

Swiss Spotlight : Only nine months separates us from General Election

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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

Only nine months separates us from the General Election.

On the last Sunday of October 1959, the Swiss people will engage in a General Election: they will elect their deputies to the Lower House, in which the people are represented directly, and also the greater part of their deputies to the Upper House, which represents the Cantons. As from now, the political Parties are beginning to define their positions, with a view to the renewal of the two Houses of Parliament.

The Socialists, who are not represented on the Executive and thus form what might be called the Opposition, as well as the Trade Unions, have taken certain decisions which already make it possible to foresee what will be the principal subjects used in the electoral campaign, in the autumn.

The military problems will form one of the important subjects, particularly the possible equipment of the Swiss Army with tactical nuclear arms, a matter which, for some months past, has proved the subject of a great deal of controversy. It may be recalled that certain actions taken in this regard went so far as to demand that a prohibition, pure and simple, of atomic arms be introduced into the Swiss Constitution. Even if the leaders of the Socialist Party are quite definitely opposed to such a prohibition being inserted into the Constitution, they will try, nevertheless, to use the hostility which exists, in regard to this armament, for their own purposes; they will propose the adoption of a new constitutional article which would make it the Government's duty not to take any measure in the domain of atomic weapons without first consulting the Swiss people. In this way the Socialist Left Wing would show its determination not to allow the authorities, any longer, to take decisions, of their own right, on matters relating to military technique, but to oblige the said authorities to obtain, in all circumstances, the express consent of the people.

On the social plane, an Initiative may be expected on the part of the Trade Unions. They intend to launch, in a few months' time, a constitutional Initiative advocating a reduction in working hours, whilst, at the same time, providing a sufficient delay for the adjustment of our industries to this innovation. By doing this the Trade Unions will justify the opposition shown by them recently to another Initiative, which was launched by the minority Party of Independents and which proposed to reduce working hours, at one go, to 44 per week. This Initiative was rejected last October.

Continuing in the social field, we learn that the Socialist Party has just decided to launch an Initiative in favour of an increase in the benefits paid by the Old Age Pension and Survivors Insurance, as also in that of a progressive adjustment of such benefits to the increase in the cost of living. If one considers the fact that the said insurance is very prosperous and that its receipts exceed its requirements to a considerable extent, it may be anticipated that the Initiative in question will meet with a positive success. But it should also be borne in mind that the ageing of the population is increasing pro-

gressively, in consequence of which the position of the Old Age Pension and Survivors Insurance will, of necessity, become much less favourable and it would, indeed, become much worse if this period of over-employment should change into a period of normal employment, or perhaps even of partial unemployment. In this particular domain it would be imprudent to draw bills on the future.

Finally, the Socialist Party has announced that it will shortly put forward a proposal of a strictly political order. It intends to launch an Initiative which would make it possible for 50,000 citizens not only to ask for a modification of a general constitutional principle, but also to propose the modification — even if this be only on a point of detail — of the text of a law. This would mean, in fact, an extension of direct democracy. It seems to us, however, that up to the present the Swiss people have never wanted to institute a régime which would entail an increase in the number of popular referendums.

The aforementioned are some of the important subjects to figure in this year's electoral struggle, out of which will arise a new Swiss Parliament. It is very possible that, during the course of the next nine months, other subjects will arise for social or political debates, which will set by the ears, among themselves, the various political parties in our country.

LE PRESIDENT DE LA CONFEDERATION A GENEVE.

Monsieur Paul Chaudet, Chef du Département militaire et, pour 1959, Président de la Confédération, a bien voulu accepter, comme ses prédécesseurs, d'inaugurer le Salon International de l'Automobile dont la 29ème édition aura lieu du 12 au 22 mars à Genève.

Cet événement rassemblera les personnalités les plus marquantes du pays, non seulement du monde automobile et routier mais encore de la diplomatie et de la politique.

La tradition veut qu'à cette occasion le premier magistrat du pays prononce un important discours concernant les problèmes économiques relatifs aux véhicules à moteur.

Le Président du Conseil d'Etat de la République et Canton de Genève, Monsieur Emile Dupont, ainsi que le Président du Comité d'organisation, Monsieur Roger Perrot, prendront la parole à la même occasion.

Les ambassadeurs et ministres plénipotentiaires des 17 nations exposantes accrédités près le gouvernement helvétique seront présents ainsi que leurs consuls généraux résidant à Genève.

Le Salon international de Genève est la seule manifestation complète de l'industrie automobile durant le printemps et l'été 1959. C'est pourquoi il attire déjà l'attention passionnée de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à cette branche de l'activité humaine.

ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE S.M.S.

A full report of the Annual Dinner and Dance of the Swiss Mercantile Society, which took place on Saturday, 7th February, at the Dorchester Hotel, will appear in our next issue.