

Home affairs

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1954)**

Heft 1226

PDF erstellt am: **27.04.2024**

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

(Parliamentary procedure; "Question Hour"; putting forward proposals).

In accordance with the Swiss Constitution, every member of the Federal Assembly has the right to submit proposals in regard to affairs of State; moreover, the Law authorises him to ask the Federal Council for information regarding any matter pertaining to the Federal Administration.

This right to receive information from the Government, can be used in various ways. In regard to questions of the moment, for which an explanation is required briefly and without any delay, there exists, at the end of a Session, the so-called "Question Hour" which is available to the members. Another means for obtaining information is the so-called "Little Question", which is submitted in writing and is answered in the same way. In regard to affairs which are of general interest, a so-called Interpellation takes place. This Interpellation has to be put forward in writing and, in order to avoid any abuse of this procedure, it has to be signed by at least ten members of the Council. This rule has for effect that small minority Parties or Groups from the Opposition, who would like to put forward questions of a very one-sided character, cannot make use of the Interpellation. As soon as the Federal Council is ready to furnish a reply, then the questioner gives his reasons for this Interpellation at a session of Parliament, and a representative of the Government furnishes the desired reply. The time allowed for speaking is limited. A discussion only takes place in such cases when it is decided upon by the Council.

By means of these three procedures, the parliamentary right to exercise control, is safeguarded. It is further supplemented by the possibility of speaking, in regard to any subject under discussion.

As regards the right to put forward proposals, this can be made use of by every member of the Council not only in respect of the ordinary business of Parliament, but, as already mentioned, every member is entitled to submit any proposal he may wish, in regard to State affairs. These are classed as "Postulates", should the Federal Council be invited to examine the matter in question and then to furnish a report, or else to submit suggestions for the settle-

ment of the question. The reasons for such a Postulate have to be set forth by the author of the question at a full session of the Council, whereupon the answer is given by a Federal Councillor. It is then the duty of the Council to decide whether the matter is to be handed over for action to the Federal Council, or whether it is to be rejected.

Should the Government be bound to submit a Draft Bill for a Law, or should it receive binding instructions regarding measures that should be taken or proposals that should be made, then this must take place in the form of a so-called "Motion". This differs from the Postulate because owing to its obligatory character, it must be approved by both Chambers first, and only after this can it be made obligatory for the Federal Council, in the aforesaid manner.

In the work of the Parliament, Draft Bills of Laws and State business proposals are always given priority of handling, before such matters as individual proposals and questions, be they motions, postulates or interpellations are dealt with. It thus happens, that the latter have a tendency to accumulate over a lengthy period, until time can be found to deal with them. On the list of still pending subjects for discussion one may find as many as fifty and more of such individual proposals, and in many a Session it happens that the number of such new proposals and questions is even greater than that of the questions and proposals waiting to be dealt with. In view of this, it has proved necessary to make a Rule, according to which, should these various matters not be dealt with within the space of two years, they are struck of the List.

HOSPES SWISS TOURISM AND INTERNATIONAL COOKERY EXHIBITION.

The Literary and Historical Committee of the above mentioned Exhibition, which will take place in Berne from May 14th to June 21st, has awarded a Gold Medal and Diploma to Mr. W. Bachmann, Chairman of the British National Team and Delegation, for his three books on "The Art of Cookery", and a silver medal and Diploma to Mr. P. Lehrian, Manager of the "A l'Ecu de France", 111, Jermyn Street, W.1. for his book "The Restaurant". Heartiest congratulations!

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