

Parliamentary autumn session

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1967)**

Heft 1534

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-696091>

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PARLIAMENTARY AUTUMN SESSION

On Monday after the Federal Day of Prayer, the last Parliamentary Session of the four-year legislative period began in the "Federal Palace" in Berne. As is the case inevitably before General Elections, much was said and left unsaid with an eye on the election campaign. Two of the most controversial subjects, the Initiative against *Ueberfremdung* ("over-foreignisation") and the revision of the bread-cereal law, have been postponed to a later Session.

The Session in the National Council began with a Postulate by Prof. Beck (Zurich, no Party), asking the Federal Council for information regarding the possible advantages and disadvantages of Switzerland's entry into the Common Market. Federal Councillor Schaffner accepted the Postulate, and Parliament agreed.

The first week was marked by the battle for the subsidies. In December 1964, Parliament had asked the Federal Council to examine the whole range of subsidies. Subsequently, Prof. Stocker's Commission studied the matter and published a report which suggested a saving of 140m. francs out of a total of 1.4 milliard. At first the Government accepted the report *tel quel*, but later reduced the 140 to 115m. francs. About 50m. francs were saved by stopping the *Verbilligungsbeiträge* for dairy produce. Further reductions were suggested in constitutionally anchored subsidies, and the National Council had to deal with 18 of these. The speakers who represented certain interests which would be affected by cuts, were well briefed, and by the time the items had been debated, only half of the proposed 60m. was agreed to, in spite of Federal Councillor Bonvin's eloquent warning of the serious position of federal finances. Would the outcome of the debate have been different if the forthcoming elections had not influenced some of the speakers to strike a popular note?

The Council of States had to deal with the reorganisation of the Military Department, which had already been done in the National Council in June. The Council of States also gave the proposals a favourable reception. In the National Council, there was a lively debate on four military matters; two (the introduction of a raincoat for the soldiers and a rain protection garment when on duty, and the sixth report on the "Mirage" plane production for the Army) were passed without opposition, but the purchase of a "Mirage" twin seater aircraft for the training of pilots (7m. francs) was opposed by the Socialists. However, the amendment was defeated. Criticism was voiced in the matter of land purchase and construction of military buildings, with the result that the total credit of 295 francs was finally accepted by only 74:12, the rest abstaining. The National Council also passed three proposals for Technical Assistance: a loan of 21.6m. to the Asiatic Development Bank, one of 52m. to the International Development Organisations of the World Bank and one of 100m. francs to the World Bank. These loans were called "multilateral development assistance".

Federal Council Tschudi promised a new revision draft of the Old-Age and Dependents' Insurance by next summer so that the seventh revision would become law by 1st January 1969. A Motion demanding a Government Programme at the beginning of each legislative period with a report at the end of the four years was accepted by Parliament.

Strong criticism was voiced during the debate of the report on the Confederation's reactor policy. What would

happen to the Atomic Research Power Station at Lucens, and what long-term programme was there for the Institute for Reactor Technique at Wuerenlingen? Industry shows no more interest in Lucens which cost 100m. francs and which is ready to begin operations at the end of the year. Federal Councillor Gnaegi announced that the Confederation was willing to carry half the deficit estimated at 4.7m. francs for the first two years, if industry and *Elektrowirtschaft* would carry the rest. The Institute at Wuerenlingen has better prospects as it is attached to the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) and has a long-term programme in co-operation with other countries. Finally, Parliament accepted the report with a large majority.

The Council of States agreed with the National Council regarding an amnesty in federal defence tax, which will come into force by 1st January 1969, subject to popular vote. Similarly, the revision of the military penal law was accepted as in the National Council; it will provide milder punishment for conscientious objectors to military service.

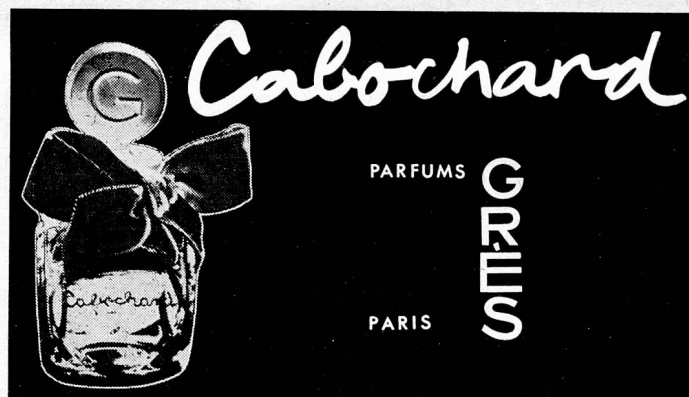
In the last week, Federal Councillor Celio accepted a Motion proposing a kind of peace corps, non-armed, but organised by the military, which would be used for reconstruction work in war-ravaged countries or in catastrophes. Both Councils agreed to a change in the *Münzgesetz* (1952); The Federal Council is now empowered to fix the silver contents of the one-, two- and five-franc pieces; in view of the rising silver price, the contents will no doubt soon be reduced.

The National Council had to bow to the decision of the Council of States in the tobacco tax law. In June, the former had agreed to a continuation of retail price fixing, but has now given in to the Council of States. The *Ständerat* also agreed to the 170m. francs already passed by the other Chamber for the extension of the ETH (Federal Institute of Technology) and accepted the reports on electricity supply and reactor policy.

At the end of the third week, the 37th legislative period came to an end, and in a farewell speech, the President, National Councillor Schaller, expressed the wish that the electors would choose politicians in the best sense of the word, men with a genuine and high sense of duty and responsibility towards the State.

In the Council of States, President Rohner encouraged Members in their task and spoke of the need to have the courage to be unpopular. This is good advice for Parliament and Government where more responsibility and less opportunism should be the guiding principle at all times.

(Based on reports from "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt".)



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