

Swiss events

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A GREAT PRESIDENT RETIRES

The spring session of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad met in Berne on Saturday, 25th February. The meeting had been fixed rather earlier than usual so as to enable members to take part in the federal plebiscite held that weekend. A meeting on information had taken place the day before, at which the most significant news had been the fact that the *Echo*, periodical for the Swiss abroad, had for the first time not been in the red. Most of the other items came up again at the Commission meeting.

The draft of the annual report was accepted. Once again it showed how much valuable work was done by the Organisation and the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad. This was also reflected in the accounts which ended in a surplus for the year, specially thanks to a large legacy received. The budget was accepted, too, and note was taken of the increased subsidy to be given by the Confederation as from 1978.

Important items on the agenda were the draft for a new Federal Constitution to be considered in the course of the next 18 months, and political rights. It was stated that 3,000 Swiss abroad had so far registered, but it was not known how many had actually voted in federal plebiscites. Members were told of a new Initiative for equal rights for men and women. An identity card for Swiss abroad was again considered, and a report was given on the Swiss schools abroad. The President of the Swiss National Day Collection addressed the meeting on the origins and aims of this institution, since the collection in 1978 will be in aid of the Swiss abroad.

The big event of the day was the retirement of Monsieur Louis Guisan, former Councillor of States for the Canton of Vaud and President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad for the last 11 years. He felt that it was time to go and to make room for another man from the "opposite camp", viz. a German-speaking man, a Roman Catholic, someone from Central Switzerland. After two years of looking round, also within the Nouvelle Société Helvétique itself, they had found someone eminently suitable and willing. It was National Councillor Dr. Alfred Weber from Altdorf, a member of the Commission for the last twelve months and not unknown to the Swiss abroad. When he was President of the National Council in 1971, he addressed the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad on the Ruetli on the occasion of the annual gathering at Brunnen. He has been extremely interested in the work of the Organisation and the activities of his compatriots outside Switzerland. Much regret was expressed by members at Monsieur

Guisan's departure, and after the new Chairman had been elected and introduced, the Vice-President, Mr. Jean Heer, expressed most eloquently and movingly the appreciation of all that Monsieur Guisan had done. On the proposal of the Executive Committee, he was elected Honorary President. The Swiss abroad owe a great deal to his wise leadership, and he will be remembered with gratitude. The new President has no easy task in following such a personality, but there is no doubt that he is an excellent choice. Surrounded by an efficient staff at the Secretariat and men of experience in this field of activity in the Executive Council, he will be able to continue the great work. Dr. Weber will officially take over on 1st May, and he will be in charge when the next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad takes place at Einsiedeln at the end of August. The theme will be "Information to and from the Swiss Abroad."

The spring meeting of the "Little Parliament of the Swiss Abroad" ended with the traditional luncheon at which the Secretary-General of the Political Department, Ambassador Weitnauer, addressed the gathering.

MM.

TEAR DOWN THE ROAD – LITERALLY

The Swiss were called to the polls on a number of local and federal issues during the weekend of 25th-26th February. They agreed to a 9th Revision of Old Age and Invalidity Insurance. They also agreed to confirm the powers of the Government to handle economic crises.

But they overthrew in their overwhelming majority a left-wing proposal to institute retirement at the age of sixty. They also rejected, although by a smaller majority, proposals by the environmentalist Franz Weber to increase the powers of the people to decide on the layout of motorways.

Franz Weber, who is well known for his environmental campaign in several areas, in particular against baby seal

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hunting, accused the Swiss authorities of "bureaucratic dictatorship" in its handling of the motorway programme.

His proposals, if accepted, could have entailed the dismantling of parts of motorways constructed during the past three years.

PLAGIARISM DOESN'T PAY

A man was jailed for two years by a Geneva court for having posed as a journalist and sold a series of articles by somebody else to a Swiss magazine.

The magazine has bought a six-part story for Sw.Fr. 18,000. After publication, it realised that the articles had been written by a French journalist and already appeared in a French magazine.

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