

Home Affairs : "The New Financial Programme"

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HOME AFFAIRS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The New Financial Programme".

It was with a good deal of curiosity that the new fiscal and financial projects of the Federal Council were awaited. They were made public, at the end of last week. Already, the Press is taking a lively interest in the matter. The reception given by public opinion to these projects is not enthusiastic, to say the least of it. The reason for this we will now try to explain.

In regard to fiscal matters, we have been living, here, in Switzerland, for a number of years past, under an exceptional régime. The First World War, then the serious economic crisis of the "thirties", and, finally, the Second World War, had the effect of completely upsetting Federal finance. It proved necessary, as a matter of urgency, to find new sources of revenue. At the time, it was thought that these were merely emergency measures. But, they had to be maintained, not only because the two wars had increased the National Debt, but also because the prerogatives of the State took on larger dimensions and, therefore, quite naturally and consequently, expenditure had to follow the same course.

Everyone agreed, however, in regard to one point: it was imperative that an end should be put to the provisional régime, and the principle of the taxation which could be levied, henceforth, by the Confederation, be embodied in the Constitution. This was the first thing to be done. Attempts in this direction had been made, and had failed, already on two occasions. Now, the country is faced, once more, by a new expiration being due, in view of the fact that the extraordinary emergency legislation will cease to be valid, at the end of 1954.

The reason why the Government project is — generally speaking — disappointing, is quite simple: the people expected a reform and something new. But, what has happened is that, factually and in its general lines, we are merely asked to prolong, once again, the legislation which is now in force. It is true that we are not called upon to give it a definite character, but to maintain it in force for at least twenty years. Indeed, it may be considered that the Federal Council is not honouring a maturity, but is striving for its adjournment.

Moreover, on the Left, there is dissatisfaction felt because the direct tax on the fortune of private persons would be abolished, although this lightening of the burden would be compensated by an increase in the direct tax on revenue. On that side of the political horizon, it would be preferred if direct taxation was made heavier, generally.

Surprise is felt among the public that no decisive effort has been made in order to reduce expenditure. In this respect, the Government's proposals are, to put it mildly, of an extreme timidity. A great many citizens believe that it will never prove possible to solve the financial problem, unless a start is made by reducing the establishment of the State and by cutting down its interventions in the domain of economy, interventions which take the form of numerous subsidies, which mount up, in the end, to a very large sum of money.

Moreover, dissatisfaction is also felt in regard to the intention of maintaining a direct Federal tax, which will continue to compete with, and to be added to, the direct Cantonal taxes. It is thought that this constitutes a menace for federalism and for the sovereignty of the Cantons, and is a new step forward in the direction of centralisation. However, the people have resigned themselves to this, but only temporarily. It had always been hoped that it would prove possible to go back to former conditions. A number of people feel that they cannot accept, what others consider to be evidence, namely that henceforth it will not prove possible for the Confederation (in view of the amplitude of its tasks), to renounce from this source of revenue and to keep its treasury filled without having recourse to central direct taxation.

From the foregoing, you will realise that objections are numerous and that the parliamentary study of this project does not promise to be at all easy. In any case, we have before us a political struggle, which it will be very difficult for the Federal Council to win.

CITY SWISS CLUB

Will members kindly note that the next

MONTHLY MEETING

will take place on **Tuesday, March 3rd, 1953, at 6.30 p.m. for 7 p.m. at Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, W.1.**

The Dinner will be followed by a game of Jass, Bridge or Canasta.

Members wishing to be present should send their card to the Manager of Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, W.1, to reach him not later than, Monday, March 2nd, 1953.

Ch. GYSIN

Hon. Secretary.



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