

Comment

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Telegrams: Paperwyse Stock London
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fool about with it in a vain attempt to draw a sound from its strings on the wrong side. Another one was to sit a little too far from a piano and draw the piano nearer to the stool instead of moving the stool.

These pranks always appeared simple. Yet, without Grock's comic genius it was impossible for anyone to raise the same hilarity. Grock worked on his tricks for long. They took years of perfecting. Many of them just came by accident. The stool and the piano classic first happened when a piano and stool had been inadequately positioned on the stage, and when Grock found it more convenient to displace the piano owing to the presence of a carpet under his stool. Laughter broke out in the theatre and this was the birth of a new gag.

One day the seat of the chair upon which he was performing collapsed and Grock fell to the floor in a shower of laughter. He got back on the chair, somewhat taken aback, jumped and un-

accountably landed in a yoga position atop the chair's back. This was the accidental creation of an acrobatic trick which Grock alone could perform.

At 67, Grock could still do the trick! He was still active on the sawdust, on and off, until his last appearance in Berlin in 1954. He then retired in his villa at Oneglia, Italy, and died on 14th July, 1959. He was an accomplished acrobat, a proficient musician and a comic of genius. He had the equipment of a complete clown, able to thrill both Circus and Music Hall audiences. He was probably the greatest show-business star Switzerland has ever produced.

COMMENT

WHAT THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS MEAN

The 38th legislature of the Swiss Confederation is drawing to an end and on 31st October the country's legislative will be re-appointed by the people. What are the tendencies represented at the National Council? Every shade of attitude ranging from conservatism to radicalism has its reflections in the electoral programmes of the parties. There is, predictably, a right, a centre and a left. At the extreme right one finds Schwarzenbach's National Action, the Independent Republicans, the Agrarians and cantonal fringe movements such as the Vigilants in Geneva. More squarely on the right wing are the well established Liberals, imbued with a philosophy of hard work and unimpeded prosperity. The Radicals are somewhat to the right of Centre.

The Christian Democrats no longer consider themselves as conservatives and are to be situated to the left of Centre as a result of their new programme. The Socialists are, naturally, on the Left, followed by the Labour, or Communist Party, which now have representatives from Geneva

and Vaud and which have been extracted from the Ghetto in which they once were. At the extreme left are all the proponents of an overhaul of society. However they refuse to play the electoral game from the outset.

All these parties have their line of action. There are alliances and campaigns with the aim of pulling more political weight. Each party shall, depending on its financial means, advertise in all available media, its advantages as the elections get nearer and the voter will have to inform himself diligently in order to make up his mind on the candidate he will choose. The coming elections are the nearest thing in Switzerland to general elections. With this difference, however, that the Executive will not automatically change. The continued term of office of federal councillors depends indirectly only on the outcome of the elections to the National Council. The composition of the new Federal Assembly will certainly have a bearing on the future choice of federal councillors and it is possible that a new composition of Parliament will lead to changes in the Federal Council. It will be eventually elected (it stays in office for four years) but the practice is to select again those federal councillors wishing to stay in office.

The Federal Council is not elected by the *people* and, in contrast to the practise of other countries, the electorate is not called to a kind of national confidence vote placing a party leader in power.

Whatever the course of action elaborated by each party, there seems to be a political law which says that the variety of options presented at elections tend to be smothered by the hard realities of power. Basically, it is *economics* that tend to narrow the margin of choice and, whatever the policies of the ruling parties, they are soon confronted with an heritage and economic constraints which deprive them of freedom of action. This is more apparent in Great Britain where,

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for example, the loyalty to certain economic principles, apparent in the case of Upper Clyde, is mirrored by the circumstances as callous dogmatism.

The basic options remaining to Parliament are very simple. They are whether to instal a nationalised or planned economy, which is what the Left is supposed to want, or the maintenance and the "optimisation" of the present economic order, which is what the conservative parties want. No party represented at Parliament has yet asked for a suppression of the armed forces or neutrality, so that two other options are out of the list. The question of foreign labour and the eventuality of forced repatriation is the other great topic facing the country. But in whatever way the people will vote, it cannot be realistically expected that Parliament will be dosed in a way to allow the close shave of June 1970, to be repeated within its precincts or anywhere near it. The people will always be more pro-Schwarzenbach than their elected representatives. If they want to throw out the foreigner, they will only achieve this through a referendum.

Indeed, the referendum offers them far more power than elections to the National Council every four years. In Britain the only non-local political powers offered to the population are irregularly-spaced general elections whereas in Switzerland they are administrative necessities. There are

more opportunities for citizens to choose a national course in the referendum than in appointing a legislative slanting towards one of two solutions to a basic economic option.

The multiplicity of parties also tends to diminish the political consequence of the elections to the National Council. That the extreme right National Action is antagonistic to big business whereas some Radical speakers have been heard to defend it forcefully is a mind-confusing contradiction. Between the basic options there is a gamut of technical and delegated legislation imposed by necessity and little influenced by the political composition of the two Chambers. The adoption of new road traffic, environmental or anti-drug laws will depend to a very small extent on whether the majority of the House is socialist or conservative. These are not basic options and the voter is given more to say with special devices of Swiss democracy.

Much ink will be used over the 31st October elections and indeed, as they only happen every four years, they are important. There may well be plenty of hue and cry and political commotion. But when all is said and done, the importance of these elections is more institutional than political, and they mean more to the political parties and the candidates immediately concerned than to the average citizen. (PMB)

ENVIRONMENT

Initiative for free transportation

The *Institut de la Vie* is a political group in Geneva headed by a dentist, Dr. Paul Rouget. It has sponsored a local popular initiative demanding top priority for the development and improvement of urban means of transport and free public transport, 24 hours a day. In order to be accepted, the initiative had to attract the signatures of 10,000 citizens. It obtained 14,500 signatures. This will place the town's legislative in the obligation of working out appropriate new provisions and submitting them to the local electorate.

The *Institut de la Vie* was primarily concerned by the deterioration of the environment and by the impossible nuisance constituted by the firm habit of using a car in town. There are 137,000 motor vehicles for a population of 340,000 in the Canton. Free transport will encourage motorists to abandon their cars as they go into the city.

The "trans-Helvetie" canal before the Upper Chamber

Gouverner, c'est prévoir. The Federal Council has put this motto into effect in its handling of the age-old Rhone-Rhine canal project and other plans of inland waterways. A 514 page report had been prepared on the possibility of navigation on the upper Rhine, the Aar, on an eventual link between the Aar and Lake Geneva, and on a waterway connecting Lake Major to the Adriatic. There is furthermore the problem of harnessing the upper Rhine. This will involve detailed discussions with the Germans. The report was presented to the Council of States, which took note of the fact that no decision on these matters had yet been taken. There is a considerable "east-west" split over the desirability of a navigable Aar. The German-Swiss believe that this will not improve Switzerland's communications and will be a further agent of pollution. Their French-speaking counterparts believe that it will aid the industrialisation of less developed areas. However, all that has been agreed at this stage is that the Federal Council will, within two years, put forward the legislation enabling the State to acquire the land to eventually carry out these projects.

CANTONAL

Appenzell is 900 years old

Appenzell has just celebrated the 900th Anniversary of the foundation of the church around which the capital of Inner Rhodes was founded. This was the occasion for important processions

SWISS EVENTS

MONETARY QUESTIONS

"Gold should be upvalued"

Mr. Alfred Schäfer, Chairman of the Board of the Union Bank of Switzerland invited the United States to a devaluation of the dollar with respect to gold at a press conference in Washington. He estimated that gold, actually valued at 35 dollars an ounce, should be uprated to 40 dollars an ounce. Mr. Schäfer warned his audience that if the monetary uncertainty persisted, Europe would face a serious recession. He had come to Washington to discuss the Bretton Wood agreement. In his view, it was not possible to install a new international monetary system in the short term. It was therefore necessary for gold and the dollar to continue to play a role as international currency. The United States were in the best position to improve the situation. Mr. Schäfer said that they should check inflation and reduce their external deficit by cutting their spending in Indo-China.

The effects of the 10 per cent surtax

Of a total of 22.1 billions francs of exports last year, 2 billion were directed towards the United States. Imports from the U.S. amounted to 2.4 billion, which means that trade between the two countries was in Switzerland's disfavour to the tune of 400 million francs. Still a small fraction of a 6 billion franc annual trade deficit.

Swiss exports to the U.S. can be broken up in machinery and technical equipment (570 million francs), watches (515 million), pharmaceutical and chemical goods (209 million) and textiles (183 million). A wide range of goods from cheese, calendars and toys account for the remaining 500 million francs. Because the American surtax of 10 per cent affects only a tenth of Swiss exports, its effects are not dramatic. However, some firms rely heavily on their American businesses and will suffer particularly severely. One such firm is Bobst and Sons, Lausanne, makers of packaging equipment. They will be forced to give notices to a hundred employees.