

The new parliament faces a heavy session

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THE NEW PARLIAMENT FACES A HEAVY SESSION

In the morning of Monday, 2nd December, the oldest Member of Parliament, National Councillor Carl Dellberg, opened the new session of the National Council. This was the second occasion on which this honourable task had fallen to this Valaisan, a retired postman of seventy-seven. This is by no means a record, for in the 115 years of history of the Confederate State, there have been only twenty-four Seniority Presidents, although up to 1931 Parliament was reconstituted every three years.

After Members had been bound by oath, Parliament was ready to do business.

The new President of the National Council and of the Federal Assembly is Councillor Otto Hess, a representative of the Farmer's Party from the Thurgau. The President of the Council of States is Councillor Ludwig Danioth, the first representative of the Canton of Uri ever to have reached this position. Councillor Danioth opened the new session in the Council of States the same day.

One of the first items on the heavy agenda was the acceptance of the report of the Alcohol Administration and the granting of an eleven million franc credit for the purchase of land in Lausanne and Geneva where PTT (General Post Office) require new premises. The budget for 1964 of the Swiss Federal Railways caused considerable debate. The financial position of the state railways had deteriorated, and an increase in certain tariffs was becoming necessary. The budget was finally accepted unanimously. The project for a Toedi-Greina Railway was discussed, and the special commission on the Gotthard base tunnel reported on its findings.

Also unanimously the National Council accepted the credit of 8.8 million francs as a Centenary gift to the Red Cross. This money is to be used for the erection of a Henry Dunant Institute.

A grant of 33.6 million francs was made towards various foreign aid schemes, International projects (like UNICEF) or Swiss schemes operating abroad (like the Swiss medical team in the Congo) will benefit.

The main business of the first week was the sixth revision of the Old Age and Dependents' Insurance. Twenty speakers had been put down for the initial debate, and President of the Council Hess warned members that the country expected deeds, not long speeches. The revision will be dealt with separately in the next issue of the "Swiss Observer".

In the second week more schemes of a social welfare nature were on the agenda, so the revision of the regulations governing compensation for loss of income by the Swiss soldier during military service. Substantial increases were accepted.

The 1964 budget of the Confederation was the subject of a long debate and was finally accepted unanimously. We shall refer to it more fully in a future issue.

The draft law on working conditions in industry, trade and commerce caused long and heated argument. There had been a proposal (initiative) of forty-four hours a week. It seems strange to advocate shorter working hours at a time when labour is so scarce in Switzerland. The National Council was in favour of a compromise, viz. to fix a maximum of forty-six hours and to reduce this to forty-five by 1st January 1967. Overtime regulations also came up for discussion.

A further subject on the agenda was the expulsion of Italian workers due to subversive activities. It was agreed that every man had the right to his own political opinion, but where Communist activities of foreign workers in Switzerland could be proved, expulsion was necessary, not only in the interest of the country, but also of the foreign workers themselves.

The measures taken to combat the excessive were the subject of an informative address by Councillor Schaffner.

A new draft regarding the subsidy to Swiss schools abroad was presented to Parliament by the Federal Council. From Fr.10,000.— per annum in 1922, the subsidy has now risen to 1.4 million francs. The new proposals were unanimously accepted.

After a long debate the National Council empowered the Government by 131 : 1 votes to ratify the Moscow agreement on the banning of atomic tests.

Several efforts had been made in Parliament regarding advice to consumers and goods tests. Federal Councillor Schaffner commented in general and announced his decision to form a special commission to investigate the question.

The re-election of the Federal Councillors was already reported in the last issue. Federal Councillor von Moos was chosen President of the Confederation for the new year, and the new Vice-President was elected in the person of Federal Councillor Tschudi from Basle, who will probably become President next year.

Dr. R. Frank Vaucher (Lausanne) was elected to the Federal Insurance Tribunal in place of Dr. Louis Prod'homme. The Presidency was given to Fuersprech Hans Wuethrich and the Vice-Presidency to Dr. Pietro Mona.

After three weeks of intensive work the first session of the new Parliament ended. It is no easy task which faces the representatives of the people. The decisions they are asked to make are far-reaching. But M.P.s are bound by oath, and its contents should be their guiding star. At

the beginning of a term of office members are sworn in. The Federal Chancellor speaks the oath, and the member either swears it by word of mouth or by signing a written pledge:

"I swear by God the Almighty to keep the Constitution and the Laws of the Confederation honestly and truly; to keep the unity, strength and honour of the Swiss Nation; to protect the independence of the fatherland, the freedom and rights of the people and its citizens, and to fulfil conscientiously all the duties entrusted to me. So help me God."

(Based on A.T.S., "Basler Nachrichten" and "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt.")

FEDERAL NEWS REMNANTS

Looking through the files for 1963, I have come across a number of federal news items which for various reasons somehow did not find their way into the S.O. Some of them may still be of interest, even though they are no longer topical.

In connection with the coming Swiss Centre in London it may be opportune to remember that, in June, the National Council agreed to a credit of 3.45 million francs for alterations and enlargement of the Swiss Institute in Rome, the Villa Maraini. Several members of the parliamentary commission, including Federal Councillor Tschudi, had been to Rome a few weeks previously to investigate the matter.

On 15th August the Confederation was represented by three delegates at the Silver Jubilee of the accession to the throne by His Serene Highness Prince Franz Joseph II of Liechtenstein. They were the then Vice-President of the Confederation Federal Councillor von Moos, the Secretary-General of the political Department Ambassador Micheli, and the Director of Customs Oberzolldirektor Lenz.

Later in the same month thirty-six Swiss Ambassadors met in Berne for their annual conference. There were lectures by several heads of departments on topical problems of foreign policy, international technical co-operation as well as on questions concerning the Swiss abroad.

Early in September a dozen delegates, members of both Houses, represented Switzerland at the Fifty-second Interparliamentary Conference in Belgrade, where M.P.s from over sixty countries met.

On 17th September we heard that the "Plan Wahlen" which dates back to before the outbreak of the second world war is still in existence. This plan was created by Federal Councillor Wahlen, then in charge of the Federal Agricultural Research Institute in Zurich/Oerlikon, and it covered extensive cultivation and making use of every possible square metre of arable land in case of a national emergency. It was very important for Switzerland's survival during the war. This plan is being kept up to date, and it is reckoned that with the aid of electronic computers the whole plan is ready to be put into operation in only two hours.

At the end of September two Federal Judges, Dr. Paul Corrodi and Dr. Louis Python, resigned for reasons of age, and Dr. Jean Castella and Dr. Eduard Joehr were elected in their place.

In October Federal Councillor Wahlen was presented with the first volume of the American collection "Digest of International Law" by the American Chargé d'Affaires Monsieur Kellermann.

At the end of October the members of the Federal Council accompanied by five former Councillors (Kobelt, Petitpierre, Weber, Streuli and Lepori), went to inspect the construction progress of the National Exhibition in Lausanne.

On 13th December Federal Councillor Wahlen gave an appreciation of the late President Heuss of the Federal German Republic who had been a good friend of Switzerland.

One hundred and fifty countries have issued postage stamps in aid of the "Free the World From Hunger Campaign", amongst them Switzerland. F.A.O. showed their appreciation of these efforts by presenting an album containing all these stamps of the heads of states. These "hunger stamps" were presented to the President of the Confederation on 10th December by the Chairman of the Swiss national hunger campaign committee, Dr. Edgar Schumacher.

The traditional Christmas dinner of the Federal Councillors and their wives took place at the "Frischinghaus Beatrice von Wattenwyl" in Berne two days before Christmas.

The first news items from the Capital in the new year concerned the radio address given by the new President of the Confederation Federal Councillor von Moos. He recalled some of the sad happenings of the past year, such as the aircraft disaster of Duerrenesch, but he also spoke of memorable events like the Red Cross Centenary. He referred to the National Exhibition which will be the most important event in 1964 and expressed the hope that the new year would be one of peace for the world.

On 1st January the traditional reception of the Diplomatic Corps took place in Berne when forty-four Ambassadors, one Minister and thirteen Chargés d'Affaires were received by the Government in the splendidly decorated *Palais Fédéral*.

On 6th January three messages were received by the new President of the Confederation. One was from Mr. Krushchev, in which he proposes to renounce the use of force in territorial disputes in the future. The second message was sent by the Pope from the Holy Land, in which he expressed his hope that peace would triumph. The third telegram arrived from Tunisia; President Bourguiba congratulated Federal Councillor von Moos on his election as President of the Confederation.

On 7th January, the Federal Council held the first meeting of the new year, and with it "Berne" was back to work in earnest. [A.T.S.]

ANNIVERSARY OF THE SWISS METEOROLOGISTS

The first network of weather stations was established in Switzerland one hundred years ago. On 1st December 1863, operations were taken up by eighty weather stations all over the country. Working on a voluntary basis, the men assigned to the different posts issued their reports on atmospheric pressure, temperature, humidity, wind and other phenomena connected with the weather three times a day. Since then, the number of meteorologic stations has grown to 120. The "Annals of the Swiss Meteorologic Central Office" (MZA), the "daily figures on precipitations" and the monthly weather reports contain most interesting and useful information. Among the essential tasks of the MZA was the establishment of observation posts in the mountains. The oldest is the one on the Säntis (8,215 ft.) which has been serving its purpose since 1882. [S.N.T.O.]