

Swiss Spotlight

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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

The Federal Political Department (the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) in Switzerland recently invited the correspondents of the Swiss Press accredited to the Government to take part in a trip to Italy. The aim of this trip was to give the Press an opportunity for studying, on the spot, the part played and the concrete tasks assumed by our diplomatic missions and our Consulates abroad.

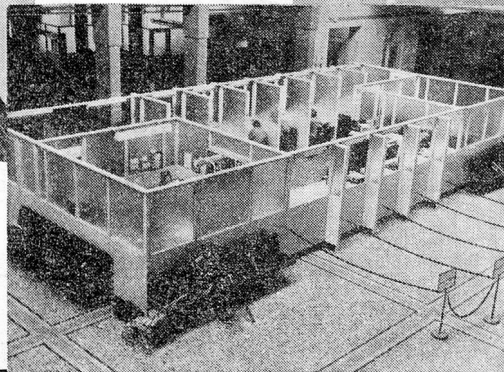
In point of fact, the Swiss Diplomatic Service is not at all well known to the public in our country and, indeed, it is sometimes criticised, even in Parliament, especially in regard to its expenditure, which is considered to be excessive. Moreover, there are still a great many people who believe that the diplomatic career is a kind of "preserved hunting ground", reserved for the members of a certain class of society, namely the aristocracy. The trip to Italy has made it possible for the journalists to find out for themselves the interesting evolution which has taken place within our diplomatic corps during the last few years.

Only forty or fifty years ago Switzerland possessed practically no foreign policy. For any decision regarding her conduct and attitude in international affairs she merely referred to one sole principle, which was simple and absolute — that of neutrality. Our country did nothing but remain aloof from all international disputes and had no other interests to defend, except its commercial interests. Even these were limited, in the sense that in the Western world there then prevailed a liberal régime in regard to foreign trade and any intervention in this domain on the part of the State was extremely restricted.

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that at that time our diplomacy, like that of most of the other countries, only possessed a small number of specialists and technicians. Most of the diplomats came from the aristocracy, a social class which has always been particularly apt to exercise representative functions and less capable of defending other causes, such as, for example, economic interests. Things have changed very much since then. To-day, Switzerland *really* possesses an external policy. It is true that this is based on neutrality, but, since the end of the Second World-War, to this principle has been added that of solidarity. Switzerland now takes an active part in

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international schemes in very varied fields of activity: economic, financial, monetary, technical, social and cultural. At the same time, even if she has remained faithful to the principle of economic liberalism, the action taken by the State in the evolution and development of our material exchanges has become very important. If Swiss industries intend to continue to export their products it is necessary that we should have a large number of Embassies, Legations and Consulates abroad, and that these should be administered by men who are well versed in the practical questions we have just mentioned, and seconded in their efforts by a staff comprising experts also. The number of countries in which Switzerland is represented has been increased considerably during the last few years.

The necessity for being more efficient — as the Anglo-Saxons put it — has had for its consequence that the recruitment of diplomats is no longer effected in the same way as formerly. The fact of belonging to a certain social class no longer plays as important a role as in the past. For some years now the Federal Political Department has proceeded to recruit its diplomats by means of examinations. In order to become a diplomat it is necessary to possess a University degree. Then there is an admission test. After that the candidates are required to undergo a probationary term of two years in private business, in industry, in trade, in banking or the Press. After that the budding diplomatists are on probation, doing practical work in the offices of the central administration in Berne. At the end of this second probationary stage they have to pass their final examination. It is only then that they can claim to be career diplomats.

This method of recruiting our diplomatic staff constitutes an adjustment to the new tasks which have to be carried out by our national representatives abroad. From all this it will be seen that the prejudices which persist in regard to the possibilities of admission to the Diplomatic Service are absolutely without any foundation, in view of the fact that one of the principal qualifications for admission is the knowledge possessed by the candidate — not his social status.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

The Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club, which was held at the Dorchester Hotel on 14th November, will be fully reported in our issue of 19th December.

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