

In and out of the federal place in Berne

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IN AND OUT OF THE FEDERAL PALACE IN BERNE

The parliamentary winter session started on 3rd December. As usual, the budget of the Confederation for 1963 took a prominent part in the debates. The message covering it filled a respectable three hundred pages and was most informative about all and anything concerning the federal state "household". In some of the general remarks it predicts a slackening of the rate of increase in the economic boom which, unlike in most European industrial countries, is still on the upgrade. The budget is higher by 430 million francs than in the previous year and envisages a surplus of 372 millions.

The Federal Council's last meeting in 1962 took place on 28th December. It was the 88th of the year — three short of the total of 1961. Usually the traditional New Year's Eve Dinner follows the last meeting, but this time it took place the day before. The seven Federal Councillors, the Federal Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor and their wives assembled at the lovely Beatrice-von-Wattenwyl House at the Junkerngasse for this purely social meeting. It must have been a welcome change to leave all the worries of high office behind and relax. Soon enough the new year will bring new burdens. The Federal Council has been newly balanced through the loss of Federal Councillor Bourgknecht and the addition of Federal Councillor Bonvin. Let us hope history will establish the change as one of benefit to the country in the trying times ahead.

In the morning of New Year's Day, one of the great public holidays in Switzerland, the traditional reception at the Federal Palace took place, as usual a very picturesque spectacle. The new President of the Confederation, Bundesrat Spuehler, received, for him the first time, the delegates of the Bernese authorities and the Diplomatic Corps. According to an old custom, the Governments of the Canton and Town of Berne arrived ahead of the others. They drove up in six open landaus, each drawn by two white horses, with livried coachmen and footmen in attendance. Then followed the first black limousines of the diplomats. Their Doyen, the Apostolic Nuncio, dressed in a scarlet red Roman coat, was the first to offer his congratulations to the new Federal President. According to strict protocol and unlike for many years, it was not the French but the Belgian Ambassador to come next. There was one Ambassadress, Madame Bodil Begtrup of Denmark. Typical of the changes in the Diplomatic Corps, there was only one Minister, the representative of the Principality of Monaco, followed by the first of the *Chargés d'Affaires* Prince Henry of Lichtenstein. Another woman diplomat was the *Chargée d'Affaires* of Bolivia. Of the 76 diplo-

matic Missions (57 Embassies, 18 Legations and one Nunciature) in Berne, 58 were represented. Incidentally, in 1945 there were 33 Legations and one Nunciature) Seventeen of the present representatives accredited to the Confederation are resident outside Switzerland.

The coming and going at the Federal Palace presented a most striking show. The *tenue* ranged from full dress suits to smart military uniforms and colourful national costumes. The representatives of Saudi Arabia reminded the many onlookers on the Bundesplatz of fairy tale splendour.

The Federal Horticultural Establishment had provided beautiful floral decorations: over one thousand plants and eight hundred cut flowers were used, salmon coloured Lorraine begonias, starry-blossomed red poinsettias, fabulous Swiss carnations of all shades from white to dark red. The biggest attraction was a magnificent display of huge azaleas in the Federal Council Chamber.

Talking of decorations reminds me of an item which I gleaned from the "Basler Nachrichten" of 17th December. It concerned the Christmas decorations of the Spital- and Markgasse in Berne. Thinking ahead, the decorators decided to invest Fr.50,000 in contemporary lanterns to be fixed to the existing street lights which would not only do for Christmas, but for other special occasions as well, as the writer in the "Basler Nachrichten" put it, a combined symbol of Christmas Angel, Helvetia and Easter Hare. Unfortunately the final product was a flop, the lanterns resembling women's petticoats. Fun was poked for a week and then the decorations were withdrawn — proof of the influence of public opinion, but also of great courage on the part of the organisers to admit a mistake.

Finally back to the Federal Palace. According to established custom, the new President of the Confederation speaks to the Swiss people over the radio on New Year's Day. President Spuehler brought greetings and best wishes from the Federal Council. He reflected on how the start of a new year invariably made us count our blessings, this time even more so since 1962 had brought tension and danger of war.

He said it was a time for thanksgiving, not only privately, but also in a wider circle. We had reason to be grateful to many, to workers in the public services, teachers of our children, but also to wives and mothers whose work in the home was often underestimated. He felt we should also be grateful that our country was thriving, and that peace on the labour front was reigning.

Nevertheless we should not forget the other side of the medal — bad consequences of the continuing economic boom and we should consult our consciences whether we could not as individuals do something to prevent excesses in speculation, rise of cost of living and other unhealthy development. "It is not easy" President Spuehler said, "but it will have to be tried, seriously and with good will."

We need unity all the more as the new year would bring to the fore the vexed question of European integration. "We Swiss", he confirmed, "feel ourselves culturally and historically as part of Europe and know well that our fate is tied up with hers. We are therefore ready to open our doors to a larger economic European unity. But we cannot give up the principle of our neutrality, and the basis of our federalistic democracy which allows the citizen to decide all major cantonal and federal matters by way of plebiscite." The speaker referred to the seeming inevitability of big happenings in face of which man felt powerless. Where the strength of the individual was weak, let him combine with others. That applied to men as well as nations, whether in trade, science or help to others. He particularly referred to the Swiss abroad who would be of invaluable assistance in common international endeavours. Bundespräsident Spuehler concluded with the assurance that by accepting our daily duties, conscientiously carrying out our work and by an understanding attitude towards our neighbours we would find the way to tackle the larger tasks in the country and the world.

(Partly based on news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

NEW AGREEMENTS

An important new agreement on social security has been arrived at with Italy. It covers questions of insurance for invalidity, old age, dependents, industrial accidents, family allowances to agricultural workers and small farmers.

An additional clause concerning widows' pensions has been incorporated into the agreement on social security between Denmark and Switzerland.

In June 1961 the Confederation and the Federal German Republic signed an agreement regarding compensation for Swiss Victims of Nazi persecution. This agreement has now become valid and the German Government is paying ten million Reichsmarks to be used at the discretion of the Federal Council within the framework of the agreement.

The agreement between Switzerland and Chile regarding the use of Swiss banking credits for financing deliveries of Swiss investment goods to Chile has been extended to 1st December 1963.

From 1st January payments to and from Greece are freely transferable according to a new agreement between the Confederation and the Hellenic Government.

The Federal Council has empowered the Swiss Observer at UNO to sign the international coffee convention which was the outcome of the conference of 58 countries under UN auspices last summer. The agreement brings Switzerland no measurable obligations but could be of importance from the angle of Technical Assistance to underdeveloped countries.

According to recent negotiations no more visas are required for Swiss citizens travelling to Bolivia and Cyprus for three months or less.

[A.T.S.]

NEWS FROM THE FEDERAL COURT OF JUSTICE IN LAUSANNE

At the end of November four Federal Judges handed in their resignation to the President of the National Council to take effect from 31st December.

Dr. Eduard Arnold was born in 1895 and is a citizen of Lucerne. A former National Councillor (Socialist), he was elected a Federal Judge in 1942.

Mr. Fernando Pedrini from Faido was born in 1898. He practised law at Faido and in Locarno. He was on the Ticino Cantonal Council (Radical) and became a member of the Federal Insurance Tribunal in 1931. He was in office as Federal Judge for twelve years.

Dr. Karl Dannegger, citizen of Morat, was born in 1895. He was a member of the Farmers' Party and held various posts in the Cantonal Courts. He was President of the Cantonal High Court of Berne. In 1954 he was elected a Federal Judge.

The fourth Federal Judge who retired at the end of the year is the Socialist Dr. Fritz Bachtler.

In their place four new members of the Federal Court of Justice were elected by the Federal Assembly (Parliament) on 13th December. It is interesting to note that 220 voting papers were distributed, 218 of which were returned, four of them blank. The absolute majority which had to be reached was therefore 108. Dr. Harold Huber (Socialist) had 192 votes, Dr. Rolando Forni (Radical) 181. Dr. Paul Lemp (Farmers' Party) received support from 167 and Dr. Werner Dubach (Socialist) 156 from M.P.'s. Other votes cast were 22.

Dr. Huber was born in 1912, a citizen of Winterthur. He worked in the lawyer's firm of his father which he carried on after the old gentleman's death. He started his political career at the age of thirty and joined the National Council in 1947. He is well known as a lecturer on legal subjects.

Dr. Forni is the youngest Federal Judge at 38, a citizen of Lugano. 1954 he became President of the Court of Lugano and eight years later High Court Judge of the Ticino.

Dr. Lemp was born in 1908 and hails from Attiswil (Berne). He was Secretary at the Bernese High Court for four years and since 1942 has acted as Clerk to the Federal Court in Lausanne.

Lastly, Dr. Dubach who is 58 and was born at Windisch, the son of an engine driver. In 1934 he joined the Cantonal Council of Aargau and six years later he entered the Cantonal Administration. He was elected High Court Judge of the Aargau in 1952 and has been its President since 1961.

Another election the Federal Assembly had to perform was that of the President of the Federal Court of Justice for 1963 and 1964. Federal Judge Dr. Franz Faessler from Appenzell-Innerrhoden was chosen as President, and Federal Judge Dr. Albert Comment, a Liberal, as Vice-President.

The new President is 64 and the first citizen of his Canton to join the Federal Court (1942). For the last period of office he was Vice-President.

The new deputy Federal Judge Dr. Comment originates from Courgenay (Jura Bernois) and is 69. He has been a member of the Court since 1942.

[A.T.S.]