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F. T. WAHLEN
President of the Swiss Confederation
 By PIERRE BÉGUIN

As briefly mentioned in our last issue, Mr. F. T. Wahlen, Minister of Public Economy, has been elected President of the Swiss Confederation for 1961. Here are a few biographical notes :

Exactly two years after entering the Swiss Government, Mr. Wahlen accedes to the highest political office of our country. On this occasion, it would seem opportune to recall the essential traits of his career, as well as the predominant qualities of his personality.

If one considers his early training and the first stages of his professional life, Mr. Fritz Wahlen may be said to be essentially a technician. His studies were devoted to agricultural engineering. For several years he was the manager of experimental agricultural stations in Canada. Then he returned to Switzerland to take up the same kind of work. His principals and colleagues had every opportunity to appreciate his capacities, but, at the beginning of the Second World-War, he was still unknown to the general public.

This Second World-War made him known — in a rather sudden manner. Because of his great capacities, the Federal Government entrusted him with a very hard task, namely, that of reorganising Swiss agriculture, of adapting it to the possibilities and the requirements of wartime, of extending the arable land, and, in order to achieve this, of mobilising not only the farming classes, but also — to a very considerable extent — the city-folk. It was necessary to extract the maximum amount of produce from our soil and, in order to do this, the smallest square metre of land had to be worked. It was also necessary for the cultivation of the land to be judiciously apportioned, in order to be able to cover the minimum requirements, in spite of the decline, and then the almost complete cessation, of our imports.

In this task Mr. Wahlen achieved complete success. He was not satisfied with being just a calculator and organiser. Nor was he content with the issue of a mass of legal rules and regulations. What he did, was to mobilise a lot of good will and to make his scheme popular. In short, the "Wahlen Plan" proved to be a complete success.

This success brought Mr. Wahlen his election as Zurich deputy to the Council of States, i.e. to the Upper Chamber, where he remained for several years. There exist good reasons, however, for thinking that Mr. Wahlen did not look upon this political mandate as being the crowning of his career. He, therefore, left for abroad and devoted all his energies and competencies to the Food and Agriculture Organisation — one of the Special Agencies of the United Nations. There, he finally became Assistant Director, charged more particularly with the task of carrying out the programmes of technical aid to the under-developed countries.

Meanwhile, Swiss public opinion had almost forgotten Mr. Fritz Wahlen. However, when, in 1958, his name was mentioned in connection with a candidacy for the Federal Government, the memory left by the organiser of our agriculture during the war years, as well as all that had been learnt about his activities in the FAO, aroused a great movement of confidence, which carried him to power. Since then, this confidence has become still further consolidated.

If Mr. Wahlen enjoys so much favour with the public, this is due to the fact that, during the whole of his busy existence, he has never wasted any time in indulging in the "little games" of politics. He is not a Party man, but has placed himself above all Parties. During the two years he has been in the Federal Government, he has given proof of his qualities as a statesman, that is to say, as a servant of the general interests of the public. Moreover, it is a good thing that the presidency of the Confederation should be entrusted to a personality whose horizon has expanded as a result of his international activities. This is all the more necessary at a time when Switzerland is less able than ever to live retired within herself, and when she must multiply her external contacts and relations.

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