

Parliamentary autumn session

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PARLIAMENTARY AUTUMN SESSION

Traditionally, the Swiss Parliament assembles for their autumn session after the Federal Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving (Monday, 16th September). In both Chambers, sharp words were used to condemn the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. The big debate on foreign policy took place in the second week — the first was almost completely taken up by the seventh revision of the Old-Age and Dependents' Insurance (AHV). This is being fully dealt with in the report on the front page of this issue. Other business in the first week concerned the eight "Mirage" report, and the National Council accepted it. The Council also accepted the 77th report on economic measures the Confederation had taken *vis-à-vis* other countries. No important changes were reported with regard to European integration. The Developing countries, said Federal Councillor Schaffner in his *exposé*, were beginning to realise that help and assistance had to be on a reciprocal basis. He doubted whether the Common Market would now invite new members, but specialised agreements were being made, such as in the Kennedy Round, also with regard to cheese and coffee, and new agreements for the textile and chemical industries. Switzerland would do everything in her power to make use of pragmatic solutions and of any form of co-operation. In answer to an Interpellation, *Bundesrat* Schaffner stated firmly that the 46-hour week could not yet be reduced to 45 on account of shortage of labour and the danger of too many foreign workers. The Council of States worked on the law regarding administrative control, procedure and judicature. (*Verwaltungskontrolle, -verfahren* and *-gerichtsbarkeit*), a great step forward in preserving the personal freedom of the citizen. The Council also agreed to an increase by 90% to Fr.190,000 to the "Ligia Romontscha" to keep up the fourth national language.

A Czech choir on tour abroad serenaded the Swiss Parliament on the second day of the session, a most impressive demonstration.

The extraordinary session which a young Basle National Councillor had demanded when the Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia, had not materialised because he did not manage to collect the necessary 50 signatures from M.P.s. But the two Foreign Affairs Commissions and the officers of the two Chambers had consulted with the Government, and a debate was fixed for 24th September in the National Council and for 25th in the Council of States. In both Chambers, Federal Councillor Spuehler made a statement regarding the Government's attitude. In the Small Chamber, all the 44 representatives signed a declaration, whilst over two dozen National Councillors took part in a lively debate in *their* Chamber (over 5½ hours). Most speakers agreed with the Government on the following points: Censure of the brutal attack, which corresponded to Swiss public opinion; a break-off in diplomatic relations with the Eastern Block would not have helped either Switzerland or the suffering people behind the Iron Curtain; Swiss foreign policy remained one of neutrality and solidarity and allowed, as in the Czech case, a generous policy of asylum; with her military preparations, Switzerland seems to be on the right path — passive resistance would be right only as a last resort. Speakers also agreed that the signing of the non-proliferation pact should be put off for the time being. There were some small voices of dissent, such as the demand for "splendid isolation".

The debate was not only broadcast, but televised for the first time. The "Blick" correspondent was suspended for "improperly" reporting the debate — a measure taken by the President of the Council against the individual parliamentary editor, but not against the paper itself.

Other business of the second week concerned the law regarding ground planning and right of ownership (*Bodenrecht*), but since there are considerable differences between the two Chambers, the matter will have to be taken up again in the December session.

National Councillor Duerrenmatt (Basle), himself a journalist, asked for a Press which should be economically viable, independent, and devoted to a high level of integrity. This Interpellation was readily accepted by Federal Councillor von Moos. The Federal Council is not willing to extend TV advertising, nor to introduce it in broadcasting.

The last week of the session ended on 4th October. The main business was the debate on the future of the Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPUL) which is to be taken over by the Confederation. At present it is run by the Canton of Vaud which is to receive 11.5m. francs. To this comes the cost of land in order to extend the Institute. Thus, the *Suisse Romande* will have a technical university equivalent to the ETH in Zurich. Once completed, 6,000 students should have room there.

Financial levelling out between the Cantons was another item on the agenda of the last week. There are still "strong" and "weak" Cantons, and the proposal is to find a better way of equalising the differences. The Federal Administration was criticised for introducing computers, but the majority was of opinion that the planned automation of the Postal Cheque Service of the PTT by means of a giant computer was an excellent way to rationalise. Without opposition, the National Council agreed to a new revision of the *Erwerbsersatzordnung* (compensation for loss of business) including an average increase of 50% in compensation. Far more difficult was to get agreement to create one or two parachute grenadier companies. In the Council of States, the Armament Programme II 1968 was accepted without opposition, granting a credit of 460 million francs. For military buildings, centres and shooting ranges alone, 46m. are wanted. The Small Chamber also agreed to an increase in salary for the Federal Councillors, the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Judges.

The December Session will begin on 2nd of the month and last three weeks.

(Based on news received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse, "Basler Nachrichten" and "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt".)

COLOURED TV IN SWITZERLAND

On 1st October, coloured television was introduced officially in Switzerland. The three transmissions in German, French and Italian were welcomed by Federal Councillor Bonvin with an address. Six hours a week to begin with, and that will be extended later. The German PAL method enables all black-and-white-only sets to receive coloured programmes, too, but without colour. Switzerland is the fifth Western European country to introduce Colour TV. Every month, the number of TV subscribers rises by several thousand. The total is now one million, of which almost 700,000 are in German-speaking Switzerland. Radio licence holders number roughly 1¼ million.

(A.T.S.)