

President Paul Chaudet as seen by an englishman

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Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1962)**

Heft 1401

PDF erstellt am: **03.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687444>

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President Paul Chaudet as seen by an Englishman

Switzerland's public officials are rarely flamboyant personalities. In general, the seven ministers who head the Federal Government Departments and who, collectively, are in charge of the state, are able but cautious public servants who can be relied upon to put their own personalities in the background.

Paul Chaudet, the new President of the Swiss Confederation, appears to be no exception to the rule.

Once before, in 1959, Mr. Chaudet was the President of Switzerland, for the country's Federal Councillors take the Presidency in one-year turns in rotation. In a recent interview, Mr. Chaudet recalled that his happiest memory of that year was of the number of people — not foreign statesmen but simple people — who came to him for help and advice.

"In some ways," he said, "the President is a sort of father of the Swiss family."

Although a slight man, with an expression that, particularly in photographs, appears dour, Mr. Chaudet is actually anything but dour. He sits straight and is dignified, but behind the dignity one is conscious of his profound good will and a quiet joy in getting to know people.

The Presidential task that he enjoys most, for example, besides receiving visitors, is taking part in the big manifestations of national life. This gives him an opportunity to become acquainted with the people, he maintains.

Paul Chaudet takes a modest view of the Swiss President's influence on national affairs. As he sees it, his task is to co-ordinate the efforts of the state's various departments; to arbitrate when necessary, and, at times, to speed up the rhythm of work.

Meanwhile, he continues as well in the post of Defence Minister, which he has held since 1954, when he first became a member of the Federal Council — the body of seven men who run the Federal Government Departments and form the Swiss Cabinet.

Mr. Chaudet is a Radical Democrat, but, as President, he is supposed to put Swiss interests above any party interests. He represents the country to the public and the world; serves as a representative of the Federal Council; presides over its meetings; and presents its views and proposals to Parliament.

Economic integration, Mr. Chaudet believes, is the most important issue that Switzerland faces in 1962. The year will see a profound and detailed study of problems

concerning finance, tariffs, the labour market, and political neutrality, he explains. After the study, Switzerland will be able to define her approach to the Common Market, and see about association with it, he says.

Paul Chaudet was born in 1904 in Rivaz, a village on the vine-clad hillside between Lausanne and Vevey. After finishing his general education, he went on to study agriculture, and at the age of 19 began working on his family's estate, growing grapes for wine. But before long, he also became interested in politics.

First, he was elected Mayor of his village, he recalls. Then, during World War II, he was elected a member of the Lower House of the Federal Parliament. In 1946, he was appointed Minister of Justice and Police for the canton of Vaud, and in 1948, he became Cantonal Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce. Finally, in 1954, he became a member of the Federal Council.

Married, and the father of four children, Mr. Chaudet likes to spend his week-ends at the family property in Rivaz, above Lake Léman.

There, he reads — "especially history" — and listens to music. "Honegger, too, but I prefer Mozart and Beethoven." And from time to time he goes down to his *cave* to inspect and taste his wines. His eldest son now manages the family estate, however. The second son is studying law and the third is soon due to enter the *Gymnase* at Lausanne. The Chaudet daughter is married to an aeronautical engineer.

Mrs. Chaudet divides her time between the Rivaz estate and Berne. But in Berne, she sees very little of her hard-working husband, busy from before 8 a.m. until 10 or 11 p.m. with affairs of state.

Paul Chaudet is not a headline hunter. He is a reserved, single-minded, cautious public servant who commands the respect of the nation he serves. He has roots in the land, and has never betrayed his rural heritage by becoming urbanised or sophisticated. To watch over and nurture the slow growth of the vine is good training for a minister in a democracy. It is sure to serve President Chaudet in good stead.

PETER JONES.

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