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HOME AFFAIRS.

PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Composition of our Government."

From numerous signs, it is now apparent that Switzerland has at last returned to a practically normal period of her history. Of this, we possess, as a matter of fact, a tangible proof. For, at last after a number of years, people are once more talking about a constitutional problem, one of those good old problems which our fathers and our grandfathers used to get very excited over, but which the present generation does not bother about because of lack of time to do so, all its attention being absorbed by economic and financial problems.

The problem in question is the following: how many Federal Councillors should we have? Should we remain satisfied with seven, which is the actual number? Or would it be better to raise this number to nine? This is the matter which is occupying the mind of the public, at the end of this summer. And this is something which brings a certain feeling of comfort and re-assurance.

As a matter of fact, this problem is as ancient as our Federative State, and it has been discussed for nearly a century. It was in 1848 that it was decided to fix the number of Federal Councillors at seven, this being considered sufficient for the carrying out of the duties incumbent upon them, and, also for giving the small Cantons a chance of seeing one of their own people being invested, at some time or other, with the mantle of this high public office. In the main, we have got on very well with this régime and there are a great many people who still think that there is no reason whatsoever why any change should be made.

If the question has been raised on several occasions, this has been done on the initiative of a political minority. Once, it was the people of the French-speaking regions who considered that they were not sufficiently represented within the Federal Executive. Another time, it was the Socialists who, kept as they were aloof from government responsibilities, thought that if two additional ministerial seats were instituted, it might be possible to attribute them to the Socialists, without by so doing in any way prejudicing the positions already occupied by the Parties, which were at the helm of the ship of State. They put forward proposals in this sense. These were rejected all the more easily, as they proposed simul

taneously, that the Federal Council should, moreover, be elected directly by the people.

This time, if the question has come up once more, it is not due to the minorities. The Socialists have had a representative in the Central Government for the last ten years. The people of the French-speaking districts have no longer any cause for complaint, as their representatives occupy two seats. Now, if this matter has cropped up again it is because the duties incumbent upon the seven Departments are very unequally distributed, so that whereas some of them are simply swamped by work, others are able to get through with it in a normal manner. The reason for this can be explained quite easily: the various departments have grown at a very different rhythm, a rhythm imposed on them by the evolution of the contemporary world. It is only natural that in an era when the State intervenes in the economic field and when fiscality is in constant process of development, it is precisely the Departments of Finance and of Public Economy that have taken on the greatest extension and it is their Heads who are surcharged with work, whilst their colleagues assume duties which are much more normal. So that, if there is a question of appointing two additional Federal Councillors, it is for the purpose of lifting the heavy burden from the shoulders of those who have too much work to do, or who, quite logically, are no longer able to control in an adequate fashion, the work of their staff. Viewed from the standpoint of technique, as well as from that of administrative rationalisation, this reform would be opportune. But, it will have to overcome a number of obstacles and, it may be said without any fear of being mistaken, it is not at all popular. What is feared most of all is that this reform may result in a Government which will lack cohesion and solidarity, and will thus be weakened. And such fear is well-founded, and it will dictate, ultimately, the decision which will have to be taken.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, October 16th, 1953. We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donation over and above their subscription: A. Gallusser, C. Pulfer, A. Strittmatter, O. E. Simmooth, L. B. Adam, H. Oswald, A. Wehrli, Swiss Club, Balloch, C. L. Schlaeppi, F. H. Rohr, A. Rueff, R. de Watteville.

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