

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

From the debates in the Federal Parliament — the Summer Session of which started recently — it is once more clearly apparent how extraordinarily favourable is the present economic situation in our country. This is especially apparent when one examines the State Accounts for last year, which present a surplus, such as has never been attained until now. That this surplus should be ear-marked, as has been the case in previous years, for further amortization of the National Debt, corresponds entirely to the traditional conduct of Swiss financial matters: in good times, reserves must be set aside and debts paid off, so that one can envisage the setting in of a period of depression — which is always a possibility — with greater calm.

As a matter of fact, the present welcome surpluses in the Swiss national economy, cannot be viewed as a separate thing, for a great many new tasks lie before the State. Thus, for example, the Military Budget will grow still bigger, in the future. In view of the military developments taking place abroad, it will be necessary to mechanise our Army to a greater extent and to increase its firing power. Intensive preparatory work is now being done in regard to the proposed innovations.

New items of State expenditure in the domain of social welfare are also to be expected. A Draft Bill relating to the introduction of a Disablement Insurance, supplementary to the Old Age Pension and Survivors' Insurance, as well as to the Sickness and Accident Insurance will be submitted for discussion in Parliament, very shortly.

The present economic boom is also reflected in that important Swiss social scheme, namely that of an obligatory Old Age Pension and Survivors' Insurance for all the inhabitants. This insurance is financed by means of a percentual portion of all earned income being deducted automatically. In view of the fact that wages have gone up during the last few years, contributions to the insurance in question have increased concurrently, so that considerable means are now available. During the past week, various desiderata for an improvement in the benefits paid out by the Old Age Pension and Survivors' Insurance were put forward during a whole day's session in Parliament. This is quite understandable, as, after all, an insurance is not an aim in itself, but a means for achieving an aim. Bigger receipts should be of benefit to the persons who are insured. Taken all together, however, the wishes expressed in Parliament exceed to a considerable extent the capacities of payment possessed by the O.A.P. and S.I. scheme, so that it will prove necessary to find out, after careful examination, which of the proposals put forward can be realised and to what an extent.

The Federal Railways are also usufructuaries of the prevailing economic prosperity, and their Accounts for 1955, have just been approved by Parliament. In this important State enterprise, the surplus in receipts has also reached a figure never attained previously. It is being used for filling up the ordinary reserves and also reserves set aside for special purposes. In addition to this, moreover, it has been possible to proceed with the writing off of considerable additional sums. To-day, the financial

situation of the Federal Railways is better than it has ever been. But, here again, it must be remembered that a tremendous construction programme has got to be carried out during the next few years, the technical plants must be renewed, the rolling-stock must be still further modernised and many another item of expenditure must now be proceeded with, which had had to be postponed during the lean years. To all this must be added the fact that operational costs have increased in general and that the wage conditions of the railway staff have been improved.

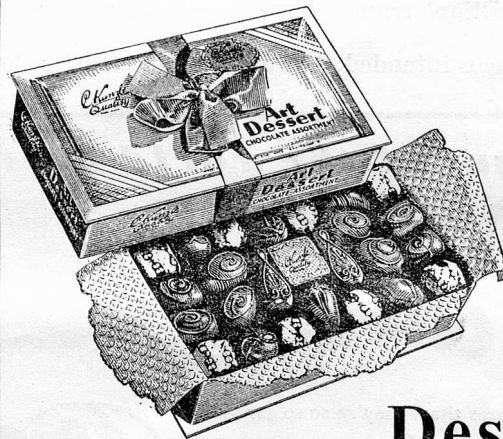
In connection with the State's conduct of its financial affairs, the so-called "Savings Initiative" is still under discussion. This is a demand put forward by the Swiss People, — by virtue of their right to have Initiatives, — that all decisions taken by Parliament in regard to expenditure above a certain figure shall be submitted to a Popular Referendum, should this be called for by a specified number of citizens. The parliamentary discussion does not revolve around the question of the introduction of this optional Referendum as such, but around the preliminary conditions which would have to be fulfilled in order that a Popular Referendum could be demanded in regard, also, to State expenditure.

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