

The federal council goes on holiday

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1962)**

Heft 1414

PDF erstellt am: **09.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692087>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER.
EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2. Published Twice Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2. Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

Vol. 48. No. 1414

FRIDAY, 10th AUGUST 1962

THE FEDERAL COUNCIL GOES ON HOLIDAY

This was the heading of one of the news items received from the Swiss telegraphic agency (ATS) in Berne. The report gives details of the holiday periods of the individual Councillors. The four weeks which is the duration of the holiday a Councillor is entitled to, seems none too much for a complete relaxation from the arduous strain our Cabinet Ministers, as it were, are submitted to while at work. It has been maintained that few men have the stamina and energy to carry out the duties of a Federal Councillor without their health coming to grief. And, alas, we have in recent years had several Councillors who have broken down under the burden. In fact, one of the present Council Members, the head of the Finance and Customs Department, Federal Councillor Bourgnecht, is at the moment still recuperating from a serious collapse some time ago.

Reading through the daily news sheets we receive from Switzerland I have come to look with respect at the exacting demands made on a Federal Councillor. Representation is a very important aspect of his daily duties. It ranges from social functions, such as the recent receptions on the National Days of the USA, France, Italy and Tunisia — where each time one of the Councillors attended — to an “in corpore” appearance of the whole Council, such as when they were guests of the Diplomatic Corps at a dinner given by the foreign diplomats in Berne to our Federal Authorities and the Chiefs of the Swiss Army.

Federal Councillors are involved in a great deal of travel. Bundesrat Schaffner journeyed by air to Copenhagen in June for a ministerial conference of the EFTA countries. Federal President Chaudet even travelled by helicopter from the Valais to Frauenfeld, where he attended the summer championships of the Swiss Army.

Some of the travelling is done by the whole Federal Council. Early in July all but two of them went on a visit to the Valais, where they inspected the road tunnel which is under construction through the Great St. Bernard. The same trip took them to the beautiful Castle of Coppet. Afterwards the august visitors, accompanied by their wives, and a number of former Federal Councillors continued their journey in a column of twenty cars to Genève, where they visited the laboratories of CERN at Meyrin.

Speech-making is another important duty, and annual meetings and assemblies of national organisations demand versatility and a thorough knowledge of many subjects. Some of the more notable speeches will be reported in this paper.

One of the hard nuts our Federal Councillors will have to crack in the near future is our country's integration into the European Common Market. For the purpose

of discussions the Council has had several special meetings at quiet inns in the country.

The demand for an enlargement of our Federal Council from seven to nine members has been heard again and again, and I believe that it would be fully justified. It is argued that an increase in numbers would make the distribution of the various departments more difficult. That may be so, but would it not be possible to have two Federal Councillors “at large” without portfolio, who could attend to some of the more representational duties with no regard to any particular department? Possibly the President of the Confederation could be relieved of his department during his year of office. Sooner or later some solution will have to be found — no country can afford the loss of its most able men through overwork. The future will certainly bring no let-up in work; on the contrary, many crucial problems will have to be faced and far-reaching decisions will have to be taken. Needless to say that it is not only the Federal Councillors who are affected; many others, leaders and executives, men of all trades and professions, of all ranks and social status, work hard and have helped to bring about the present boom and prosperity. It is also up to each and every one in our democratic community to study the serious questions which face Switzerland to-day; that is both our right and privilege as well as our duty. It is the man, and the woman, in the street on whose efforts and support our Federal Authorities rely.

So now the Federal Council has gone on holiday officially. In actual fact it is the normal sessions which have ceased for one month from mid-July. The holiday periods of the individual Councillors are staggered. Bundesrat Tschudi, in charge of Home Affairs, had to be back by our National Day. Federal Councillor Spuehler will end his holiday at the end of August, when he will address the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad at Sion (VS). President of the Confederation Chaudet and three others will split their holidays and have a second instalment later in the year.

This spreading out of holidays of the Federal Council over a period of a few months ensures that one or two of the members are always on duty to deal with urgent matters.

The summer break for each one of our “Landesväter” (the country's fathers, as they are affectionately called) means, we hope, a complete relaxation and thorough rest. They are giving of their best in the interests of our country, and their holiday is well earned and well deserved.

Mariann.