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“THE STATE OF THE CONFEDERATION”

THE FEDERAL COUNCIL REPORTS

(Part one)

The Federal Constitution demands that the Federal Council (i.e. the Government) report every year on its activities during the previous twelve months. The report is to give a picture of the state of the Confederation at home and abroad. Up to now, this statement was limited to the work of the individual Federal Departments and did not produce any general synthesis of conceptions and propositions. Acceding to the demand made during recent years by Parliament and the Press, the Federal Council has, for the first time and by the way of an experiment, issued a special *exposé* on the “State of the Confederation”. This document of fifteen printed pages was published early in April and deals with the situation at home as well as Switzerland’s position in the world.

The Federal Council stresses the need to find an adequate and workable form of political existence for the small and neutral state that is Switzerland. The following is a summary of the report.

The post-war epoch is obviously nearing its end and mankind faces a new era with new problems. The immediate past is characterised by three things: economic reconstruction, the formation of political blocks with the background of “atomic balance” and the end of colonial power. A new kind of nationalism is arising. The world is no longer dominated by two great powers; pluralistic diversities more and more determine the political arena.

Switzerland confronts the changed world with perpetual neutrality. This policy is supported by the Swiss people’s readiness for self-defence, as well as by considerable spending for defence purposes by the Confederation. Switzerland’s armed neutrality and her policy of non-alignment resolutely adhered to, serves more and more as a basis for active participation in international life. Though Switzerland is not yet a member of United Nations, she takes an active part in its many specialised agencies. Repeatedly she has supported actions for peace.

As a country extremely dependent on the exchange of goods and services, Switzerland has very close relations with the world, particularly with her European neighbours. Every initiative to reorganise international trade is of immediate and vital importance to her.

Seen collectively, Switzerland’s policy is characterised by three permanent aims: preservation of her independence, readiness for international co-operation; fostering of inner stability, securing of markets and imports for Swiss economy; as well as ever-ready adaptation of means to the changing world situation.

On the “outer front”, Swiss policy at present faces three sets of problems: her relationship with Europe and the Atlantic Community, with the Communist world and with the developing countries. Every contemplation of the relationship between Switzerland and the rest of Europe leads straight to the difficult problems of the future of the Occident. Economic measures taken by other nations compelled Switzerland to take up a position; first the setting up of the European Economic Community — which Switzerland did not join — followed by the creation of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) of which she is a member. Thus our country has to make a re-appraisal of her position again and again when faced with new developments.

The Federal Council refers to the complex situation of the Atlantic Community. It has been shown that such a community cannot be fully realised simply by having a federation of European states as counterpart to the U.S.A. The European question has become more acute by breaking the limited framework in which it has been treated hitherto; this for historical, political and economic reasons. The immediate problem in this connection is the ever-widening economic rift between the “Six” and the “Seven”, and Switzerland with her close economic ties to European countries, will have to show a marked and active interest in the efforts towards a speedy closing of the gap between EFTA and the Common Market.

The extensive customs and tariffs negotiations of the “Kennedy Round” could, if successful, result in a considerable lessening of the contrasts and in better trade relationships not only between Europe and America, but above all inside Europe.

The Federal Council refers to the correct diplomatic relations Switzerland keeps with the countries of the Communist world. Her statute of permanent neutrality requires her to have varied representation in all parts of the globe. Trade with Eastern countries is not very extensive, though it cannot be denied that the Eastern European countries were at one time very valued trade partners of Switzerland.

Switzerland considers it her duty to contribute to the economic, technical and cultural development of the new nations. Technical Assistance is today in the centre of activity of many international organisations. Switzerland makes an increasing contribution every year to the programme of technical development of United Nations. But as ever, bilateral schemes in Switzerland’s assistance to developing nations are of the greatest importance. Well

chosen, well thought-out and financially stable individual projects is the type of help which corresponds best to the Swiss character and the limited resources of money and personnel available to the country.

Swiss foreign policy is marked by its character of permanent vigilance, coupled with the determination to test and prove again and again the value of Swiss principles of state under the ever changing problems of contemporary history.

(By courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

(The Federal Council's report regarding home affairs will be published in the next issue of the "Swiss Observer".)

IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF FRIBOURG

Fribourg is no doubt one of the most beautiful old Swiss towns. It is not surprising, therefore, that four volumes of "Die Kunstdenkmäler der Schweiz" are dedicated to this Gothic city in the Uechtland. The two first volumes dealt with the considerable number of fine church buildings of Fribourg, and the third volume on the many beautiful private buildings is still in preparation. The fourth, "La Ville de Fribourg" by Marcel Strub deals with the splendid lay-out of the old town with its fortifications, fountains and public buildings. The "Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte" which is responsible for publishing the complete works (Birkhäuser Basle), has issued the Fribourg volume as the fiftieth in the series.

But it is not only the town of Fribourg, but also much of the countryside of the Canton which deserves mention. Already in 1811, Madame de Staël discovered that "il y a, dans ce canton, une chaleur qui vous va au cœur et qui vous soulange comme un baume. Je n'ai jamais rien vu de plus simple et de plus beau". In the Gruyère still reigns silence, peace and sincerity, says Maurice Métral. "C'est là, en effet, que s'enferme encore toute la chaleur d'un pays qui continue d'aimer une même existence dans la bonne tiédeur des souvenirs".

The last-but-one volume on the findings of the federal census on 1st December 1960 was published early this year. It deals with Fribourg. We learn from it that the population in the 284 Communes in the Canton of Fribourg increased by a mere 0.3% between 1950 and 1960 to 159,194. 214 Communes — all of them rural and small with inhabitants from 1,232 at Unterwistenlach to 33 at Villars-d'Avry — showed a decrease of up to 37.7% at La Magne (Glâne) which now only counts 43 inhabitants. Villarsels/Marly lost 35.8% and counts 52 inhabitants and Villangeaux 36.1% and now has a population of 39. In only a score or so of the Fribourg Communes can an increase be registered of more than 10%, mostly suburb Communes of the capital. Its population has gone up by 12.3% to 32,583. 46 Communes in the Canton count fewer than 100 inhabitants, of which 5 with under 50. The smallest Commune in the whole of Switzerland is still Illens (Sarine) whose population decreased by one in the ten years under review and counted ten on 1st December 1960. Apart from the capital, Bulle and Düdingen are the two largest Communes with 5,983 (+13.9%) and 4,284 (+5.3%) heads of population respectively.

Four out of the seven districts show a decline in the number of inhabitants: Glâne (with Romont), now 14,273, Veveyse (with Châtel St. Denis) 7,802, Broye (with Estavayer) 14,742 and Gruyère (with Bulle) 26,061. The other three increased as follows: Sarine (with Fribourg) to 53,126, Lac (with Morat) 18,130 and Singine to 25,060.

FOREIGN ORDERS PLACED WITH SWISS INDUSTRY

The British Petroleum Company (BP) has ordered three gas turbines developing a power of 3,000 kW each from Sulzer Bros., Ltd., in Winterthur. These machines, which will be used to drive generators for the service plant at the company's oil fields in Libya, must be able to work on either natural gas or fuel oil as required.

The Bell Co. Ltd. Machine Works at Kriens-Lucerne, have received an order from Finland for the whole plant for an asbestos factory, capable of producing 150 tons of asbestos sheets a day.

[O.S.E.C.]

Between 1850 and 1950, the increase in the whole Canton amounted to 58,804 and to a bare 500 in the following ten years. On the day of the census, 4% were foreigners, viz. 6,371 Italian, 1,134 French, 929 German 230 Austrian, 23 of Liechtenstein nationality and 714 other aliens.

In 1850, 86.3% of the inhabitants were Roman Catholic, and the percentage is the same today. This also applies to the Protestant communities. Languages, too, show little change, and French is still the mother tongue of 63.4% of the inhabitants. 34% speak German and 1.7% Italian.

On 26th April it was seventy-three years since Fribourg University was founded. Like other Swiss universities, it has to cope with more and more students. After Neuchâtel, Fribourg has had the fastest increase in the number of students, 2,285 today, and double the number of ten years ago. Two institutes of the University of Fribourg are unique, its Institute on Philosophies of Eastern Europe and the Institute on Automation. A new building to house the faculty of science is badly needed. Other desirable improvements are better housing and feeding facilities for students, increase of salaries for lecturers — the lowest in Switzerland — and additional lecturers. 40% of the students are foreigners from some sixty countries. Some of these statements were made at the *dies academicus* in November when a doctorate of law was awarded to Federal Councillor von Moos, last year's President of the Confederation. A few days earlier, Federal Councillor Bonvin had addressed Fribourg students. Prince Franz Joseph II of Liechtenstein, Honorary Senator of the University, paid an official visit in January, and in February, Dr. Wolfgang Schmitz, Austrian Minister of Finance, a former student, visited the University of Fribourg.

On 21st March, the Fribourg Institute met under the chairmanship of the Fribourg historian and author Gonzague de Reynold. This organisation devotes its activities to the arts, literature, music, history, the theatre and soon also to science. It is also associated with the German-Fribourg Working Party. De Reynold has recently been awarded the insignia of a Commander of the Legion of Honour of France by the President of the French Republic. He had already been a Knight of this Order since 1922.

The annual accounts of the Canton of Fribourg showed a surplus; revenue amounted to Fr. 101,036,923.— and expenditure to Fr. 100,903,625.—. The budget for 1965 visualises a deficit of 3.1 million francs.