

Parliamentary winter session

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(*"Pro Helvetia."*)

PARLIAMENTARY WINTER SESSION

Tradition has it that when the Federal Assembly opens for its winter session, a large Christmas tree in the staircase welcomes members. The idea is much appreciated, but unfortunately, this time the symbol of light was unable to refrain disturbing elements from invading the Council Chambers in the second week, when 25 young Jura separatists of the "Béliers" Group rushed in and broke up the quiet and sedate Government elections. But no more than a minute, and helvetic sobriety was once more prevalent. The well-prepared demonstration of the "Jura Libre" adherents was condemned by all and sundry, except for the Communists. The first week opened with the elections of the two Council Presidents and the budget debate. The double deficit, 434m. francs for the *Finanzrechnung* and 116m. in the total accounts, influenced the discussion, and one agreed that whilst the position was serious, there was no need to dramatise the estimated losses. More sources of revenue would have to be found. The "milk flood and butter mountain" were discussed within the budget of the Department of Economics. And it was pointed out that milk production had been reduced by the farmers and that the butter surplus was being "melted down". Dairy products were recommended in special campaigns, and milk gifts were sent to needy countries. More and better cheese is to be exported. Switzerland still has one of the highest prices for butter and milk in Europe. If the milk position stabilises, no milk control will be introduced.

The National Council agreed to the new Constitution of the Canton of Ticino, the old one having been created in 1830. The discussion touched on the statement that the R.C. denomination was the State denomination of the Canton. Agreement was only given on condition that freedom of religion and conscience were fully granted. The National Council also debated the *Maturitätsverordnung* which deletes Latin as compulsory subject for medical students and accepts the interrupted-study-process. The Government and the Federal Science Council were going to do more work on the subject.

The Council of States accepted — like the National Council before it — the new tobacco taxation law and the revision of the *Erwerbsersatzverordnung*, which will give the soldiers higher benefits for loss of earnings whilst in military service.

In the second week, the National Council critically debated the budget for military buildings and training centres — 347 million francs. Critically, that is in as much as they asked themselves whether Parliament was indeed

still in a position to consider such estimates. The armament programme was also accepted — 461m. spread over a few years. The budget for the Swiss Federal Railways was agreed to. In spite of increased tariffs, there will be a deficit of 15m. francs. The new Communications Minister Bonvin is ready to try and find better co-ordination between road and rail. In both Councils the proposal of the Government to create two parachute grenadier companies was accepted, reluctantly in the large Chamber.

"Like a thriller" said a reporter about the "Buehrle Affair". One Motion, one Postulat, two Interpellations and several *Kleine Anfragen* had asked for an explanation regarding the illegal arms export by the Buehrle concern. Federal Councillor Spuehler had no easy task to answer which he did most fairly and openly. It was a rare thing the way a Swiss undertaking was criticised by a Federal President and by M.P.s, and neither side minced matters, for there is no doubt that the unscrupulous arms deals by one firm had done a lot of harm to the country, and the sharpest legal prosecution was under way. Enquiries were also to be made into arms deliveries of the Geneva firm Hispano-Suiza.

Another subject for debate was the law for the Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH and EPUL) against which the students had started a Referendum. This subject will be dealt with in a separate article in the next issue. The National Council also discussed the preventative measures which the Government had taken to prevent possible aggression against federal property in the Jura. The militia army, it was felt, was not really suitable to keep law and order. Perhaps the proposed intercantonal police force would be better suited.

(By courtesy of "*Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt*" and "*Basler Nachrichten*".)

SWISS OLD-AGE INSURANCE

The revised AHV regulations became effective on 1st January. Nearly one million pensioners receive an increased allowance already in the first half of the month.

On 1st November the Swiss Railways introduced a new season ticket for the — "NOT SO YOUNG". Men of 65 years (women of 62 years) and over, may now purchase the yearly half-fare season ticket for Fr. 50.— instead of the normal Fr. 290.—. With this season ticket, the holder only pays half-fare for any journey made during the 12 months validity on the Swiss Federal Railways, many private railways, boats and postal motor coaches.

Already before Christmas, over 100,000 of these season tickets were sold to old-age pensioners. Some 750,000 are entitled to purchase one.

We should like to point out an omission in our article on AHV in a recent issue. From 1st January, not only the self-employed will have to pay less contribution, but all those who have no employer liable to pay a share — in other words: also the Swiss abroad.

The new President of the AHV-Equalisation Fund is Mr. Arthur Wehinger, Manager of Zurich Cantonal Bank, in succession to Dr. h.c. H. Kueng. The fund has about 7.6 milliard francs at its disposal.

(A.T.S. and S.N.T.O.)