

The parliament in Berne

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COMMENT

PLUS CELA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST PAREIL

On unfolding to-day's copy, the reader is no doubt surprised to find the S.O. has had a face-lift. Reactions will vary — just like they do when a friend unexpectedly emerges from a beauty parlour with "something done to her face". Some will say: "About time, too!" Others will comment regretfully: "Why not leave well alone?" I remember the to-do when "The Times" decided to break with established tradition and put news on the front page. I myself regretted it, and perhaps I, too, felt a little hesitant to alter in the S.O. what I have frequently been told, was more than acceptable. Not that we are able to put news in the real sense on the front page—for that the time factor is too great and inevitable in the production of a fortnightly periodical. We hope, however, that by introducing "Last Minute Information", which we did a few weeks ago, we can fill the gap to some extent.

Changes are inevitable; there have been several in the nearly 50 years of the S.O.'s existence. Once again, Advisory Council, Publishers and Editor have agreed to make a few alterations. As a first step, we have changed over to the new international standard A4 size. The introduction of three columns per page rather than two is in keeping with trends in modern lay-out. We hope that a few additional changes, too, will be pleasing and make for easier reading.

Whenever an opportunity presents itself or somebody puts forward a good and practicable idea, we try to improve the paper in order not only to please our old and trusted readers, but also in the hope of attracting new subscribers.

Although printing costs have gone up to double the figure of what they were a few years ago, we have not increased the subscription rates for more than seven years. Publishers and Editor go on making financial sacrifices, but the time will come when this is no longer possible. We must get increased support if we want to survive.

Please make your influence felt and induce others to advertise and take out subscriptions. Many pass on the S.O. to friends and colleagues at the office — a laudable gesture, but unfortunately not profitable for us! If they, in turn, cannot be persuaded to subscribe in their own right, perhaps they might be willing to take out a gift subscription for a friend or for an anonymous old-age pensioner. If every reader became a subscriber, our fears for the future would be considerably allayed.

By making changes, we are able to increase printing space and to give you additional reading matter. We hope that this will be appreciated. In return, we trust, you will give us increased support.

Fifty years ago, the "Swiss Observer" was founded, and the first number appeared in 1920. Will you help us to double our subscriptions so that we may celebrate our Golden Jubilee with an easy mind and with the future secure?

Thank you for your understanding, and many more years of what we hope will be happy reading.

MM

THE PARLIAMENT IN BERNE

Spring Session 1969

Whilst stone masons and workmen were engaged in brightening the outside of the Swiss Parliament, the two Chambers sat to decide on matters of importance to the Confederation. With 90 to 19 votes, the National Council accepted the decree regarding **compulsory permission for foreign banks** intending to open branches in Switzerland.

For over a year, the two Chambers have been trying to reach agreement on the *Bodenrecht*, the new proposed **law on land and property**. The majority has now accepted the following formulation:

—*The Confederation sets up principles by way of legislation which will compel the Cantons to use the land sensibly and to adhere to orderly town and Country planning.*

—*The Confederation promotes and co-ordinates the efforts of the Cantons and supports them.*

—*Within the Confederation's competence, it considers the requirements of national, regional and local planning.*

So far the constitutional basis. Now it will be up to the electorate to agree or dissent. The most important question remains what will be done with this basic principle.

There were women's demonstrations outside the "Federal Palace" whilst Parliament was sitting. Their opposition was against the Government's proposal to sign the Human Rights Convention before **franchise** in federal matters had been granted Swiss women. This demonstration was in no way connected with the statement by Federal Councillor von Moos a few days later who said that the Government would prepare a draft bill by the end of the year, which, if accepted by the electorate, would grant women suffrage on a federal level.

A federal **poison law** is in the making, according to which all dealings with poisons would be subject to permits.

In the Council of States, it was **agricultural questions** which stood in the forefront. The small Chamber accepted a credit of forty million francs for an agricultural research station at Grangeneuve (Fribourg). The Council, after lengthy debate, accepted the federal decree to promote cultivation of sugar beet.

The "Buehrle affair" came up, and whilst the Government's decision to give new arms orders to the said concern was acceptable, the whole question of **arms exports** remains open, and the Council of States has asked for a report by the expert commission set up by the Government.

The second week began with a debate on the **partial revision** of the **penal code**. Criticism was voiced of the Department of Justice, which was not capable of undertaking the necessary administrative work. This was one of the reasons why the whole revision was taking so long.

The National Council had to deal with a new draft of the **tobacco law**, the first one having been rejected by the electorate. There will now be no price control on cigarettes.

A commission of experts which includes eight women, is preparing a revision of the **family law**. It will be done in four phases; the first will deal with adoption rights, the second with the status of the illegitimate child, the third with marital property and the last with guardianship law.

The Council of States debated the creation of an **Intercantonal Mobile Police Force**, to be used for international conferences, in catastrophes and for general keeping of order and peace. The force would have 600 men in three regional companies. The Chamber gave the proposal a favourable reception.

A more difficult passage had the new federal law regarding the effort to **co-ordinate civil and military defence** in a new directional organisation.

In the third week, the National Council concluded the discussion on the partial revision of the penal code by **agricultural questions** which stood in dealing with the **juvenile penal law**. Three types of detention places are planned for youthful offenders over 17: the therapeutic home, the educational institution and the training school. A new class of offenders is being created, "the young adults" between 18 and 25.

The Council of States debated the **tenants protection rights**. It did not agree with the Government's proposal to include it in the *Obligationenrecht*. It will go before the large Chamber in June.

Miscellaneous questions brought up in the National Council include the attack on the Israeli aeroplane, the insufficient news service of the Army, reporting on youth troubles and alcoholism.

The session ended on 21st March.

(By courtesy "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt" Zurich.)

UNEQUAL TREATMENT?

Bail refused to Arab Terrorists

Readers may remember that, on 18th February, four Arab terrorists, three men and one woman, attacked an Israeli "El Al" aircraft at Kloten airport, injuring two passengers and three members of the crew. An Israeli security man who was on board, jumped out and killed one of the attackers, members of the Arab partisan organisation "People's Front". The other Arabs and the Israeli were arrested. The latter was released on bail, but the three Arabs are still detained. There have been protests from several quarters, and Switzerland has been accused of bias. The prosecution was handed over to the District Court of Buelach. The Zurich High Court has upheld Buelach's decision, and detention goes on. The three Arabs went on hunger strike for a few days.

Whilst both the terrorists and the Israeli have killed a man, it is held that the Arabs committed a criminal act; the Israeli, however, acted in self-defence.

On 25th March, the "El Al" pilot who had been injured, died at the Zurich Cantonal Hospital. His body was flown to Israel.

It is not yet known when the trial will take place. Some delay occurred due to the difficulty of finding interpreters needed to interview the Arabs. The Israeli security man who was granted bail, is in Israel and will return when the case comes up. His defending lawyer is Dr. Georges Braunschvig, Berne.

(By courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

ANGLO-SWISS NEWS ITEMS

On the last day of March, two British mine sweepers arrived in Basle, HMS "Flintham" and HMS "Dittisham". They are under the command of Lieut. Commander David Ogilvie and Lieut. Commander J. A. Hepworth respectively. Both crews numbered about thirty men, half of them still in training. Whilst in Switzerland, officers and men visited various places of interest, such as factories. The Basle Government gave a reception. The two ships were open to the public at certain hours. It is the first time, British ships have been in Swiss waters.

We read in "The Times" on 31st March that British European Airways had received a £7-million loan (6½%) from a consortium of Swiss banks headed by the Union Bank of Switzerland.

The National Union of Bank Employees, Twickenham, were amongst the European Bank employees organisations which met at a conference in Geneva from 24th to 26th March.

The Kent Youth Orchestra of seventy members, one of the best in the United Kingdom, have been giving concerts in various towns in Switzerland under the auspices of the "Jeunesses Musicales de Suisse" and the patronage of the British Ambassador in Berne.

The British Postmaster General, Mr. John Stonehouse, visited Switzerland for a few days earlier in April, accompanied by a few postal experts. They visited several PTT establishments and also the World Postal Union, the first time ever since the organisation was formed in 1874.

(Mainly Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

DISTINGUISHED SWEDISH VISITORS

On 7th April, the Swedish Ministerial President Erlander, his wife and several high officials arrived in Switzerland for a four-day official visit. The Swedish guests were entertained by the Swiss Government. A visit to a Grenchen watch factory was part of the programme.

During talks, a general *tour d'horizon* was made, and questions of mutual interest were discussed, including European integration, disarmament, exchange of technical and scientific information, recognition of Hanoi and sanctions against Rhodesia.

"99.9% agreement" was the verdict. It was decided to continue such meetings in future.

(A.T.S.)

EASTER

Sunshine and Traffic Records

After a reasonably mild winter with only a few really cold spells, with a few heavy snowfalls in unexpected places such as Lugano, and Locarno, with the usual Siberian temperatures at La Brévine, spring came in earnest over Easter. In the higher regions, of course, winter sports activities still went strong, but above all, it was by rail and road that travellers went South. Thousands of motor cars used the St. Gotthard and other road and rail tunnels, and hundreds of extra trains were put to use. No fewer than sixty special trains took back holiday makers to Zurich at the end of the holiday, and the Uetliberg alone had 8,000 visitors on Easter Monday. 18,000 people were transported by boat on the Lake of Zurich. On Easter Monday, 20,143 vehicles used the N.13 (National Road) at Maienfeld in the Grisons, and no fewer than 25,000 cars drove over the Julier Pass. 82,000 vehicles passed through Martigny over Easter, and if these had been put nose to tail, the queue would have reached from Sion to Paris!

Unfortunately, Easter traffic took its toll in road victims: 14 people lost their lives and many were injured. The Alpine Rescue Service was called out several times, not least in the avalanche disaster on Piz Val Lunga, in which three train drivers from Samedan lost their lives. Three bodies in other parts (Lenta Glacier) were not recovered. A special course had been organised for rescue pilots at Samedan, which included glacier landings with helicopters, survival techniques in high alpine altitudes, radio communication, first aid, etc.

Although there was some doubt earlier as to the traditional "première" in the Berne Bear Pit, six youngsters were presented to the public on Easter Day. Three cubs had to be taken from one of the two mothers as she had refused them, but they seemed to thrive with their "father", bear keeper Haenni, who bottle fed them at home. Their antics caused great amusement and entertained thousands of onlookers.

Whilst there had been some snow in lower parts of the Valais at the end of March, around Easter 500,000 apricot trees were already in bloom. It is hoped that the frost will not ruin the fruit.

(A.T.S.)

BRILLIANT FINISH TO "SALON"

The 39th Geneva Motor Show may be termed a great success with an attendance of nearly 530,000 people. For 10 days, the exhibition had been teeming with visitors showing a keen interest. The President of the Confederation opened this year's show of automobiles and boats. He was accompanied by M.P.s, high Army officers and diplomats, as well as other personalities.

(A.T.S.)