

Parliamentary disagreement on how to deal with conscientious objectors

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PARLIAMENTARY DISAGREEMENT ON HOW TO DEAL WITH CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

The problem of conscientious objectors is one of those recurring issues, like abortion and aid to developing countries, which Swiss members of Parliament find difficult to agree on. Four years ago, a group of teachers in Basle launched an Initiative, known as the Munchenstein Initiative, which called for the institution of a constructive period of service to society for the benefit of those who sincerely felt that they could not be made to carry a gun and be trained in the science of killing.

But these well-meaning citizens, whose proposals were supported by a great many of their compatriots, left Parliament with the ploy of devising the details of the future Civic Service. Conscientious objectors have so far been sentenced to terms of detention usually longer than the periods of National Service.

The two houses of Parliament have so far disagreed on how to decide who should be exempted from military duties. At present, the Council of States agree with the proposal of the Federal Council to enable young men with definite religious and philosophical motives to undergo a non-military Service. But the Commission of the National Council has now put forward a considerably more

liberal proposal, which would exempt any man who had a genuine horror of violence. In other words, the philosophical, ethical and religious motives would be considered as secondary to the deeper commands of individual conscience.

SWISS ARMY THREATENED WITH AGE

Because of the decline of the Swiss birthrate during the past 12 years, the effectives in the Elite Corps of the Army will fall by 10,000 men during the next eight years and by a further 35,000 men during the subsequent ten years whereas those of the Landwehr and Landsturm will rise by 25,000 by 1995. Swiss servicemen serve in the Elite troops from 20 to 32. They are in the Landwehr until 42 and in the Landsturm until they are 48. One proposal put forward to maintain the levels of the Elite would be to extend the age of its members to 34.

SWITZERLAND'S ECONOMIC STRENGTH IS ITS BEST DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENT

Dr. Albert Weitnauer, former Ambassador in London and now Secretary General of the Political

Department, said at the end of last month that our national economy and our diplomacy converged towards the same aim. Speaking to a Zürich Economics Association, he added that Switzerland's new "diplomatic mobility", which contrasted with its traditionally "static role", was bound to enhance the country's economic opportunities across the world.

In his speech, Dr. Weitnauer stressed that Switzerland's economic strength enabled it to make its mark in the world. It actually allowed the country to develop political power so that Switzerland could allow itself to pursue "a well-founded foreign policy ensuring that it enjoys a great prestige in the world and preserve its existence".

Dr. Weitnauer stressed the importance of industrial peace at home in achieving such results. Switzerland's sound economic base had enabled it to "open its windows wide open to the world". He also reminded his listeners that the Swiss diplomatic machinery was ideally geared to help businessmen looking for new and larger opportunities abroad.

Swiss foreign policy and the export industry strive towards the same goal, namely to protect the interests of the nation and, as the Preamble of the Federal Constitution states, to "maintain and enlarge the unity, the strength and the honour of the Swiss Nation".

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