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THE SEVEN FEDERAL COUNCILLORS

The Constitution of the Swiss Confederation provides in Article 96 that the seven members of the Federal Council shall be elected for four years by the Federal Assembly consisting of Swiss citizens eligible as members of the National Council. The same article prescribes that after every re-formation of the National Council the Federal Council, too, shall be reconstituted, that is to say every four years. Up to now this renewal has always been made individually with each member of the Federal Council having to stand personally for re-election.

The last confirmation of the seven Federal Councillors took place on 12th December. It took place in an unusual atmosphere as the ceremony was transmitted on Television, which meant cameras and bustling photographers — a great deal of fuss which disturbed the dignity of the Council Chamber. There was considerable criticism of such forced publicity.

The new President of the National Council, Mr. Otto Hess (Thurgau), was in the chair. The elections proceeded in order of seniority of office.

Federal Councillor Paul Chaudet, Chief of the Military Department, in the Government since 16th December 1954, was elected with 185 votes (absolute majority 96).

Federal Councillor F. T. Wahlen, Head of the Political Department, in the Government since 11th December 1958, was confirmed by 197 (absolute majority 110).

Federal Councillor W. Spuehler, Chief of the Department of Communications, President of the Confederation in 1963, in the Government since 17th December 1959, was elected with 164 votes (absolute majority 89).

Federal Councillor Ludwig von Moos, Head of the Department of Justice and Police, Vice-President of the Confederation in 1963, in the Government since 17th December 1959, was confirmed with 160 votes (absolute majority 92).

Federal Councillor H. P. Tschudi, Chief of the Department for Home Affairs, in the Government since 17th December 1959, was elected with 204 votes (absolute majority 103).

Federal Councillor Hans Schaffner, Head of the Department for Economic Affairs, in the Government since 4th July 1961, received 195 votes (absolute majority 98).

Federal Councillor Roger Bonvin, Chief of the Department of Finance and Customs, in the Government since 27th September 1962, was confirmed with 190 votes (absolute majority 96).

Ever since Federal Councillors have been re-elected it has happened only once that one of them did not receive a sufficient number of votes and had to leave the Government. It was expected that the elections were purely a matter of form and that all seven Councillors would be confirmed. Nevertheless, the results are not very flattering, and it shows that the M.P. is not prepared just to be a "Yes-Man".

In an article in the "Basler Nachrichten" the Parliamentary Correspondent, Mr. Arnold Fisch, comments on this "Doubtful Examination for the Federal Councillors". The relatively low number of votes which some of the seven members of the Government registered could give the wrong impression. Mr. Fisch maintains that popularity is a bad measure for the real performance and accomplishment of a Federal Councillor. Above all, he says, this popularity is subject to considerable fluctuation, may be high one day and low the next. Mr. Chaudet received a reasonably high total, but he, too, has registered poor results in the past. Though some military credits are still the subject of heated argument, in general there are no complaints against him. His quiet, pleasant way of accepting criticism apparently reconciles his opponents.

Mr. Wahlen, polled the highest number of votes — not being very exposed to conflict of interests in his domain. On the other hand, the outgoing President of the Confederation has had to face considerable criticism regarding the handling of his department. This was reflected in a low number of votes. The next candidate, the then Vice-President of the Confederation, Mr. von Moos, polled the lowest number of all, which Mr. Fisch considers the result of unfair party politics — the Socialists taking revenge for the bad support accorded to their member Mr. Spuehler. Fortunately, the opponents did not continue this kind of competition, on the contrary, the next Socialist, Mr. Tschudi, achieved the second best result. Mr. Schaffner still had to feel some of the Socialists' indignation and only polled a meagre 171 votes. It must be mentioned that the man in charge of economic affairs has to face some very unpleasant tasks at the moment — the fight against the excessive economic boom rests on his shoulders. Finally, the Parliamentary Correspondent describes Mr. Bonvin's result as surprisingly high, seeing that there had been quite some displeasure at his handling of federal finances.

It is also typical of the Swiss system that though Federal Councillor von Moos received the lowest number