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politique. Ce grand fonctionnaire, cet excellent diplomate — l'un de nos meilleurs incontestablement — sera donc le premier et principal collaborateur de M. Petitpierre.

Leur tâche sera lourde. On s'en était déjà aperçu, quand l'U.R.S.S. a refusé de renouer avec la Suisse des relations diplomatiques normales. On vient d'en avoir une nouvelle preuve par la campagne que la presse américaine vient de déclencher contre notre pays, sous prétexte que nous persistons à commercer avec l'Allemagne. C'est assez dire que de nombreux problèmes restent à résoudre et que nous éprouverons quelque peine à trouver dans le monde de demain la place à laquelle nous avons droit. Il faut le dire en dépit de la déclaration si compréhensive que le Département d'Etat américain vient de publier et qui condamne implicitement les attaques violentes de la presse des Etats-Unis.

Entre les belligérants et la Suisse neutre, il y a une profonde divergence de vues. Les premiers mènent une lutte à la vie et à la mort. Ils éprouvent de la peine à comprendre qu'un petit peuple épris de liberté, profondément démocrate, ne s'associe pas à leur oeuvre et ne soutienne pas leurs efforts. Notre position est trop nuancée pour qu'elle ait à leurs yeux la force de l'évidence. Quant à nous, nous savons aussi que la neutralité est une question de vie ou de mort, qu'elle conditionne notre existence même. Si nous n'étions pas neutres, s'en serait fait de notre indépendance. Nous deviendrions un satellite de telle ou telle grande puissance. En outre, nous ne pourrions pas jouer le rôle de médiateur qui nous est dévolu : représentation des intérêts étrangers dans les pays belligérants, actions humanitaires, etc.

Pour la Suisse, le maintien scrupuleux de la neutralité est une question de propreté morale et d'honnêteté. Il nous condamne à déplaire alternativement aux uns et aux autres. Il faut avoir ce courage, car notre fermeté est la condition même du respect qu'on finit toujours par ne point nous refuser. En cet instant des négociations sont en cours entre la Suisse et les Alliés pour préciser les conditions dans lesquelles notre trafic de transit pourra reprendre à travers la France. Pour nous accorder cet avantage irremplaçable, on nous demandera sans doute de restreindre encore davantage nos échanges économiques avec l'Allemagne. Un accommodement sera trouvé. Tel est notre désir. Nous ne doutons pas qu'il sera satisfait, maintenant que le Département d'Etat américain insiste dans sa déclaration officielle sur l'amitié mutuelle des deux peuples et sur leur communauté de conceptions politiques, alors que certaine presse ne voulait plus voir dans la neutralité qu'une condamnable hypocrisie. Pendant quelques jours, nous avons été alarmé par des voix qui nous parvenaient d'outre-Atlantique. Nous savons maintenant quelle est la vraie voix de l'Amérique et nous ne doutons pas que des mois difficiles, entrevus un instant, nous seront épargnés. Bref, malgré tout, malgré le refus russe, malgré notre controverse avec les Alliés, l'année 1945 commence moins mal qu'on ne l'avait craint. Tout dépend de l'esprit dans lequel se poursuivront les négociations en cours. Il est excellent. Nous ne pouvons pas en demander plus. Entre amis et entre gens de bonne foi, on finit toujours par s'entendre.

Berne, le 12 Janvier 1945.

Pierre Béguin.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

A short and superficial debate took place in the House of Commons on Tuesday, January 22nd, when the system of Proportional Representation was rejected with the overwhelming majority of 208 to 17. Although the system is already in use in parts of the British Empire, and particularly in Switzerland, the actual data thus available did not strengthen the weak case presented by the proposer and seconder. The following extract of the proceedings is taken from "*The Daily Telegraph*," January 24th, from which it appears that none of the orators had entered into the subject seriously, certainly not the Hon. Member who described it as "just moonshine." We do not suggest that the experience of Switzerland might constitute a guide to British legislators, but it is rather remarkable that none of the speakers has been able to cite a single example where the "Proporz" has not given satisfaction in those parts of the Empire where it is already in vogue.

"Mr. HARVEY (Ind.), who seconded, said that the present system prevented a very large number of citizens from being elected to local authorities.

'We all know,' he said, 'of cases where people of one particular point of view have no chance of election and in which the councils consist of only one party. That is a bad thing. It is bad that criticism should be driven underground. This proposal would provide a wider basis for our municipal life.'

Mr. PETHICK LAWRENCE (Soc.) held that the abolition of the ward system in municipal affairs was involved in the amendment.

'That would create a muddle,' he said, 'and it would lead to logrolling.' The idea that P.R. was a great reform was 'just moonshine.'

Sir PERCY HARRIS (Lib.) felt that local government had been very much held in suspense. Great powers had been taken by the Government Departments to override local authorities.

Mr. A. P. HERBERT (Ind.) regarded the reform as a great thing because of the psychological effect it would have on the voters, who would feel that their vote would have a fair shot at the target and would not be wasted.

Miss WILKINSON, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Security, said that it was easy by producing particular examples to show that no system which was not proportional representation could be regarded as theoretically perfect.

But the problem of democracy was not to secure a kind of mathematical justice. The job was to get local government done in the simplest possible way. To attempt to introduce this highly controversial system of proportional representation would create a lot of work and would make 'confusion worse confounded.'

Mr. PRITT (Soc.) was glad that Miss Wilkinson had recovered her health, but was sorry she had not recovered her manners. He had hoped that she would be mellowed a little by old age. On the contrary, she had advanced childish arguments and had been both flippant and insolent.

'If you want to know what the country is thinking,' he added 'get the Home Office expert's opinion, turn it exactly upside down, and then you will know.'

Sir WILLIAM BEVERIDGE (Lib.) said there were three arguments in favour of the transferable vote. It would:

Foster oppositions, without which one-party government was not British and was not good government.

Increase the power and interest of the voter.
Improve the quality of the candidates.

Mr. KENNETH LINDSAY (Ind. Nat.) suggested a local option on this matter, and demanded, 'Are we to be completely regimented in this country?'

The Solicitor-General, Sir DAVID MAXWELL FYFE, replying to these points, said that there was an ever-increasing area of local government into which party was coming more and more strongly.

He was entirely unconvinced by the argument that they were going to get better candidates and that those candidates were going to have a better chance of getting in if they had proportional representation.

He deprecated the suggestion that party loyalty and party work were something derogatory in the equipment of the politician, national or local. In his view the main requirements were a burning interest in politics and an ability to work if necessary 18 hours a day."

"If a burning interest in politics is one of the main requirements," we certainly believe that P.R. will formulate and ascertain the political alignment in any electoral community, but will not produce "an ability to work if necessary 18 hours a day."

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

Thirtieth Annual General Meeting.

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique (London Group) held their thirtieth Annual General Meeting, on Saturday, January 20th, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

In view of the fact, that the Society had reached the age of thirty, the Council decided to celebrate this event by a Luncheon party to which a number of guests were invited.

Ten years ago, on the occasion of the Society's twentieth anniversary, I wrote in this paper "The twentieth anniversary is not only an eventful happening in a man or woman's life, but equally so with a Society. The twentieth year is often a critical age, especially with young people; it is then that they start to become 'saucy' and tell their parents that they must now take a back seat, in every domain barring 'forking out' with the money. I hope the young 'N.S.H. Lady' will not step from the path of maidenly virtue, which she has trodden during the last twenty years."

Well I am glad to say, that at the age of thirty, the now not so young "Lady" has kept an unblemished record, she is still very respectable, yet full of youthful vigour.

Approximately eighty members and guests assembled for the birthday Luncheon. The seat of honour was occupied by the Swiss Minister, who was accompanied by Madame Ruegger.

Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, was heartily cheered on rising from his "Fauteuil Présidentiel"; and I am glad to report that in spite of the tragic ordeal which he had experienced twelve months ago, he looked fit and well and as energetic as of old.

In extending a hearty welcome to Monsieur and Madame Ruegger, he said:

"We look to you, Monsieur le Ministre, for direction, for sympathy and for inspiration, the short months that you have been in our midst have shown us clearly that we shall not look in vain for your support and active co-operation; besides, we had every reason to expect these favours from you since the Secrétariat Suisses Etranger in Berne, on the occasion of their 25th anniversary in August of last year cabled to the London Group as follows: "Le S.S.E. se réjouit de l'appui amical et éclairé que la N.S.H. trouvera auprès du Ministre Ruegger qui fut partout le soutien de nos efforts."

An equally cordial welcome was extended to the Minister's collaborators present, namely, Messieurs Girardet, de Rham and de Graffenried and the following Guests: Mr. A. Bon, President City Swiss Club, Mr. J. Boos, President Swiss Mercantile Society, Mr. C. Campart, President Secours Mutuels, Mr. J. Ellenberger, President Swiss Club (Schweizerbund), Mr. F. G. Sommer, President Swiss Choral Society, Mr. E. P. Dick, Conductor Swiss Orchestral Society, Mr. Streit, President Swiss Philatelic Society, Mme. Bolla, President Rutli's Ladies' Club, Mr. Berti, Unione Ticinese, Mr. Th. Ritter, Swiss Benevolent Society, Pasteur M. Pradervand, Father A. Lanfranchi, Mr. A. Stauffer and Mr. A. Bossert. Colonel de Watteville, Delegate of the International Red Cross, who was invited as a guest was unfortunately prevented from attending.



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