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Life with the «Magic Formula»

Oskar Reck was born in 1920 and spent his childhood in the Canton of Aargau. He studied in Zurich (Journalists' Training College of the University) and Geneva and Berne (political economy).

Since the end of the Second World War, Oskar Reck has been a journalist. He was editor-in-chief of the «Thurgauer Zeitung» and later of the «Basler Nachrichten». He was a member of the federal commission of experts for total conception of the media and is at present president of the independent complaints body for radio and television. For ten years, he was a member of the Thurgau Parliament and Central President of the New Helvetic Society from 1964 to 1969.

Has Switzerland, whose existence nobody doubts and which is still in a comfortable economic and social position, remained an Elysium? Foreign observers are inclined to agree. There is little of excitement to report from Switzerland, possibly the banking secrecy or contested chemical products. In our own media, one gets excited mostly about matters of minor importance, for it is only exceptionally that there is something to report which is above average.

Yet this picture of calm is deceptive. For it is the result of our scant readiness to follow the social and political developments when they undergo only inconspicuous change. Switzerland is neither an immovable country nor does it offer the slightest guarantee for continued well-being. Within just a few years, we ask ourselves with amazement why we never noticed the many signs of recognizable change. The answer is simply because we did not want to see them.

When, three years ago, the Zurich youth disturbances calmed down as if they had only been a nasty phantom, we had nothing more urgent to do than to return to

normal. Yet it was obvious that under the calm Swiss surface, a very alarming state of the country was hidden. The same can still be said of the Social Democratic Party Conference last February. Its theme was whether this second-largest party – after the Radical Liberals – should remain in the Government or leave it. Once it was decided to continue the present practice, the media immediately lost all interest and nothing more important seemed indicated than to return immediately to Helvetic everyday life. That is where one was again amongst the like-minded with regard to the importance of problems.

It is a fact that a quarter of a century under the «magic formula» is unequalled in any country's political life. No other democracy shows so much practical continuity. But we should not pretend that the Ruetli Oath was re-enacted in 1959, and that, in 1984, Social Democratism had done nothing short of saving Switzerland from disaster just in time. The «magic formula» had nothing to do with a miracle when it was introduced. It was simply time to include the Social Democrats in the Government, up to then only «buergerlich». In the middle of economic boom and development of the welfare state, this was the simple consequence of political development. The result was not a coalition on a foreign model nor a solid governmental alliance. Each party was free to decide on any political matter according to its own conscience.

Since 1959, this practice has simply been continued, for it is not in the federalist character of Switzerland to engage in the politics of majority and Opposi-

tion. There were abundant public means, social and defence problems were easily solved, and thus there were sufficient matters of equal importance of the Right and the Left. In the 'sixties' changes began to appear in Switzerland, first social and then political: erosion of traditional values, problems of ecology, students' revolts and «over-foreignisation» caused somewhat negligently. Yet all these manifestations and signals discernable quite early, were not able to rock the political boat.

It was only the economic recession in the 'seventies' and the decline in public funds which introduced a process with political consequences which has by no means come to a conclusion. The

youth disturbances in Zurich, Berne and Basle showed for months just how far society had broken down. At the same time, it became obvious that the period of open-handed distribution in all directions had passed, and the moment for consolidation had arrived. The surface is still intact, but underneath it, strong change has begun. Just as we lived for a long time with all the pleasant aspects of an economic boom, we now have to face the consequences. We have already lost a lot of substance, socially, culturally and also state-politically – the students' revolts showed it clearly.

So far, a definite majority was in favour of remaining in the Government at the Social Democrat

Conference. But it was the middle and older generations who are still part of the traditional trades union system who turned the scale. We no longer live in a life of unquestionable security. What we should urgently concern ourselves with is the inner situation of our country.

Oskar Reck

¹⁾ The expression «Magic Formula» describes the special composition of our Government, which is based on tacit agreement of the political parties.

Since the Social Democrats joined the Federal Executive in 1959, the seven seats in the Federal Council are distributed according to their share of the votes. We thus have two Radical Liberals, two Christian Democrats, two Social Democrats and one representative of the Swiss People's Party on the Federal Council.

The Returns of the Federal Voting of February 26th

For years, the Confederation has been trying to find new sources of income in order to balance its accounts. To reach this goal, new revenue must be found and savings achieved. The electorate has a say in the matter, and it is by no means simple to convince it, especially since we are in a state of economic recession.

On 26th February, two new measures were put to the vote, both limited to ten years; tax on heavy vehicle traffic and a motor-

way vignette. With these measures, it is hoped to get half a milliard Francs a year.

The Swiss people have accepted the first proposal with 58,7% and the second with 53%. The French-speaking Cantons have rejected both proposals uniformly, whilst nearly all other Cantons accepted both schemes.

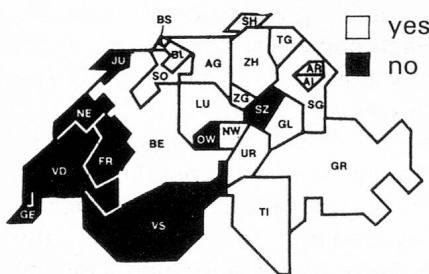
It is expected that the cost of goods transport by road will increase slightly by 1985. Private motorists will have to purchase a

sticker at 30 Francs for their cars if they want to travel on National Roads. Foreign vehicles are also subject to these taxes, even if they are only in transit through Switzerland. In comparison with our neighbouring countries, the cost of the vignette is low.

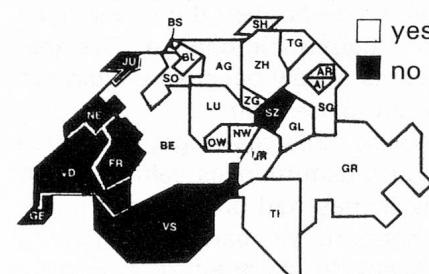
A third proposal put to the electorate was responsible for the exceptionally high participation of 52,2% of the voters.

It was the Initiative for a civil (as opposed to military) service,

Tax on heavy vehicle traffic



Motorway vignette



Initiative for a civil service

