

The new president of the Swiss Confederation

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THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION

On 13th December the Swiss Federal Assembly elected Federal Councillor Willy Spuehler as the President for 1963. Traditionally, the new President moves to the top after a year in office as Vice-President. Owing to Federal Councillor Bourgnknecht's illness and subsequent resignation, Federal Councillor Spuehler was elected his successor three months ago and has now become President after an exceptionally short vice-presidential term.

Dr. Willy Spuehler is the third Social-Democratic Federal Councillor — the fourth is Federal Councillor Peter Tschudi — but it is only the second time in the history of our Confederation that a Socialist has been President of the Confederation. Our Cabinet used to consist of members of Liberal conviction, and it was only gradually that candidates with other political ideals were accepted. In 1891 the first Conservative was elected Federal Councillor. In 1929 the first farmer entered the Federal Council in the person of Rudolf Minger, and at last in 1943 the fourth large party, the Socialists, succeeded in getting a representative into the Government. It was Federal Councillor Ernst Nobs who was in office for eight years and according to custom became President for one year during his term of office. In an article in the "Basler Nachrichten" on 13th December 1962, Arnold Fisch recalls the happenings of the early fifties when Federal Councillor Nobs retired and was succeeded by Prof. Max Weber. In 1953 the finance proposals were rejected and Federal Councillor Weber resigned before his turn as Federal President came. No further Socialist got into the Government until 1959, when four new Federal Councillors had to be elected on 17th December — Jean Bourgnknecht, Willy Spuehler, Ludwig von Moos and Hans Peter Tschudi. This explains why Federal Councillor Spuehler is only the second Socialist President.

Dr. Willy Spuehler was born in Zurich on 31st January 1902. He considers himself of working-class stock. But he was privileged to go to university, where he studied Economics. His successful career took him into the Zurich Municipal Government. From 1942 up to his election into the Federal Government he was Minister of Health and Public Economy of Zurich. For seventeen years he was National Councillor and for the last four years previous to his election to the Government he was Councillor of States.

In the Federal Council he is in charge of the General Post Office and the Railways, the department which has recently been re-named Federal Traffic Department (Verkehrsdepartement).

The writer of the article in the "Basler Nachrichten" describes Federal Councillor Spuehler's quiet ways which might give the impression of a passive observer rather than of an active politician. But apparently in spite of his quiet unassuming ways which gave him the title of a "Social-Democratic Lord" he succeeded where others failed in introducing a postal tax reform. No doubt, he will cope successfully with the many representative duties which await him in his new office.

* * *

The New Vice-President of the Confederation is Federal Councillor Ludwig von Moos, who was born on 31st January 1910 at Sachseln (Obwalden) as the eleventh child of the local station-master. He studied Law. He started his political career at an early age and became Councillor of States at 33. As Federal Councillor he is at the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police.

(FOOTNOTE: It is a remarkable coincidence that both the President and the Vice-President of the Confederation have the same birthday: 31st January.)

CULTURAL EVENTS IN SWITZERLAND—JANUARY 1963

Three strange figures which will haunt Basle on 12th January, the "Griffin Bird", the "Lion" and the "Wild Man", bear evidence of the survival of old Swiss folk customs. The "Grand Théâtre" in Geneva, scheduled to reopen in December in new glamour, will not be a repertory theatre in the Swiss tradition, but will resort to short, festive series of guest performances. In January, productions of operas by Richard Wagner and Claude Debussy will be shown in between a Molière play to be performed by the Comédie Française of Paris. Ballets, theatrical groups and orchestras from Vienna, Copenhagen, Stuttgart, New York, Lisbon and London are to guest

perform at several Swiss cities. The Museum of Ethnology in Basle announces a series of exhibitions under the motto "Man and Handicraft"; the Zoological Museum of the University of Zurich, in a special show, calls the attention to "Extinct and Endangered Animals". At Berne, Basle and Schaffhausen the local art shows are being held over into January; Geneva renders homage to Hodler, Lausanne to Henry Bischoff, and the St. Gall Abbey Library exhibits documents relating to the history of the buildings and books of the Monastery. Grindelwald opens the 75th anniversary of its winter season with a "Culinary Fort-night".

[S.N.T.O.]