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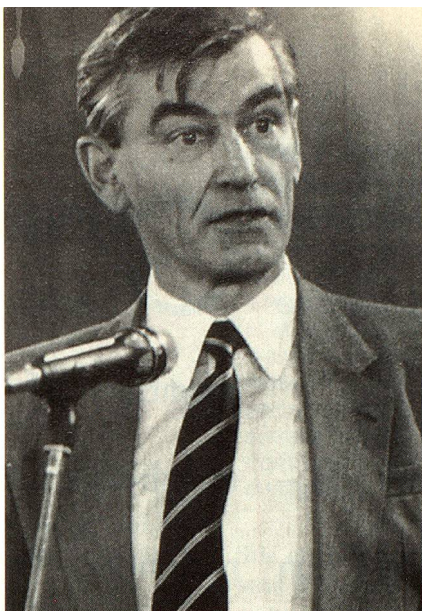
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Switzerland's participation in the process of European integration may be expected to have on democracy and on federalism as it operates at present in Switzerland.

But the policy of the Swiss government on European integration is not the only factor which will transform the political rights of Swiss citizens. Whatever choice it makes in this area, Switzerland cannot possibly escape the ever increasing economic globalisation, reflected in the internationalisation of trade in every conceivable commodity and in the inter-dependence of states which is growing every day. We can never allow ourselves to forget that one Swiss franc out of every two comes from foreign trade. In the past Switzerland has always tried to preserve its independence and its prosperity, together with the freedom and the rights of the confederates, as stipulated in the federal constitution. But the question now is: Does maintaining the joint prosperity of all the Swiss people have priority over the maintenance of democratic rights as they have been understood since the

It is only since 1971 that Swiss women have enjoyed the same civic rights as Swiss men. In that year, now over twenty years into history, the number of citizens with full civic rights doubled overnight. But this has not had a particularly beneficial effect on the main problem which besets Swiss democracy: abstention from voting. During the last quarter of a century the number of those who do not bother to vote has been increasing steadily. This is a situation which causes grave anxiety to both the government and the political parties, but so far no one has been able to come up with a suitable remedy.

creation of modern Switzerland in 1848? The people as sovereign – more than five million individuals living in Switzerland and abroad – will be replying to this question in a number of upcoming referendums. The first will be on Switzerland's membership of the European Economic Area – at the beginning of next year – and then a few years later perhaps will come the people's decision on Switzerland's full membership in the European Community. And in both these cases, ironically perhaps, the deeper question is: Will the people as sovereign continue to make the important choices of the future in our traditional form of semi-direct democracy as they have always done in the past? ■



Portrait

Georg Stucky

He is not one of the main foreign policy figures of the Federal Assembly. Nor is he one of those parliamentarians who is always to be heard putting forward motions for this and that new idea. But he is persistent and gets things done. That, in very few words, is Doctor-at-Law Georg Stucky, member of the National Council, member of the government of the Canton of Zug since 1975, and an acknowledged financial expert. He is the man who, with his parliamentary motion first put forward in 1986, has achieved the breakthrough by which the Swiss Abroad will be able to vote by correspondence from July 1 of this year.

An idea well worth pursuing

With his original motion Stucky seemed at first to be backing a non-starter. The introduction of the postal vote had been one of the main demands of the Swiss Abroad and their national lobby, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, for decades. In summer 1985 it looked as if the idea had once again been put on the back burner after the cantons, the political parties and the professional associations had come out with rather divided opinions on the matter.

As a result the Federal Council of the day came to the conclusion that it would be better to let the wind blow itself out. But not the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, which in August 1985 passed a strongly-phrased protest resolution at that year's Congress for the Swiss Abroad in Interlaken. And not National Councillor Stucky, who started ploughing his way through the answers to the proposal which was about to be dismis-

sed by the government and came to the conclusion that it was well worth pursuing.

But where did this government executive and member of Parliament for the Canton of Zug get his enthusiasm for the Fifth Switzerland? The answer is quite simple: from his own experience. Before he entered Swiss politics Georg Stucky worked for the petroleum industry for a number of years and has lived at various periods of his life in Germany, in the Middle East and in north Africa.

Swiss Abroad in Parliament?

For National Councillor Stucky the postal vote for the Swiss Abroad is not the end of the road but a point very near the beginning of it. He wants much more attention to be given to the experience, opinions and advice which can certainly be garnered from the Fifth Switzerland, and he recently remarked: 'It is by no means unthinkable that a Swiss citizen living abroad should be a candidate for the National Council. Which party will be the first to send such a member to Parliament?'

It is quite possible that it will be the international section of the Radical Democratic Party which was formed recently with Stucky as president. The Radical Democrats are rich in tradition, and this is the first Swiss party to extend its structures to the Swiss Abroad.

Other parties are likely to follow suit. And this means that the communication channels which have always been maintained between the Fifth Switzerland and their old homeland will receive a new and very important dimension. The network of relationships will become closer, and the stream of information will become stronger. For the lasting benefit of all our compatriots.

R.W. ■

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