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The Constitution to have an Article on Inflation

The Federal Council has drafted a new Article which will enable it constitutionally to take drastic measures to keep the country's economy under control. The need for such an Article has been felt for a long time because Berne lacked the necessary constitutional provision to act. The proposed Article explicitly allows the Government to take measures departing from the principle of free enterprise and to implement new taxes. The Article also offers the Government considerable power in regulating the

money supply by controlling its expenditure and adapting its subsidies to Cantons to the requirements of the situation. The Article will be debated by the Council of States in March. It will eventually be submitted for ratification to the Swiss people.

VIETCONG FLAG UNFURLED IN FRIBOURG

Five hundred South Vietnamese nationals living in Switzerland met in the Parish Hall of St. Peter's in Fribourg to celebrate *Tet*, which marks the beginning of the lunar new year. The South Vietnamese Ambassador to Switzerland, Mr. Bui Van Anb, was presiding over these festivities.

When the meeting broke up, its participants saw a pro-Vietcong flag hanging from the walls of the Parish vicarage, and a huge, 40-ft long streamer proclaiming "*GRP à Saigon*" floating 200 feet high from a bridge spanning the River Sarine. Firemen took several hours to remove the streamer owing to its perilous position. It had been placed there by a Swiss left-wing group. A flag with a similar slogan was hoisted up the steeple of Lausanne's cathedral and was pulled down by the authorities with great difficulty.

Most of the South Vietnamese living in Switzerland are students. Two hundred of them study in Fribourg alone. The great majority of them are believed to support the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

SWISS INLAND NAVIGATION

The Parliamentary Commission on inland waterways has invited the Federal Council to introduce within two years a bill on inland navigation.

Following a meeting at the end of January, the Commission called on the Government to submit proposals on developing navigation on the upper Rhine and on the Aar; to pursue current negotiations with Germany on improving the navigability of the upper Rhine up to its merger with the Aar; and to continue the study of other possible fluvial links, namely: Yverdon-Geneva-Rhone-Mediterranean; Upper Rhine-Yverdon (through the Aar); and Lake Maggiore-Adriatic Sea.

The problem of linking Switzerland to the sea is as old as the "Chunnel". The last official report published on the subject (in June, 1971) gave rise to considerable controversy. Once strongly supported, the idea of linking central Switzerland to the sea by regulating flow on the upper Rhine and the Aar is now opposed by a growing section of public opinion on environmental grounds.

Civil Service for Conscientious Objectors

The Federal Council has decided to introduce a debate on the "Muenchenstein Initiative". Sponsored by a committee of teachers in Basle-Country, this initiative called on the people to support an amendment to the Constitution providing for a kind of "civil service" in which conscientious objectors refusing to submit to military service could serve.

Judging from the Government's announcement, the process of setting up this service will be slow. Parliament will be called to examine the problem for the first time next September. If it supports the Muenchenstein Initiative, the Federal Council and the Military Department will draft the adequate modification to the constitutional text (Article 18) which should be submitted to the people during 1975. A new civil service for conscientious objectors and its legal framework could then be ready by the end of the seventies.

The problem of conscientious objectors in Switzerland first emerged 56 years ago, when the Free Church of Vaud asked the Government to examine the possibility of instituting a civil service as a replacement solution for conscientious objectors. This proposal was shelved, but the problem remained and was periodically raised. It has become progressively more topical with more and more draftees refusing to serve. Their numbers hovered around a hundred during the sixties, but jumped to over 250 in 1971 and are still growing.

Berne has made it known that only those pleading religious convictions will be spared from military service. Those motivated by political considerations will not have a right to this privilege. Berne insists that the new legislation must be worked out slowly with due regard to what is being done abroad. The practical aspects of the planned civil service have not been worked out. At present, conscientious objectors are given severe prison sentences.

An international kind of non-military service is also under study. The Government's Delegate to international rescue and humanitarian missions, Mr. Arthur Bill, has been entrusted with laying down the framework of a planned volunteer force which could be sent to areas stricken by natural disasters across the world. This force would have about a thousand volunteers. It is officially stressed that these would *not* be conscientious objectors, although it is possible that time spent on assignments with the force could be deducted from obligatory military periods. The planned force will be composed of highly qualified and efficient young people, available at short notice for assignments of several months anywhere in the world. It has not yet been decided whether the volunteer force should fall under the direct authority of the Swiss Government or be brought into action within an international framework, either under UN or Red Cross auspices.

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