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PIERRE BÉGUIN.

A Federal Referendum and its consequences.

(July 8th, 1952.)

As you have already probably heard, the Swiss people, last Sunday, rejected by a strong majority the Project for financing rearmament, which was submitted for its approval. This legislative measure was condemned by some 350,000 citizens, as against 250,000 in its favour. As regards the confederated States, there were only three — Zurich, Berne and Basle — who accepted it, but with a very small majority. Opposition revealed itself to be particularly strong in the French-speaking regions of Switzerland. But, at the same time, it was found that the voting was pretty uniform almost everywhere in Switzerland. This is really very satisfactory, as it will make it impossible for people to talk about a trench which separates the two principal parts of the country and, from this point of view, no political uneasiness will arise as a result of this referendum.

The Swiss people were perfectly right in considering that this was no military problem which had been submitted to them. That has already been settled. The necessary credits have been voted. National defense will be strengthened. It will neither be slowed down, nor restricted. The people, however, considered that they had been asked to solve a problem of a purely fiscal nature. The matter in question was really the following: Does the Confederation possess sufficient resources in order to be able to accomplish all the tasks which lie before it, or is it necessary to place supplementary receipts at its disposal?

To that question, the Sovereign People replied with a categorical "no". It is of the opinion that the present receipts are adequate and, even, abundant. It considers that, should these receipts decline later on, as a result of certain circumstances, it will then be quite time enough to give an extra turn of the screw to the fiscal machine. This is the true significance of the recent voting. Any other interpretation would be quite erroneous. In particular, it would be absolutely wrong to conclude from this, that our determination to resist any possible aggressor has in any way diminished and that we are no longer firmly decided as in the past to consent to the necessary sacrifices required for the maintenance of the external safety of the country.

As a matter of fact, this referendum showed an

absolutely spontaneous and very definite reaction against fiscal excesses. This year, already, the Swiss people proved their readiness to furnish the normal revenue to the State, when they approved the maintenance of the Turnover Tax. But they rejected the Capital Levy proposed by the Socialists, as also an increase in the rate of the direct tax and the taxes on beverages.

Quite naturally, this Referendum has caused great disappointment in official circles. The Federal Council persist in thinking that it requires new revenue, and that the financial situation of the country is less favourable than is generally thought. This idea is also very widespread in the leading circles of the big Parties. Already there is talk about new measures which must be proposed and adopted in order to increase the Federal receipts. There are those who speak of economies on a large scale, whilst others ask themselves if it might not be a good thing to organise two separate referendums, one dealing with the increase in direct taxation and the other with the question of taxing beverages, instead of lumping the two problems together, as was the case last Sunday. Still others, speak of a new project for a Levey on Capital, which would compromise substantial reductions and which would only be applicable to quite a tiny minority of the tax-payers as a whole.

In our opinion, most of these projects can be attributed to the disappointment experienced by the vanquished in the political battle of the 6th July. The first thing to be done, is to get busy with the drawing up of a definite project for the financial and fiscal régime. As regards this matter, we are still living under a provisional régime which is due to lapse in December 1954. Two and a half years will not give us too much time in which to draw up a project capable of rallying to it a sufficient popular majority. The time at our disposal should just about prove sufficient to bring into harmony the various divergent tendencies and to effect a working synthesis among them. Meanwhile, there lies no danger in delay. It is much better to devote all our forces to a lasting piece of work, rather than to waste our energy in immediate, but limited, efforts.

NEWS FROM THE LEGATION.

The Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté have left for Switzerland. They will be absent until the middle of October.

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