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Meet the new men at the top . .



Fritz Honegger . . . a President who prefers to work in the background

A JOINT meeting of the two chambers of the Swiss Parliament has elected the Economics Minister, Mr Fritz Honegger, as the new Swiss President and the Foreign Minister, Mr Pierre Aubert as Vice-President.

The outcome of the election was, of course, well known beforehand, since a Swiss vice-president normally becomes president in the following year, and it is also usually known who will be the new vice-president.

The only surprise element in such elections concerns the number of votes the two candidates receive.

Mr Honegger was elected with 210 votes, and 11 MPs handed in a blank paper. Mr Aubert received 190 votes, with 28 blanks.

The seven members of the Swiss government take the presidency in turn for one-year periods. But during that one year they remain at the head of their own ministries.

The federal constitution only says that the president and vice-president of Switzerland are elected from within the members of the government for one-year terms by the two houses of Parliament.

Since the beginning of the century, there has been a law which says that a new government member will only become vice-president and then president after serving under all the other ministers who have been in office longer than the newcomer.

Swiss cabinet ministers usually remain in office until they decide

to retire, and so a minister can become president two, three or more times, depending on how long he remains a member of the government.

Mr Honegger and Mr Aubert were both elected to the cabinet in December, 1977, and it is their first term as president and vice-president.

Mr Honegger is 64. He is from canton Zurich and studied economics at Zurich university. Before becoming director of the Zurich chamber of commerce he was a secretary of the watch-making chamber of commerce and of the Zurich silk industry.

He joined the Radical party when he was still very young, and later became mayor of the small town of Rüschlikon and a member of the Zurich cantonal

parliament. In 1967 he was elected as representative of canton Zurich in the Swiss Senate. His special fields of interest there included economic and monetary problems. In 1974 he became president of the Swiss Radical party.

After his election to the Swiss cabinet, Mr Honegger took over the Economics Ministry in February, 1978. He is not what is known as a "popular" politician. Little about him and his ministry appears in the press and he personally prefers to work in the background. But he is said to be very efficient.

The nomination earlier last year by the Social Democratic party of Mr Aubert as vice-president was preceded by some controversy. His own party president, Mr Hubacher, attacked him, among other things for allegedly failing to cooperate with the party. After heated discussions, however, the Social Democrats gave Mr Aubert their full support.

He is ten years younger than Mr Honegger. A lawyer by profession, he also started his political career in his commune, La Chaux-de-Fonds. He later became a member of the Neuchâtel cantonal parliament and in 1971 was elected to the senate.

In the cabinet he supports an opening of Switzerland's foreign policy, and he has made trips to several developing countries in Africa. There was some public criticism of his travelling, but in Switzerland the seven members of the government are jointly responsible for such trips as well as for any other government activity.



Pierre Aubert . . . much-travelled advocate of a more open foreign policy