

Switzerland to have embassies and ambassadors

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SWITZERLAND TO HAVE EMBASSIES AND AMBASSADORS.

During the recent session of the two Federal Chambers in Berne, which has just come to a close, the transformation from Legations into Embassies, and *ipso facto* from Ministers into Ambassadors — put before Parliament in a proposal by the Federal Council — has been approved by a surprisingly large majority (National Council: 127 for, 3 against; States Council: 33 for, 0 against), which is all the more astonishing as until quite recently there was some considerable opposition not only from certain political circles, but also among the people themselves, where the opinion is still held that the proper thing for Switzerland to do, is to remain "modest and reserved".

We are glad to note that a more up to date attitude has gained ground, not only because diplomatic courtesy demands that those countries which already maintain Embassies in Berne should be granted reciprocity, but also because the question of a settlement on the lines proposed by the Government was long overdue.

There are very few countries left in Europe which have still Legation status. International development in the intercourse between the various countries is growing steadily in that, instead of Ministers — that is to say, of representatives belonging to the second diplomatic rank — there is an increasing tendency to accredit Ambassadors — that is to say representatives of the highest rank — to foreign countries.

It is, therefore, quite apparent that Switzerland, owing to her position in the international community of nations, can no longer allow herself to maintain a special attitude, by which she only detracts from her own influence.

The change over will not take effect for some time, firstly a three months period has to be observed pending a possible referendum against it — which we do not consider likely — and secondly it will be left to the discretion of the Federal Council to decide which Legations are to be raised to the status of Embassies, so that a final solution can hardly be expected much before the end of the current year.

The following facts will, no doubt, be taken into consideration: in the first instance the special Swiss interests will count, among them being the size of the Swiss colony in the respective country, and the economic, financial and cultural relations. Historical ties with a country may also prove to be of importance, as well as the part played in world politics by the

foreign country. Another matter to be taken into account will be the existence of important international organisations in the country in question, as Switzerland is not a member of the United Nations.

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As these changes affect to a certain degree also the Swiss colonies abroad, we deem it an opportune moment to add a few remarks.

It seems somewhat painful to us, that when the Federal Council in a previous session acquainted Parliament with the intention of making this change, it was at once muted, that the remunerations of the personnel affected would be by no means augmented, in other words promotion to a higher rank would not mean a corresponding higher scale of pay. This, in our opinion, was undoubtedly meant as a bait to accede to the wishes of the Government, and was possibly one of the reasons why Parliament passed the proposal with such a large majority.

Week after week, month by month we read in Swiss papers of large profits made, not only by industrial and commercial concerns, but also by state owned administrations, such as the Swiss Federal Railways, Customs, Post, Telegraph and Telephone, etc., etc., which are undisputable proofs that Switzerland is passing through a period of prosperity to such an extent as has never before been experienced, from which obviously the Federal Exchequer gets its fair share, and yet "Mother Helvetia" — who always had the reputation of being "a bit near" — seems not to be able to afford to pay its diplomats in accordance with the position they hold, some of whom have to dig into their own pockets to make both ends meet. It is no secret that Swiss diplomats of all diplomsats the world over are some of the worst paid. Time after time a number of them are forced to leave the service because they would, or could not afford to continue using private means to represent their country in a dignified manner.

Another objectionable practice has for some time existed, namely that members of the Diplomatic and Consular staff, have been promoted to a higher rank, without however receiving the remuneration which this rank should entail, in other words they are asked to shoulder additional responsibility without an increase due to them, with perhaps a vague promise that one fine day an adjustment might be made. "God's mills are grinding slowly" it is said, but what about those in the Federal capital?

If our country expects an efficient representation abroad, not relying on personal means, then it should provide it with sufficient means to do it — not extravagantly — but in a manner which behoves "one of the most prosperous countries".

The Editor.

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