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Autor: [s.n.]
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Do we need a new Federal Constitution

In the spring of 1874, the Swiss electorate, for the first and so far only time, accepted a thoroughly revised Federal Constitution – the one of 1848. At the time, as Oskar Reck reminds us, one travelled to the Ticine by postal coach, and it took another eight years before the Gotthard Tunnel was opened. There was not telephone, and another five years were to elapse before Edison invented the electric light bulb. At that time, the Swiss population was still largely agricultural, although the mighty industrialisation had begun. And Oskar Reck goes on to call to mind that factories opened their doors at 5 a.m. and closed them at 8 p.m., and only after the new Constitution had been accepted, a law could be passed, bringing the 11-hour day. The revised Constitution made the Army the Confederation's concern, and that was a very bold step for Switzerland.

Since then, the world's power politics have changed the Old Continent, and things have altered in Switzerland, too. She was lucky to be spared two world wars, but the economic, technical and political developments touched Switzerland greatly. After the war, there were great difficulties, even a general strike. When proportional representation was introduced, the party-political

conditions changed and the Liberal party lost its major role. Since then, there has been no majority party.

Oskar Reck, in his book with the above title, goes on to describe Switzerland's problems in the second world war and the people's firm belief that any idea of a "federal revival", imported from abroad, was obnoxious to Swiss citizens. After the war, Switzerland returned to even stricter neutrality, and she did not join the United Nations' political organisation, unlike her joining the League of Nations in 1920.

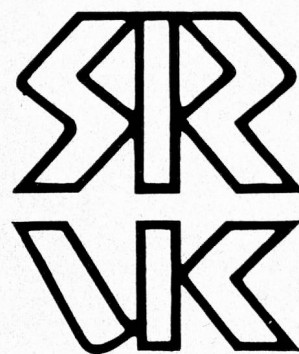
Over 80 partial revisions of the Federal Constitution have taken place in the last 104 years, 169 changes in all had been proposed, but 87 were rejected by the citizens. More and more, the demand was heard for a total revision. Over 10 years ago, Karl Obrecht in the Council of States and Peter Duerrenmatt in the National Council were successful, and the "Wahlen Working Group" was formed. A questionnaire was sent to the Cantons, universities and parties, and a report of 2,200 pages in four volumes was presented, popularly known as the "Wahlen Catalogue". In spring 1974, a federal commission of experts was set up with three sub-commissions. The Wahlen findings were studied and a draft Constitution prepared. The commission

consisted of politicians, lawyers, economists, journalists, writers and federal judges, and it was chaired by Federal Councillor Kurt Furgler. The draft was published in February this year, and a great national discussion was started; opinions are very mixed indeed from wholehearted welcome to complete rejection.

Swiss Electronics for Ghana

The Swiss watch firm of Longines recently inaugurated two huge electronic displays, designed specially for the African Football Cup, which is being held in Ghana.

These display panels are controlled by a micro-computer. Their programming system makes it possible to indicate, by means of some 324 luminous elements, the composition of teams, the score, the names of those who scored goals and the length of play. These display panels will also be used for athletics events held in these stadiums.



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London, EC3M 7AP
Telephone: 01-623 7891