, but the Confederation will support them with financial contributions where necessary.

Forty-two Ambassadors and three Charges d'Affaires took part in the annual meeting of Swiss diplomats in Berne. Various topical subjects were discussed, and the Ambassadors had an opportunity to meet the members of the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Parliament, and to attend the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad. They were also received by Federal President Schaffner on the "Lohn" Estate and took part in the traditional excursion to the home Canton of the President, the Aargau, where the atomic reactor at Wuerenlingen was visited, as well as the Castle of Lenzburg which houses the cultural institution "Philipp-Albert-Stapferhaus".

The Presidents of the two Chambers represented the Federal Parliament at the inauguration of the new Israeli Parliament Building.

(Based mainly on news received by courtesy of Agence Telegraphique Suisse, "Basler Nachrichten" and "Echo")

P.S. On going to press we learn that the Federal Council has accepted in globo the proposals contained in the Stocker report, though the Cantons will be consulted before final decisions are taken. As regards the Joehr report, a spokesman of Federal Finance Administration said that the figures were only estimates and that there was no cause for alarm, though new sources of revenue would have to be found as deficits were going to be certain.



Would anybody knowing the address of Mr Alois Meienberg, formerly of Hikutaia, please contact the Editor.