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THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION

FOR the first time since Switzerland's Constitution came into being in 1848, the President of the Confederation for 1967 hails from the Valais. It is, therefore, not surprising the Federal Councillor Roger Bonvin, Federal Finance Minister, received a tumultuous reception on his return to Sion. When the election results in Parliament became known, a twenty-two-gun salute was fired in Sion, and flags were hoisted. 20,000 people gave the new President an enthusiastic welcome, and the Commune of Nendaz (near Sion) accorded him Honorary Citizenship. "The Times" carried a front-page picture of the presentation of a tankard made to Monsieur Bonvin by Valais girls in costume. Congratulatory telegrams arrived from Heads of States from all over the world, including H.H. the Pope.

Federal Councillor Bonvin was born on 12th September 1907, at Icoigne-Lens near Sion, son of a surveyor. He went to school at Sion and Einsiedeln and studied engineering at the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich. He qualified in 1932 and then worked for two years on special projects of the Dixence S.A. Next, he was employed by the Federal Office of Topography, followed by appointments in the Valais, amongst them six years as chief of the cantonal **Baudirektion** of the Valais. Amongst the projects he was concerned with, are the development of the Furka, the Mauvoisin and Mattmark Power Stations.

In 1955, Monsieur Bonvin was elected Municipal President of Sion, from which time onwards he was also in the National Council. On 27th September 1962, he was elected to the Government as successor to Dr J. Bourgknecht.

He is a Colonel in the Swiss Army and in command of a Mountain Infantry Regiment (Upper Valais). He was in charge of training high Alpine patrols, holds a pilot's certificate—at one time he piloted Swissair machines on several European routes—he is a qualified mountain guide and ski-ing instructor.

Monsieur Bonvin is the second Valaisan ever to be in the Government, the first having been Federal Councillor Joseph Escher. He has the gift of speech and is one of the few men in Parliament who speak without manuscript. He is married and has seven children. Incidentally, he is a relative of Mr Edgar Bonvin, President of the City Swiss Club in London.

On 1st January, the new President gave the traditional New Year's message over the Swiss radio and television networks. In a special TV programme, "Un' Ora per Voi," he addressed the Italian workers in Switzerland whom, he said, he was particularly happy to know from his own days as an engineer on many construction sites in the mountains. [A.T.S.]