

Swiss foreign minister resigns

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DEATH OF THE FORMER FEDERAL COUNCILLOR DR. WALTER STAMPFLI

In the early hours of 12th October, the former Federal Councillor Dr. Walter Stampfli died in the Cantonal Hospital in Zurich at the age of 80. He was born on 3rd December 1884 at Bueren in the Canton of Solothurn ("Schwarzbubenland"), the son of a teacher. He went to school in Solothurn and studied insurance mathematics, economics and law at the universities of Zurich and Goettingen. In 1906 he graduated as dr. rer. pol. For ten years, until 1918, he edited the "Oltener Tagblatt" and then became Secretary of the Solothurn Chamber of Commerce. Three years later, he joined the von Roll'schen Eisenwerke as Secretary, later to become a Director.

He had a great gift for politics, and at the age of 28, he became a member of the Solothurn Cantonal Council (until 1937). In 1931, he joined the National Council for Solothurn (Liberal). As successor to Federal Councillor Obrecht, Dr. Stampfli was elected Federal Councillor by the Federal Assembly on 17th July 1940. He was President of the Confederation in 1944, the fourth Solothurner since 1848. He resigned on 20th November 1947 for reasons of health.

It was during Mr. Stampfli's term of office as Federal Councillor and Minister for Economic Affairs that the preparation, creation and beginning of the Old Age and Dependents' Insurance took place, as well as the revision of the Economic Articles of the Federal Constitution.

On relinquishing his governmental post, Dr. Stampfli accomplished much for the handicapped and invalids. He was also President of the "Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Eingliederung Behinderter in die Volkswirtschaft".

The death of the great statesman was widely mourned, and a vast congregation attended the funeral service at the Reformed Church in Solothurn on 15th October. Federal Councillors Wahlen, Bonvin and Schaffner were amongst the mourners, and the latter addressed the congregation. Five former Federal Councillors were present and many personalities from all walks of life.

In an obituary in the "Basler Nachrichten", National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt said that Bundesrat Stampfli was a politician who deserved the name statesman. He was in every way what is called a striking personality, not only because of his impressive build, but above all his Liberal ideas and extraordinary intelligence, his energy and his abilities. Mr. Dürrenmatt went on to say that Mr. Stampfli's achievements during the war were enormous and of extreme importance to the country. He proved his superiority without any trace of arrogance. His temperament made him enjoy argument and he had a dash of dare-devil vigour, but he never lost his sense of proportion. He always remained fair, and even his opponents in Parliament bowed before his achievements. It was not surprising that in each re-election he had by far the highest number of votes, very nearly unanimity. Walter Stampfli was the old-school "Eidgenosse" who had emerged from the Liberalism of the late nineteenth century. But he remained ever critical and open-minded for the huge changes which Switzerland had to face. Mr. Dürrenmatt ends his obituary by referring to Walter Stampfli's great humanity. "It is the completeness of this man which will remain unforgettable and emphatic to all those who knew him."

(A.T.S. and "Basler Nachrichten".)

SWISS FOREIGN MINISTER RESIGNS

On 19th October, Federal Councillor Wahlen announced his decision to resign at the end of the year for reasons of health and age. His resignation was handed to the leader of the Federal Assembly, Dr. F.-J. Kurmann. The President of the Confederation expressed official regret at this decision on behalf of the Federal Council and referred to the seven years of rich and successful activities of the retiring member of the Government.

Professor Dr. Friedrich Traugott Wahlen was born at Mirchel in 1899, a citizen of Trimstein-Rubigen (Berne). His father was a primary teacher. At 21, F. T. Wahlen graduated from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH) as agronomist, and after receiving his doctorate of technical sciences, he went to Quebec to manage the state seed research institute. At the early age of 25, the young Swiss was put in charge of all agricultural research institutes of Canada. In 1929, Dr. Wahlen returned to Switzerland to take over the agricultural research institute at Oerlikon. It was through his work as scientist and speaker, that he came in close contact with the whole Swiss economy, especially agriculture for whose problems he had always had a profound interest. At the same time as working on the Executive Committee of the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich, in 1939, he was called in for the preparation of wartime economy. The Federal Council appointed him head of the "Anbauwerk" (food production) during the last war. His "Wahlen Plan" for utilising for food production every available piece of land hitherto only used for grazing, became an example of rational agricultural economy and played a vital part in Switzerland's war-time feeding.

From 1942-1949, Dr. Wahlen represented the Canton of Zurich in the Council of States, and in 1943 he became lecturer at the agricultural department of the ETH, a post he held for six years. The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations was at that time in process of development, and Prof. Dr. Wahlen was called in as head of its agricultural section, first in Washington and after 1951 in Rome. He was appointed Deputy Director of FAO in 1958.

That year, Prof. Wahlen was nominated candidate in succession to Federal Councillor Feldmann who had died suddenly. It was a difficult position at the time. The Bernese Farmers' Party (Bauern-, Gewerbe- und Bürgerpartei) had nominated the Bernese Regierungsrat Siegenthaler in a rather dictatorial way. Protests were heard, and during heated discussions, the name Wahlen appeared. Finally, in a stormy Party meeting, their candidate had to retreat, and the outsider Wahlen was proposed. The Federal Assembly had to vote three times before Prof. Wahlen was finally elected. His opponents gave as reason against electing him that he had been abroad too long and had worked in international organisations!

So Prof. Dr. F. T. Wahlen became Federal Councillor on 11th December 1958. First he was in charge of the Department of Justice and Police and for a few months simultaneously the Communications Department during the illness of Federal Councillor Lepori. At the beginning of 1960 he took over Home Affairs and became Deputy Foreign Minister. In 1961, he was President of the Confederation, and during the same year he became Swiss Foreign Minister.

Federal Councillor Wahlen has worked in all spheres with circumspection and intelligent approach; he used his great experience, and his wise counsel was influential. In his appreciation, the President of the Confederation Prof. Tschudi said that Mr. Wahlen's merits were extraordin-

arily high, and that the country owed him a great deal of gratitude. His activities in connection with EFTA, the Council of Europe and Development Aid had been of great importance to Switzerland's place in the world.

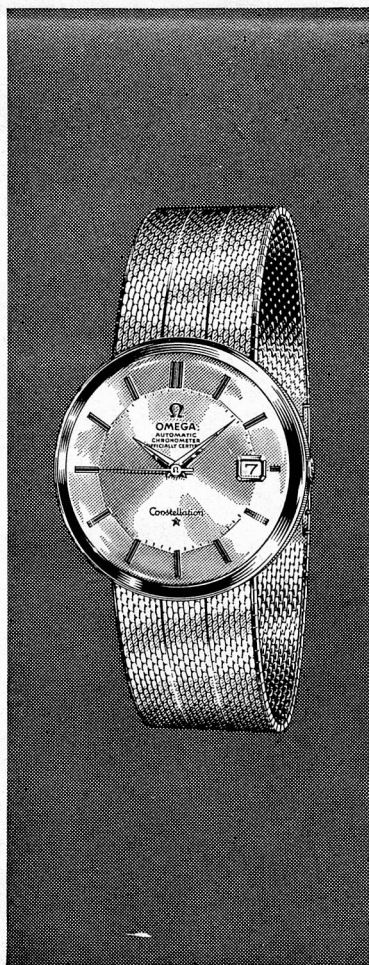
His own Party, whilst regretting Bundesrat Wahlen's resignation, stated that his judgment and sense of duty had always been infallible, and they would, therefore, accept his decision unquestioningly. Their own appreciation would be shown at the end of the year.

The Swiss abroad owe Federal Council Wahlen particular gratitude for all the efforts he has made on their behalf, and they wish him a good many years of well-deserved retirement.

The Parliamentary Correspondent of the "Basler Nachrichten" is of opinion that Federal Councillor Wahlen's retirement may be followed by other resignations from the Government. The names Chaudet and Spuehler are mentioned, and, says the "Basler Nachrichten", with the present cumbersome way the empty posts can only be filled satisfactorily if several resignations take place, and a reshuffle is possible. It looks as if the thunder and lightning which prevailed at the time of Bundesrat Wahlen's election were to appear again now that he bids farewell. The correspondent forecasts a stormy end to a politically rather unfriendly year.

(By courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse and "Basler Nachrichten".)

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