

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

The Federal Council has passed the State Account for 1952. It will be discussed by the Federal Assembly, during its June Session. With a deficit of 181 million francs in the total account, this means a deterioration, as compared with the Budget amounting to approximately one hundred million francs. Certain outstanding debts and amounts written off, are included in this total.

The accounts of the Cantons and of the Communes are not yet available, in respect of last year. Nevertheless, it may be estimated, on the basis of the last figures to be made public, that the financial situation of the Cantons — considered as a whole — is more favourable than that of the Confederation. This is due, principally, to the fact that although the economic situation in regard to the fiscal receipts of all the public administrations is satisfactory, the Confederation, owing to the extraordinary expenditure entailed by the additional armament programme, has to bear a financial burden, such as is unknown to either the Cantons or the Communes.

When reviewing Cantonal finances, no true picture of the actual conditions can be obtained by taking into consideration the average figures for all the Cantons, as a whole. The differences which exists in regard to the various Cantons are far greater to-day, than was the case in former years. It is a fact that eight out of the twenty-two Cantons, are definitely weak financially. These are the ones whose territory lies mainly in the mountain regions. Their financial difficulties are attributable to causes of a similar nature, the reason being that as there are very few industrial undertakings established in the Mountain Cantons, their financial administration is unable to draw any substantial benefit from the economic boom. Tourist traffic, which should provide the necessary compensation, has brought in very little during the last few years, in consequence of the currency restrictions to which would-be visitors from abroad, are subjected. On the other hand, expenditure for the mountain Cantons has increased a lot, during these same last years. This is due, to a large extent, to the cost entailed by the road building and improvement, which has become a matter of urgency as a result of the great increase in the number of visitors to Switzerland, travelling by car.

According to the Regulations, contained in the Swiss Constitution regarding the repartition of duties and competencies between the Cantons, as being member-states, and the Confederation, as being the Central Executive, road-sovereignty is an attribute of the Cantons. However, with the development which has taken place in regard to traffic, the necessity for the provisions and construction of large thoroughfares grew concurrently, and it was not possible, of course, to leave it to the wishes and the financial capacity of the various Cantons, as to whether it would carry out its share of work on that portion of the road which ran through its territory, or not.

This led to the Confederation taking over, to an increasing extent, matters connected with road-improvement, which had become too heavy to be borne by a small or otherwise financially weak Canton. To begin with, the Confederation recognized the necessity

for road-construction in the Alps to be considered as a matter falling within its competency. After that — two years ago, to be exact — the Cantons' share in Customs revenue derived from imported petrol for cars, was doubled. At the present time, they receive half the Customs receipts from this item. And, as the number of motor vehicles is constantly on the increase, imports of the necessary petrol are increasing concurrently, and with them the relevant Customs' receipts.

Recently, a new system of repartition has been decided upon in regard to these Customs receipts, amounting to some 50 million francs per annum, which takes into consideration, in a generous manner, the peculiar difficulties of the financially weak Cantons. As a result, there are now Cantons which are able to cover their entire expenditure for road construction by means of their share in Customs receipts from petrol.

In the Draft Bill on the Constitutional Revision of the Federal Finances, which is to be debated on during the March Session of Parliament, special attention has been paid to this problem of financial compensation. It is intended to ease the burden of the financially weak Cantons, whenever the occasion should arise, by means of suitable measures, to be applied individually. With the help of such "planned" financial compensation — as it is called — more effective results can be achieved at a smaller cost, than when all the Cantons are allocated a Federal subsidy or a procentual share in the State's fiscal revenue, on a per capita basis of their population.

In this way, also, there is less danger of the Cantons having to be towed — financially — by the Confederation, and thus losing by degrees, more and more of their independence.

