

"Overhaul" of the Constitution urged

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industrialisation-patent legislation, banking, aviation, copyrights, trade etc. has to be confederal and the Constitution will no longer need to specify in which particular field the Confederation is entitled to legislate, but rather specify what is left for cantonal legislation. The trend is obviously towards a more unified and centralised country and this ought to be reflected in a Constitution which, as it stands now, pays an unnecessary lip-service to the autonomy of the cantons.

Articles 51 and 52 (which follow immediately two articles guaranteeing freedom of creed and conscience and free exercise of worship) ban the Jesuits from Switzerland and can clearly be reconsidered. Article 51 says: "The order of the Jesuits and affiliated societies may not be admitted to any part of Switzerland and their members are forbidden any sort of activity in church or school. This prohibition may be extended, by means of a federal decree, to other religious orders whose activities are dangerous for the state or disturb the peace among the different creeds". It is difficult to see, nowadays, how the activities of religious orders can be dangerous to the state! In the same vein, Article 52 says that "The establishment of new convents or religious orders and the re-establishment of those which have been suppressed are forbidden". Another surprising article is No. 12. It insists, in four paragraphs, that no officer of the Swiss army, member of federal or cantonal authorities and legislative assemblies may accept pensions, allowances, titles, gifts or decorations from foreign governments. Infringement of this prohibition shall entail the loss of mandate or office. However, the Swiss having no civil distinctions of their own, it is hard to understand why a worthy National Councillor may not accept an O.B.E. or the title of "officier de la légion d'honneur"!

These were impressions derived from a first reading of our Constitution. As the following article shows, they were far from exhaustive. In fact, the only area where I appear to have reached the same conclusions as the Geneva committee is that relating to the fate of the Jesuits in Switzerland . . .

'OVERHAUL' OF THE CONSTITUTION URGED

The committee set up in February 1968 by the Canton of Geneva to make proposals for a revised Federal constitution has now submitted a 60-page report to the cantonal authorities.

The members of the committee were drawn from different sections of Genevese society and included political, legal and university representatives.

Among its very exhaustive proposals, the committee has come out in favour of the suppression of all forms of religious discrimination, universal suffrage (i.e. the federal vote for women), an increase in the number of Federal Councillors, the creation of

state secretaries in addition to Federal Councillors and nominated by them, the establishment of an Economic and Social Consultative Council.

As regards military service and compulsory duty, the committee proposes a new decree on the principle that "All Switzerland is expected to share in the country's defense."

Conscientious objectors should undertake some alternative service and women should also be expected to contribute to the general defense in some manner short of joining the army.

The committee advocates free education in the primary and secondary grades and the right to social security.

It also wants all fundamental rights accorded to all inhabitants of the country, irrespective of nationality, with the exception, of course, of political rights reserved for Swiss citizens.

The committee wishes to see Swiss expatriates have a say in certain fundamental questions, such as whether Switzerland should join the UN or enter the Common Market, and wants them to have a voice in the framing of a new constitution.

It also says that the naturalization procedures should be simplified and speeded up to encourage applications from desirable parties.

On financial questions the Geneva committee feels that the best solution would be for the Confederation to handle indirect, and the cantons direct, taxation, but the financial burdens on the Confederation and the diminishing customs revenue, the committee realizes, makes this solution difficult.

The committee has no hesitation in advocating that the federal type of constitution should continue.

It believes that the revision of the constitution should be carried out in stages, but the most delicate questions such as the vote for women and religious rights should be dealt with first.

(Weekly Tribune, Geneva)

SWISS NEWS

'GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT' —BANKS APPLY BRAKES

As from the beginning of this month almost all Swiss banks have limited the annual expansion rate of their domestic credits to between 9 and 11.5%.

This move is the content of a so-called "gentlemen's agreement" between most of the country's banks—with balance sums exceeding Sfr. 20 million—on the one side and the Swiss national bank on the other.

Though it had been feared that the agreement would be scotched by the failure of too many banks to give their signature or to give it unconditionally, it has proved that all but a small

percentage of the banks in question will now respect the treaty's provisions. Among those who have refused to participate, incidentally, is the important Zurich-based Migros bank, the banking division of the Migros co-operative federation.

The effecting of this new credit control, the first since the end of the Swiss anti-overheating programme some two years ago, shows the awareness of the national bank and almost the entire banking community that some sort of new dampening measure is due in the light of recent acceleration in Switzerland's economic upswing.

The Banker's Association points out particularly that the voluntary move was made before the Central Bank fell back on any of its legal prerogatives—the bank rate and the Lombard rate, for example, remain at their July, 1967, levels of 30% and 3.75% respectively.

This does not mean, however, that no bank rate increase is now likely, since the Swiss level is so far below the European average that a rise would seem only natural, even taking into account that the bank rate has much less significance in Switzerland than elsewhere.

Whatever the case, the voluntary agreement has already had its first follow-up. On Friday the National Council's commission charged with studying reform of the National Bank Act recommended by 18 votes to five, in the light of the "gentlemen's agreement," that the law should not be revised at this stage.

While the Federal Council would have preferred new control regulations to be anchored in the expansion of legislative rights for the national bank, it seems certain that parliament will follow the commission's recommendation.

The agreement, though it precludes the suggested National Bank Act amendments regarding minimum reserves—which the Bankers' Association considers "inexpedient in view of the banks' limited liquidity"—is generally expected to be the first step, if not a very great one, towards a toning-down of the new and potentially problematical Swiss boom.

2,500 MERCY MISSIONS AND LOTS OF UNPAID BILLS

The Swiss Air Rescue Guard has flown its 2,500th mercy flight since its reorganization only nine years ago.

The latest rescue was carried out in Canton Valais, where a mountaineer suffering from pneumonia was picked up by helicopter from an Alpine hut and flown to a hospital.

The Air Rescue Guard—which last year alone saved more than 400 sick and injured people—recently launched a nationwide fund-raising campaign to help finance its voluntary activities.