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COMMENT

HOW RELEVANT IS A YOUTH POLICY?

After a four-hour debate last September, the Council of States decided to entrust the Federal Council with working out proposals for a "Civil Service" in which conscientious objectors could be enrolled. The National Council has already opted for the same solution despite the recommendations of Parliament's Military Commission, which had decided against any alteration of Article 18 of the Federal Council. This Article states that "Every Swiss man is held to national service".

The idea of a Civil Service had first been launched by a group of teachers from Muenchenstein (Basle) in an initiative which had received wide popular support. This initiative will however not be used but the Government will base its draft bill on the suggestions of the Muenchenstein Committee. The proposed Civil Service must not be confused with another scheme, which is in a far more advanced stage, allowing volunteers to enrol in an international civil and humanitarian force which could be sent in disaster areas around the world.

The new bill will of course require a Referendum because amendment to the Constitution is involved. It is quite an important amendment as compulsory military service has traditionally been considered as a fundamental duty of every citizen — as the tribute paid by every Swiss for the right of living in the security of a neutral country.

Details of the new bill have not yet been worked out. They will necessarily be complex. So far, young men refusing to serve for political and moral reasons have been considered as "criminals" in as much as they refuse to abide by the rules of Society. The law calls every able man to serve. Refusal to do so can only be described as breaking the law in the present state of legislation. Switzerland is one of the few countries which does not give conscientious objectors a special

status distinguishing them from law-breakers. As yet, conscientious objectors have to defend their case before the courts and are usually sentenced to a spell of hard labour.

Parliament has decided to change this. Conscientious objectors should no longer be regarded as criminals and will be offered an alternative. The problem will be to define criteria distinguishing between various types of conscientious objection. A man that would not refuse to serve under another political regime is obviously a doubtful conscientious objector. Refusing to serve for political reasons is equivalent to a blunt rejection of the present order of things and poses philosophical problems to the law-makers, who will doubtless have to rely on the vast body of case-law already available. Moral and Religious objection is more acceptable since it is more general and involves a refusal to hold and use weapons of death under any circumstances.

It will be necessary to make the alternate civil service as demanding if not more, than normal military service in order to stem a possible flood of would-be conscientious objectors. Whatever one thinks of the Swiss Army's credibility, it is there to stay until the people decide otherwise and cannot be deprived of thousands of serviceable men suddenly finding themselves a pacifist calling.

Religious conscientious objectors should indeed be given a special status and allowed to serve the community in some other way than by taking part in drills and field exercises. There are in fact rather few of them and their number has not risen over the years whereas political objectors have become more and more numerous. But political objectors should pay the penalty asked of those breaking the law in the interest of the country and community who depend on that law for their survival. Destroying military service

— an arguably valid aim — can only be achieved by people showing an example by their sacrifice. When thousands of young people will be breaking stones in hard-labour detention centres, then Swiss public might be moved into reconsidering the relevance of national service. For the time being, the majority still believe that national service is an essential institution of our democracy. The will of this majority should be respected and it is natural that those who defy it should pay a price.

While Parliament agreed to consider a military-exemption legislation, three National Councillors asked the Government to consider apparently contradictory proposals providing for women's military service. Two parliamentarians asked for a voluntary service, and a third for a compulsory one. The Federal Council replied that it would accept these proposals as long as they were not binding and asked the M.P. who had called for obligatory service to alter the form of his request from that of a private members bill (motion) to a question ("postulate"). The Government stressed that women military service presented many problems which would take time to settle.

The fact some M.P.'s are asking for *women* to serve when conscientious objection is on the order of the day shows how concerned many Swiss are over the future of national defence.



VOTING IN THE COUNTRY

Sunday 23rd of September was a voting day in many parts of Switzerland. Several cantons had to settle issues pending for a long time. Some of them, namely Geneva and the Valais, stood out by their high absenteeism. Only 9 per cent of Genevese bothered (a) to transfer the city's gas and electricity services to the Canton and (b) to accept the naturalisation of foreign adopted children. These issues were arguably not of the kind to change the course of history and didn't give rise to much local concern. In the Valais, only 12 per cent of the electorate went to the polls. A great majority of them turned down proposals to transform the "obligatory" referendum into an "optional" referendum. This means that the people did not like the idea of being called to the polls for administrative matters only when 4 per cent of the electorate (6000

people) would specifically have called for a vote. The idea had been recommended by cantonal authorities wishing to simplify the business of running the canton and feeling that the people were being called to vote on too many issues. But the old system will remain, proving that those that *did* take the trouble to vote insist on keeping an eye, and a controlling hand, on the affairs of the State. The financial referendum was only altered by a small majority of citizens in a separate vote. Every non-budgeted expenditure of over 200.000 had hitherto been automatically submitted to the approval of the people. This figure is from now on raised to 1 per cent of the cantonal budget, or about 5.5 million francs.

THE JURA: STILL MORE ARGUING

Sure of their strength, the anti-Separatist Party in the Jura has echoed a recent demand by their Separatist opponents calling on Bern to organise without delay a Plebiscit that will decide on the fate of the Jura. This Plebiscit was planned in March 1970 to be held "when the necessary conditions will have been met". The anti-Separatist Union des Patriotes Jurassiens now claim that these conditions exist and that the time is ripe to choose between Separation, continued integration to Bern and

Autonomy. Only a week earlier, a similar call, couched in blunter terms, had been made to the Bernese Government by the Separatist Movement. This leaves the "Third Force", pledged to defend the unity of the Jura, as the odd one out. This party wants change: It doesn't accept the continued integration of a French-speaking and Catholic people to a German and Protestant Canton with a very different mentality. Yet it is not prepared to accept a split of the Jura between three anti-Separatist districts remaining linked to the "Old Canton", and the three northern districts (Délémont, Porrentruy, Franches Montagnes) forming a new and poorer canton. On the other hand, it is not satisfied with the semi-independent status worked out by the "four wise men" Commission at the request of Bern.

Nuclear Power stations hotly debated in Parliament

The National Council severely defeated a motion on nuclear power stations put before the House by a socialist m.p. from Geneva, Mr. Jean Ziegler. This parliamentarian wanted the new law on nuclear power stations to give communes and cantons the first say on the construction of new installations. Building permission should first be given by the Canton or Commune concerned

before being sanctioned by the Confederation. Mr. Ziegler referred to the planned construction of a nuclear power-station at Verbois, just outside Geneva. A strong opponent of this project, Mr. Ziegler claimed that the site who had been chosen was unique for its beauty, that it lay on the flight path of aircraft landing at Cointrin Airport, that the problem of radioactive waste disposal had not been solved. Mr. Ziegler added that it was time to check uncontrolled economic growth.

Mr. Roger Bonvin, Head of the Department of Transports, strongly rejected Mr. Ziegler's contention. Mr. Bonvin, who has warned of electricity rationing in the next few years unless Cantons and Communes accepted the necessity of nuclear power stations, claimed that it would be madness to smother down economic growth by cutting down on energy supplies which could reduce Switzerland's dependance on imports. He added that the problem of waste storage was under active study. The geologists were at work to find safe stratas offering protection against radioactivity.

Mr. Bonvin called on the National Council to reject Mr. Ziegler's motion. His plea was received by 94 against 10 m.p.'s. The majority of Socialists abstained.

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Switzerland maintains diplomatic relations with Chile

The Swiss Embassy in Chile appeared to have trouble interpreting and applying a call by the Federal Council for political hospitality. Shortly after the 11th September Coup, the Swiss Government said that Switzerland would continue recognizing Chile and added that the Embassy in Santiago had been instructed to help all those that might be in serious physical danger. This promise applied in the first place to Swiss nationals, but one gathered from the Federal Council's indications that the Embassy in Santiago would have its doors wide open to people in trouble calling for help. A short while later, it was rumoured that Ambassador Masset had turned away many applicants for political asylum or a safe-conduct out of Chile. Several Swiss were reported to have been left in the lurch.

At the time of writing, it appeared that only a handful of Swiss had actually sought protection at the Embassy. One or two had actually been repatriated. In their immense majority, the many Swiss living in Chile lived through this political upheaval without risk to their lives and properties. On the other hand, the Embassy was flooded by calls from Chilians and other Latin Americans asking for protection and safe-conducts out of the country. There is a Latin-American agreement whereby anyone who seeks refuge in an Embassy may in principle receive a safe-conduct out of the country. The Swiss Embassy had to explain to its many callers that

Laundry ablaze in Geneva

A hundred women employees temporarily lost their jobs when a vast laundry was gutted by fire in Geneva's Acacias area. Despite the prompt arrival of firemen with six hoses and a water canon, the blaze spread over the installations causing 2 million francs worth of damage. It was fortunately prevented from reaching the heating room of the building in which a hundred tons of fuel had been stored. Firemen managed to save a considerable amount of personal clothing and linen.

Decent appearance at the National Council

The National Council has voted to alter former regulations according to which members have to be dressed in dark. The new regulations, made imperative by the arrival of women m.p.'s, asks the House to be "decently dressed". Should a litigious point arise, the President of the National Council will arbitrate.

Switzerland was not a party to this agreement. It appears that Ambassador Masset interpreted recommendations from Berne in a restrictive way. The Swiss Embassy was by no means an open door to security and political asylum during the troubled days in Chile. But it is true that the Embassy could hardly have welcomed and processed the thousands of left-wingers; tracked down by the military in Chile.

Switzerland was one of the first countries to recognize the new regime. The Government explained that Switzerland recognized other countries regardless of their political systems so that the recent events had not modified Berne's attitude towards Chile.

Against compulsory sickness insurance

The Council of States had rejected proposals contained in an initiative sponsored by the Socialist party for an overhaul of the sickness insurance system and making this insurance obligatory. The initiative was aimed at making sickness insurance as general as Old Age and Invalidity Insurance and accepted a counter project by the Federal Council.

Yet a new revision of AHV

Only months after Swiss Old Age and Invalidity Insurance had been revised for the eighth time, two National Councillors from Lausanne and Geneva have asked the Federal Council in a "postulate" what was being done about the rising cost of living. The two men called for automatic adjustments. The eighth Revision of Old Age Insurance saw pensions rise by 70 to 80 per cent this year. A bill for yet a new revision is expected to be put to the floor of the House in December. The two left-wing MPs claim that minimum pensions should reach 6,000 francs a year by 1974 and 9,000 for married couples. With complementary benefits, the total should reach 7,200 and 10,800 francs. This would preserve the buying power of the increases won by old people this year. The two parliamentarians say that their income should again be adjusted in 1975 so as to keep their standard of living intact.

Not enough funds for Basle's new theatre

A strong majority of "Baslers" turned down new funds for their new theatre. Voting on this important local issue on 25th September, they decided that they would not allocate 2.7 million francs a year above the 10 million that had already been budgeted, thus refusing to support its ambitious programme. This

decision was seen as a slight on producer Werner Duggelin, one of the most imaginative theatre personalities of Switzerland, whose artistic audacity and love of experimentation has not been to the taste of all his public. Duggelin retaliated by announcing that he had cancelled his contract with the theatre and would step down at the end of the current season.

Having spent over 50 million francs on a superb new theatre due to be opened for next year's season, Basle found that it had not allowed for the expense of running such perfected installations. The original 10 million francs a year were found to be insufficient. 13 million francs was required by the theatre's governors. Following prolonged debates, the half-Canton's Parliament finally decided to devote 2.7 million on the theatre and put the issue to the people. The planned expenditure had the backing of a majority of five parties but two parties, the National Action and the Liberals, were violently against it.

Three million francs is a small sum compared with an annual budget of over a billion francs. What magnified it was the town's very heavy deficit. The country's wealthiest city realised that it has to save in earnest.

Over two hospital employees per patient

Recent official figures on the health service show that the average cost of keeping a patient in a Swiss hospital is 109 francs a day. This sum rises to a maximum of 274 francs in maternity hospitals, and 254 francs in teaching hospitals. It is lowest in hospitals caring for chronically sick patients, on whom about 32 francs are spent a day. The amount spent on patients is reflected in hospital staff strength. On average, 103 persons are enrolled in hospitals with a hundred beds. The proportion rises to 210 persons in teaching hospitals (it was only 146 in 1966). It has also increased from 174 to 220 in maternities during the same period. The cost of wages and salaries accounts for two-thirds of hospital expenditure. This amounted to over 1,800 million francs two years ago. On average, hospitals are 81 per cent full. Of the 444 hospitals in existence in Switzerland in 1971, 272 of them, with 56,211 beds (or 78 per cent of the total) had registered 16.6 million days of hospitalization. This would therefore indicate that every Swiss spends on average three to four days in hospital a year.

High response to call for world disaster corps

2,600 young Swiss have answered the call for the new volunteer corps to be sent to areas of disaster around the world. 1,430 of the applicants have definitely confirmed their initial application. The Division concerned with the new Corps in the Political Department will select about a thousand of them. The selection procedure is expected to be completed by

the beginning of next year. About 300 volunteers have already been appointed. Selection is proving a difficult task over to the high number of eligible candidates. The authorities are looking for young men with professional and practical qualifications. 83 per cent of the first thousand candidates were Swiss-German, 10 per cent French-speaking, two per cent Ticinese and five per cent foreign. 13 per cent of applicants were women.

British anti-skid surfacing introduced in Switzerland

A special anti-skid road surface used on British roads for the past five years will be sprayed on three strategic crossings in Geneva. It is believed that Geneva will be the first Swiss city with "Spraygrip" road surfacing. The firm which has tendered for the job is the London-based "Prismo Universal" company. Spraygrip consists of a specially prepared gravel which is spread on a liquid layer of epoxy resin. The surface is guaranteed for five years and strongly reduces skids. It has been spread on all major crossings in London and other British towns. The three crossings where the Geneva authorities have decided to use Spraygrip are at two inclined bridges (Pont Sous Terre and Pont du Grand Lancy) and on the left bank of the Pont du Mont Blanc.

Cannabis is far from a "soft" drug

An American scientist has claimed that hashish affected DNA molecules and could have irreversible effects on the

human cell. Speaking at a medical congress in Geneva at the end of September, Dr. Gabriel G. Nahas, spokesman for a team of researchers at Columbia University, said that the active chemical of cannabis resin, tetrahydrocannabinol, penetrated inside the cell protoplasm and could cause irreparable damage if it came into contact with DNA molecules. DNA is the substance at the heart of every animal and vegetable cell. It contains the coded imprint of the characteristics of each living individual and is able to reproduce itself. Dr. Nahas and his team have found that strong use of hashish or cannabis had led to an inhibition of the DNA reproductive process. He found that 34 youths of an average age of 22 who had taken three cannabis joints a week for the past two years had strongly diminished cell immunity. It was found that they were 60 per cent less resistant than a group of ordinary smokers and drinkers aged 44 on average. Normally, the opposite should happen, because the defences of the organism are reduced with age. A Japanese researcher corroborated these findings. He reported that strong injections of tetrahydrocannabinol on rats had produced serious cell damage after six weeks.

Bernard Cornfeld refused bail

Bernard Cornfeld, the fallen financier who created the IOS investment empire, was refused bail following a request by his lawyers. Cornfeld has spent

the past five months at Saint Antoine Prison before being arraigned on charges of fraud related to the crash of IOS. He had asked to be freed on 500,000 francs bail but this has been refused. Cornfeld, who claims his innocence may have to stay at Saint Antoine for as long as it takes to enquire into his case and examine a very bulky dossier. His lawyers believe that he is not guilty of any crime. At worse, he can be held answerable for misdemeanours which do not justify such a long stay in prison. They argue that a man who in 1969 was at the head of 14 investment trusts and 7 banks, one of them among the ten top banks of Switzerland, could not possibly be held solely responsible for the dealings of such a group. Responsibilities must have been shared, they say. It is moreover unjust to keep a man in prison for the duration of the enquiry while this may last for months and even years. As for Cornfeld, he claims that the criminal side to the fall of IOS is to be laid at the door of the American financier Robert Vesco, who bought what was left of the Funds for 225 million dollars and made the money disappear. Cornfeld claims that he had never wanted to sell IOS to Vesco and eventually did so believing that the final buyer was the Union Bank of Switzerland operating through a secondary bank under its control.

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