

Mr. Escher, Federal Councillor, dies at his post

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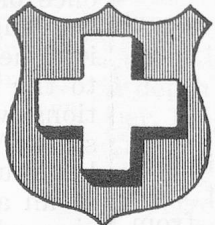
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AUCKLAND.

Mr. Escher, Federal Councillor, Dies at his Post

The state of health of Mr. Escher, Federal Councillor and head of the Federal Postal and Railways Department, was compelling him to retire from the post to which he had been elected four years ago and to decline the honour of being Switzerland's next President; the members of the Council of States and the National Council which together form the Federal Assembly would have been only too happy to elect him in token of their deep respect and the great esteem in which he was held.

Before taking leave of his department, which deals with problems concerning transport, communications and tourism, Mr. Escher insisted on bringing his files up to date and it was for this reason—dictated by that innate sense of responsibility so characteristic of him—that he went on the morning of Thursday, December 7th, to the hall of the National Council where Mr. Moritz Kaempfen, a deputy from the same district in the Valais, and president of the town of Brigue, was putting forward a motion in favour of granting extra credits for tourist propaganda in the United States; in the middle of the speech, Mr. Escher, who was seated near the speaker, suddenly collapsed and had to be carried into an adjoining room where it was not long before he breathed his last, the victim of a heart attack.

The Swiss press unanimously voiced the deep feelings of sorrow and affliction felt by the Swiss people, feelings which were echoed in the tribute that members of the Cantonal and Federal legislative and executive powers rendered to the deceased at the funeral ceremony on December 14th, at Brigue.

Mr. Joseph Escher was very attached to his home canton. As Mr. Jean Seitz, parliamentary correspondent of the "Gazette de Lausanne" in Berne, said: "It was difficult to be more typically "Haut-Valaisan" than Joseph Escher. He was a citizen of Brigue-Glis, and, as if to strengthen still further these roots, he was born

at Simplon Village. One may become a brilliant lawyer, be capped as an honorary doctor, preside over the destiny of a great national party, possess great tactical resources as a political leader, be the first in one's canton to attain to the rank of Federal Councillor, but one cannot, even if one wished to, deny one's origins. They leave their mark on a man for ever."

Three New Federal Councillors

On the morning of December 16th, the Federal Assembly—which is a combined assembly of members of the National Council and the Council of States summoned whenever it is necessary to proceed to the election of members of the Government, a new chancellor or the judges of the Federal Law Courts, or the examination of appeals—elected three new members of the Federal Council: Mr. Thomas Holenstein, born at St. Gallen in 1896, Doctor of Laws and member of the National Council since 1937; Mr. Paul Chaudet, born at Rivaz (canton of Vaud) in 1904, a national councillor since 1943 and a member of the Government of the canton of Vaud since 1946; and Mr. Giuseppe Lepori, Doctor of Laws and a member of the Government of the Ticino since 1940.

Mr. Holenstein and Mr. Lepori were put forward by the Catholic Conservative Party, which, as from January 1st, 1955, will thus have three seats in the Federal Government as opposed to the two it has at present. Mr. Paul Chaudet was a candidate of the Radical Democrat Party which will now have three seats instead of four. The seventh seat in the Government is occupied by Mr. Feldmann, of Berne, a member of the Agrarian Party.

The Federal Assembly then elected the new Swiss President, Mr. Max Petitpierre, who has been Foreign Minister at Berne since 1944; the new Vice-President of the Federal Council will be Mr. Feldman.

Finally, the members of the two Chambers elected as President of the Federal Law Courts Mr. Robert Petitmermet, of Lausanne, who has