

Swiss news

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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 cooperative 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.

The organization receives no federal subsidies and few cantonal contributions.

And less than half its bills are paid, because the people concerned have no money, or either forget or even refuse to pay.

But the Air Rescue Guard always carries out mercy flights whenever its services are needed—and without ever asking whether or not its costs will be covered.

(Weekly Tribune, Geneva)

A WINSTON CHURCHILL LIBRARY OPENED IN ZURICH

A Winston Churchill Library, founded by the Winston Churchill Foundation, has been opened in the Swissair Building of Zurich. The library, containing 1600 volumes, is accessible to the public and offers works by the great statesman, studies devoted to him, on his contemporaries and the history of the England of his day. The number of books possessed by the library will be increasing in future. Among its rarities, we can mention the "British Gazette" edited by Churchill while he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, recorded speeches, including an original recording of the famous speech he delivered in Zurich on September 19th, 1946. The Swiss Winston Churchill Foundation has been founded to perpetuate Churchill's memory. It is presided by National Councillor M. W. Bretscher.

(A.T.S.)

MOTOR COLUMBUS ESTABLISHES ITSELF IN LONDON

Motor Columbus Ag, the engineering firm from Baden, and the American firm Burns and Roe Inc. have founded a common subsidiary in London. It is called Burmot Engineering Consultants Ltd. and its prime purpose is to gather and exploit know-how in the field of nuclear engineering from both Europe and America. The subsidiary will be staffed by qualified British experts who, with the informational backing of Motor Columbus and Burns and Roe, will be in a privileged position for dispensing information to their customers over practically the whole spectrum of nuclear technology.

Both the Swiss and the American firm are internationally reputed as engineering consultants. Motor Columbus was founded in 1895, employs 600 persons and is specialised in energy production.

(A.T.S.)

FEDERAL VOTING ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The population of the whole country have been called to vote, on September the 14th, on its position

concerning the Confederation's responsibility in regional planning. It was asked to support the following addition to the Constitution: "The Confederation will enact principles applicable to the development plans to be executed by the Cantons in view of securing the most sensible use of our soil and a rational occupation of the land."

The various parties have been debating the amendment, in its principle and details: a constitutional text on a field that has hitherto been absent from the Constitution. In fact, regional planning has been carried out both by the Cantons and the Confederation for an untold number of years without any constitutional regulation. Its need had been felt, however, because private interests, personal influences, lack of entente among the Cantons and Confederal empiricism had all but too often led to negative results for the communities concerned. The solution arrived at is distinctly federalist in spirit: the responsibility for regional planning rests with the Cantons, but the Confederation acquires a co-ordinating, legislative and inspirational role in this vital national activity.

(A.T.S.)

WHY THE EDITOR OF "BLICK" WAS SENTENCED

In November of last year, the chief editor of "Blick" was sentenced to two weeks jail, to pay 8000 francs costs and 6000 francs damages awarded to the plaintiff, a woman reporter working for "Bild" and living in Munich.

Cause for the trial was an article that had been published in "Blick" entitled "Blonde Marianne—Black Moïse" intimating that the former president of the Congo, Moïse Tschombe president of the Congo, Moïse Tschombe, had skipped an important session at the United Nations to make a trip to Munich and see the blonde reporter. Mr. Tschombe had allegedly been interested in her ever since she had produced a series on the Congo that had appeared in America.

The jury found that this publication had constituted an injury to the honour of both the ex-president and the journalist: the former because he was a married man, the latter because it had been implied that she was carried away by love affairs in the exercise of her duty as a reporter. There could have been no doubt that, for the average reader of this article the reporter had actually been Tschombe's mistress. The defendant had neglected the crudest journalistic precautions in producing his story and had not been worried as to whether it had the slightest truth.

(A.T.S.)

THE BONJOUR REPORT IS TO BE PUBLISHED

The Swiss Federal Government had given Professor Edgar Bonjour permis-

sion to publish the report on Swiss foreign policy during the Second World War that it commissioned him to write seven years ago. But the Government says it accepts no responsibility for the work.

Professor Bonjour, a respected historian best known for his three-volume work on Swiss neutrality, delivered his manuscript to the Cabinet earlier this year.

He was commissioned to write the work after several books had appeared in Switzerland and other countries about the role played by Switzerland during the last war.

The truth or otherwise of these books could not be checked because the documents in official files are not yet open to the public.

To set the record straight, the Government asked Professor Bonjour to write the report and allowed him access to the files. It did not, however, promise that it would be published.

The Government's decision not to undertake responsibility for the work—although it has not asked for any changes or deletions to be made in it—has caused some surprise in Bern.

The official explanation is that it would not be right for the Government to give official backing to the book unless it had been checked by other academics or by the Cabinet itself.

Also the work, which Professor Bonjour wrote in German, would have to be translated into French and possibly also Italian at government expense if it were an official document.

It is also pointed out that the Government has to give formal permission for Professor Bonjour to publish the book himself, because he was able to compile it with the help of secret documents.

Professor Bonjour is now expected to publish the book as a continuation of his series of volumes on Swiss neutrality.

Publication will be eagerly awaited by the Swiss public as well as by many foreign friends of Switzerland who have read contradictory accounts of Swiss Government actions and attitudes during the last war.

(Weekly Tribune, Geneva)

FRANCE OWES 150 MILLION FRANCS TO THE VALAIS

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Napoleon has reminded the inhabitants of Bourg-St-Pierre of a debt of 45334.90 gold francs contracted by the Emperor. With actual interest rates, this sum would have swollen to 150 million of today's Swiss francs.

This debt was an unpaid bill for the pulling down of 2000 trees, the cost of 80 unreturned stoves used by the Emperor's troops, the hire of mules for six francs a day and of villagers for three francs a day to help lug the French army's material across the St. Bernard pass.