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No assistants for parliamentarians

PABLO CRIVELLI

Parliament is struggling under the weight of an ever increasing workload. This is straining the current militia-based system to the limit. Yet National and State Councillors are not entitled to personal assistants paid for by the state.

THE WORKLOAD OF PARLIAMENT is continually growing. According to a survey conducted among parliamentarians last autumn, there is some dissatisfaction about the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, and 61 percent of National and State Councillors would prefer a personal assistant to a pay rise. This question was again a hotly debated topic during the summer session.

While some MPs complained that the present logistical infrastructure was inadequate, others expressed concern that a pay rise could weaken the militia-based system.

Several SVP faction members reminded their colleagues that the mandate of a people's representative consisted of serving the nation and not earning money at its expense. Fur-

thermore, MPs had no need of personal staff to facilitate their work. Those in favour of reform took a very different view: in their opinion, without the support of personal staff, parliamentarians run the risk of becoming enmeshed in a tangle of disparate interests and losing their independence.

The dossier was pushed back and forward between the two chambers until the penultimate day of the session, when the National Council gave in to the Council of States' proposal to increase MPs' remuneration rather than engage personal staff for them (which would have incurred costs of CHF 40,000 per person). The upper house's recommendation will cost some CHF 10 million a year – CHF 4 million less than the National Council's proposal. Tactical considerations played a part in the decision: in 1992 the electorate voted against the idea of a personal assistant for MPs.


18 weeks is not enough

The National Council voted in favour of army reform, seconding the Council of States' decision in the spring session. One of the most controversial issues was the future duration of basic military training. The National Council concluded that authority for the decision on the length of the training period should go to the Federal Council. The executive will now have to decide be-

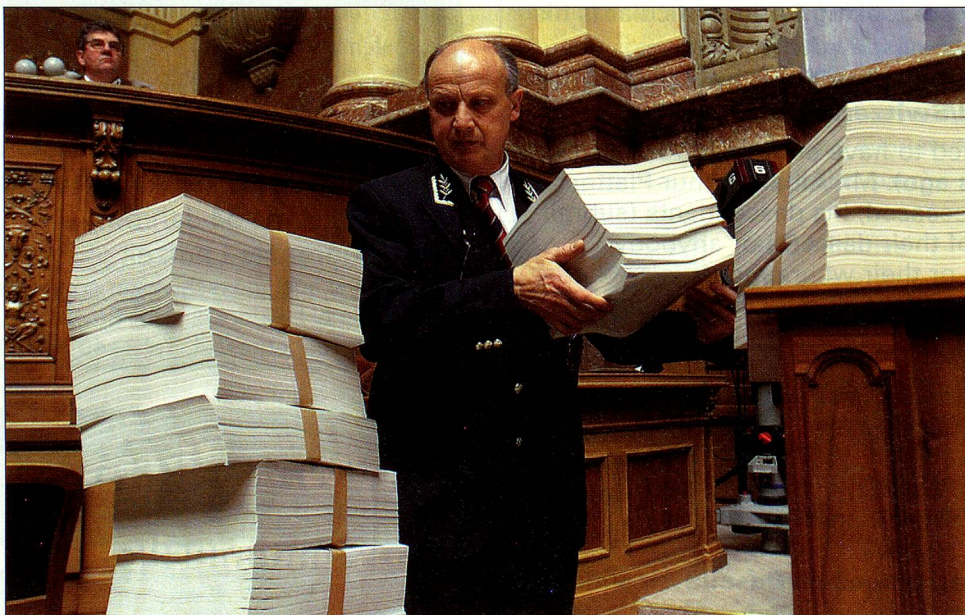
tween a minimum period of 18 weeks and a maximum of 21 weeks. Under pressure from business groups, the Council of States called for adoption of the 18-week minimum.

Switzerland's 21st-century army will be smaller than the present one, with 200,000 fewer members. Another innovation is that 15 percent of recruits – "long-term recruits" – will be permitted to complete their entire obligatory military service in one unbroken stretch.

Slap in the face for Germany?

For possibly the first time in the history of the modern Swiss federal state, the National Council has rejected a treaty with Germany which was to regulate approaches to Zurich-Kloten airport over South German territory. The pact was designed to limit flights to 100,000 a year and relax night and weekend flight bans. While Social Democrats and Greens voted in its favour, the centre-right majority believed it discriminated against the new Swiss air carrier and Zurich-Kloten airport. Yet Germany had already made it known that it would impose stricter regulations if the treaty were rejected. The issue now goes to the Council of States for debate in September, but it is a virtual certainty that the treaty will be scrapped 

Translated from the German.



Keystone

A clerk distributes mountains of files to parliamentarians.