

The "Magic Formula" and its consequences

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THE "MAGIC FORMULA" AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

On Sunday, 16th September 1962, after heavy rain, the clouds lifted and the Swiss flags were hoisted on the "Federal Palace", the Houses of Parliament in Berne. It was the signal of the start of the three-week parliamentary autumn session. This time particularly difficult business had to be dealt with, that of electing a new Federal Councillor. Bundesrat Bourgknecht had resigned as he had not recovered from the serious collapse suffered a few months ago. A very able man had retired from the highest office, and it was evident that to find adequate replacement would be extremely hard.

As the well-known historian and writer, Peter Dürrenmatt, wrote in the "Basler Nachrichten" on 22nd September, there was a general feeling of discomfort not unlike that of the mountaineers who tackle the Eiger North Wall despite all warnings and who, once started, realised the difficulties but were compelled to persevere. The rules of the game had to be adhered to, and then if all went well the personality of the candidate could be considered.

When the Federal Constitution was created the election of the Federal Council was burdened with a minimum of regulations. But then the politicians "improved" on procedure and by now precedence has left its mark. The law says that each Canton can only have one member on the Federal Council at a time. But it has since been established that the Cantons of Zurich, Berne and Vaud are entitled to a seat each permanently. Then the rights of the French- and Italian-speaking and of the denominational minorities had to be considered. This, as Mr. Dürrenmatt agrees in his article, is understandable considering the high regard for minorities which exists in Switzerland. But then the idea was carried even further and the political parties were brought in.

In December 1959 when four new Federal Councillors had to be elected this new party allocation of "2+2+2+1", the so-called "Magic Formula" coincided with an excellent crop of candidates. But unfortunately this time the choice of eligible candidates was not so wide, and many a good man whose excellent qualities would have rendered him eminently suitable did not fit the party-political set-up.

The Conservative Christian Social fraction in parliament had the privilege of putting up a candidate as the retired Federal Councillor came from its ranks. It nominated National Councillor Tenchio of the Grisons. This candidature caused great discussions. As National Councillor Ph. Schmid-Rudin put it in the "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt", he was not rebuked for lacking in cleverness and culture—he enjoyed an excellent education and commands great knowledge of languages.

But many parliamentarians doubted whether he would be equal to the heavy burden.

The same party in the Valais and Ticino then put forward National Councillor Bonvin and National Councillor Maspoli respectively. Without being nominated by the party, Councillor of State Torche from Fribourg was also put forward and that complicated matters considerably. A great controversy began to rage amongst the people and in the press and feelings ran very high. None of the candidates had the support of all his friends, leave alone of his adversaries.

An Italian-speaking representative in the Federal Council would have been welcome, but as the "Gazette de Lausanne" said, only if the Ticino could put up a man of first class format who was superior to the Romand candidate. But that was not the case, the "Gazette" maintained, and therefore supported National Councillor Bonvin. Predictions were very vague. As the parliamentary correspondent of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" stressed on 23rd September, the official candidate was by no means certain to be elected, and he recalled instances when an unofficial candidate was successful. Only the Social Democratic paper "Berner Tagwacht" was absolutely sure that the official candidate Tenchio could suffer no defeat. But how wrong it was!

On Thursday, 27th September, the Federal Assembly met at 9 a.m. under the chairmanship of its President, National Councillor Walther Bringolf. The house was full to capacity and, as an innovation, the Federal Councillors were present, too. The President read the official resignation of Federal Councillor Bourgknecht and paid eloquent tribute to the outstanding qualities and great services Bundesrat Bourgknecht had rendered in an all too short period.

"We deplore his hard fate", the speaker concluded, "and we thank him for his devotion and his work in the service of our country and our people."

Then came the election of the new Federal Councillor during which the Federal Councillors present retired from the Hall. 234 ballot papers were distributed which meant a nearly full complement as the total number of members is 240. Tense excitement prevailed as it became clear that the election was not going to be straightforward. Five ballots were needed until an absolute majority of one of the candidates was established. The first ballot showed Bonvin with 87 and Tenchio with 67 votes, Maspoli 38, Torche 26 and Clottu, a liberal candidate 14, others 2.

In the second round Bonvin's votes increased to 91, Tenchio's remained at 67. The third ballot showed an increase of 10 for Bonvin, a decrease of 3 for Tenchio, whilst Torche still had 58. In the fourth round the three

candidates left received 114, 54 and 65 votes. Then came the fifth and final ballot in which Bonvin scored 142 votes as against Torche's 85. Thus, the absolute majority was reached with 114.

The successful candidate received great acclamation. President Bringolf asked "Mr." Bonvin whether he would accept and he answered shortly, "I accept the task which your will has transferred to me", upon which the President congratulated Federal Councillor Bonvin and expressed the Assembly's hope that his work would be beneficial to country and people.

* * *

Monsieur Roger Bonvin was born on 12th September, 1907 at Icoigne-Lens near Sion in the Valais. He went to school at Sion and Einsiedeln and then studied engineering at the Federal University of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, where he qualified in 1932. For two years he worked on special projects of the Dixence SA. Next he was employed by the Federal Office of Topography. Afterwards he held several important posts in the Valais. Amongst other projects he was concerned with the development of the Furka and was in charge of the erection of the Mauvoisin power works.

In 1955 Federal Councillor Bonvin was elected Town President of Sion, since when he has also been on the National Council. He is a Colonel in the Swiss Army and commanded the Upper Valais Regiment for three years. He is also in charge of the training of high alpine patrols and presides over the Swiss Ski Association.

The new Federal Councillor is a man of great abilities and energy, and of a practical mind. He has the gift of speech and is one of the few men in Parliament who speaks without manuscript. He is also socially minded. Apparently

he intends to go on living at Sion in order not to break up his family life (he has 7 children) and to fly to Berne by helicopter. He is the second Valaisan who has reached this high office—the first having been Federal Councillor Joseph Escher. Incidentally, he is a relative of Mr. E. Bonvin, Manager of the Montana Hotel in London.

* * *

There is great rejoicing in the French-speaking Cantons in general and in the Valais in particular, where the school-children got a free day when the news was made known. Celebrations took place in Berne and the Conseiller Fédéral's return to Sion turned into a journey of triumphal progress with music, festive crowds cheering and congratulations everywhere. A squadron of aeroplanes flew over Sion, where the crowds on the main square numbered tens of thousands. Bells rang from every church in the Canton and the recruits of the military station at Sion fired a salute. The Valaisan government issued a statement expressing appreciation, pride and gratitude.

As to the reaction of the German-speaking part of the country, it can be said that though enthusiasm may be less than in the Suisse Romande the general feeling is one of readiness to support the new Federal Councillor and to give him a chance to prove himself.

To quote Peter Dürrenmatt once more, he said before the election that we had to trust to Divine Providence as so often in the history of our strange country. It is possible that the election machinery will have to be overhauled. But we ardently hope and pray that in these days of grave problems when the task of the "Fathers of our country" is particularly burdensome the structure and strength of the Federal Council has been well reinforced with the addition of Roger Bonvin.

Mariann.

SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION—LAUSANNE 1964

ADDRESS TO THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY, LONDON, BY M. E. HENRY, ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EXHIBITION, ON 2nd OCTOBER 1962

On 30th April 1964 the sixth Swiss National Exhibition will open its doors in Lausanne.

The Exhibition, which will last from April 30th to October 25th 1964, will occupy a total area of over 6 million square feet on the shores of the Lake of Geneva, immediately to the west of Ouchy, the small harbour of Lausanne. It will thus be set in sunlit greenery, between the sparkling waters of the Lake of Geneva and the hills on top of which stands the city of Lausanne.

WHAT IS THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL EXHIBITION?

Our country is not the outcome of any principle of geographical, cultural, ethnical or religious unification. It is the result of an act of will, a pact freely entered upon, and based on a shared conception of the liberty and dignity of man. For Switzerland to continue to exist, this pact needs constantly to be renewed. That is why our country, perhaps more than any other, requires an event held at regular intervals to unite the whole population and remind the Swiss of the features that are common to all of them and are expressed in certain ideals, institutions, achievements and a way of life all their own. Besides, the National Exhibition also provides an opportunity for a periodic stock-taking of the nation's activities and a consideration of the possibilities the future holds in store for the country. It likewise affords a possibility of calling atten-

tion to new aspects of internal problems such as, for example, access to higher education, woman's place in the national community, and technical and social progress.

The Exhibition is also necessary from the point of view of our country's relations with the rest of the world. On the whole, we have lived on the fringe of big world-shattering events and their consequences. We frequently lack an eye for the future and are in danger of failing to realize the full significance of the changes taking place around us: European integration, the promotion of coloured peoples, aid to countries in the process of development, etc. The National Exhibition will enable us all to become aware of the place our country must take up in a world in the throes of evolution. The Exhibition will reveal Switzerland's community of interests with Europe and the world.

AIMS OF THE NATIONAL EXHIBITION

The Exhibition's aims are the direct outcome of the general ideas expressed above:

- To be an instrument of national cohesion
- To produce an awareness of the new problems
- To stimulate the country's creative activity
- To be, finally, a means of making the country known throughout the world.