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Autor: [s.n.]
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Parliament must not prevent the Cabinet from governing

THE outgoing President of the Confederation, Mr Kurt Furgler, strongly defended the Swiss Cabinet's right to leadership. During a session of the Swiss Parliament he protested against planned motions in the House of Representatives calling on the government to reduce its programme of activities for the next two years and to postpone – among other things – steps towards possible Swiss membership of the United Nations and a possible total revision of the Swiss federal constitution.

The House of Representatives then turned down the motions but they led to long debates.

At the beginning of every legislative period, the Swiss government publishes policy guidelines which include the business it plans to tackle during the next four years. In 1979, parliament decided to demand reports from the government at half-term, and the first one of these was submitted to parliament in October.

These guidelines are declarations of intent and are not binding for the government or parliament. A binding programme would not be possible because, although made up of members of four different political parties, the Swiss government is not a real coalition government.

– Outgoing President Kurt Furgler

In its interim report the government included in the long list of business to be tackled before the end of the legislative period its message to parliament on possible membership of the United Nations and the planned total revision of the federal constitution.

Several parties in parliament consider that these two items do not have priority and could be shelved. But the debate also showed that there is little agreement among the parties on what should in fact be given priority in the next two years.

The Social Democrats, who often oppose government proposals, for once were absolutely in line with the government, while opposition came mainly from the parliamentary groups of the Swiss People's party and the Independent and Protestant parties.

Mr Furgler agreed that it might be necessary to drop some of the planned items, but he said the parliament must not prevent the

cabinet from governing. He said it was obviously necessary to tackle urgent day-by-day problems and to find short or medium term solutions. But he added that it was as important to look into the future.

For years Switzerland has been discussing whether or not it should join the United Nations, in whose specialised agencies it has been taking an active part for a long time. The final decision will have to be made by the Swiss people.

Mr Furgler said the Parliament itself had asked for the government's message on joining the UN. He said the thought process which was started years ago could not suddenly be interrupted.

Switzerland has in fact often been criticised for not being a member of the UN, and Swiss officials involved in international affairs have warned of the negative effects of this situation.

Mr Furgler also refused to stop 15 years' work on a total revision

of the Swiss constitution, which he hopes might be completed by 1991, when Switzerland will be 700 years old.

He stressed the need for a revision of the constitution, which dates back to the last century. It has on many occasions been amended and includes a lot of details which do not really belong into a constitution.

Mr Furgler – who has been personally involved in the plan – warned that work on a total revision cannot be interrupted and taken up again at a later date.

The revision should soon enter into its second stage. A first draft has been worked out and consultation procedures have been held.

The next stage would be a government proposal to parliament. This would either be discussed by the two houses in special sessions over several years, or the electorate could be asked to approve the setting up of a special constituent body.

