

New cabinet to tackle unemployment

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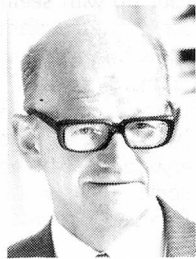
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Foreign Minister
Pierre Aubert, 55
(Social Democrat)



Interior Minister
Alphons Egli, 58
(Christian Democrat)



Defence Minister
Georges-André
Chevallaz, 67
(Radical)



Finance Minister
Willi Ritschard, 64
(Social Democrat)



Transport and
Energy Minister
Leon Schlumpf, 58
(Peoples' Party)



Economics Minister
Kurt Furgler, 58
(Christian Democrat)

New cabinet to tackle unemployment

SWITZERLAND has not only a new President this year – as it does every year, in fact – but also two new members in its seven-man cabinet.

The new President of the Swiss Confederation is Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert. But it is a largely ceremonial post, and as President he will enjoy no special powers.

Under Switzerland's unique political system, the seven members of the cabinet, or Federal Council to give it its correct name, take it in turns to fill the presidential post for a one-year term. "Promotion" to the presidency is based on length of service as a cabinet minister. The same minister may even serve two or more non-consecutive presidential terms if he stays in the cabinet long enough.

At the same time the President retains his ministerial post – which, in fact, remains his main task.

Switzerland's cabinet is a four-party coalition, reflecting not only the political but also the regional, linguistic and confessional make-up of the Swiss population. All major decisions are taken collectively, with the President merely presiding over cabinet meetings as a *primus inter pares* – a first among equals.

The two new ministers in the cabinet are Alphons Egli and Rudolf Friedrich, who have been elected by parliament to replace retiring members Fritz Honegger (Economics) and Hans Hürlimann (Interior). Mr Egli takes over the vacant Interior Ministry, while Mr Friedrich becomes Justice and Police Minister.

Kurt Furgler, Justice and Police Minister for the past 11 years and the longest-serving of the present cabinet, moves to the Economics Ministry. Mr Furgler – widely

respected for his diligence and dynamism – is known to have expressed a strong interest in the Economics post, currently the "hot seat" in Swiss politics.

Unemployment, although only about one percent of the nation's workforce, has more than trebled over the past year, and inflation is still running at the relatively high rate for Switzerland of around six percent.

New President Pierre Aubert, at 55, is the youngest of the current cabinet. Born at La Chaux-de-Fonds, he studied at the Universities of Neuchâtel and Heidelberg (West Germany), entering the legal profession in 1953.

After gaining his early political experience at municipal and cantonal level, he was elected to the Swiss Federal Parliament in 1971. He joined the cabinet as Foreign Minister in 1977.

Mr Aubert sees Switzerland's soaring unemployment as the most serious problem currently facing the nation. One of the worst-hit sectors is the watchmaking industry, the centre of which is Mr Aubert's home town of La Chaux-de-Fonds.

"I go there once a week", he told an interviewer, "and it's a sad sight. I walk along the streets there and I can almost feel the resignation of the people."

Unemployment has also become the number one worry of the Swiss people. In a recent public opinion poll, 73 per cent of those questioned gave unemployment as their main concern. In a similar survey only two years ago unemployment was in fifth place.

PARLIAMENT has rejected a proposed amnesty for the more than 1,000 young people convicted or awaiting trial following

the widespread youth unrest which shook Swiss cities in 1980 and 1981.

After listening to some 50 speakers in two days of intense debate, the House of Representatives rejected the amnesty by 97 votes to 79. In the Senate, the vote was 31 to 8.

The amnesty had been urged by liberal Swiss church groups as a gesture of reconciliation, and had aroused support among Swiss keen to smooth over the deep divisions in society here exposed by the disturbances in Zurich and other cities.

A public opinion poll last summer indicated that some 64 per cent of all Swiss would be prepared to accept at least a partial amnesty for young protesters. Supporters of the move argued that prosecuting the demonstrators grouped them with common criminals and would only serve to deepen the generation gap.

But opponents of the amnesty described the proposal as an incitement to crime and

an insult to young people who had had nothing to do with the riots.

BACK in Britain recently for a visit to family and friends in Wiltshire, I was naturally intrigued to learn that my little home town has – in the words of the local newspaper – been “thinking Swiss”.

According to the *Warminster Journal*:

When Warminster town councillors contemplate the beauties of Switzerland, their thoughts turn not so much to snow, lakes and the Alps, as to a wonderland of clean pavements and car parks free of broken glass.

More than once at Monday evening's session the condition of the Swiss was upheld as something to which slovenly Warminster folk might aspire.

Thinking Swiss began when the Mayor, Mrs Alcia Duke reported on the progress of her own anti-litter campaign.

She and her husband, deputy mayor Mr

Anthony Duke, had just come back from Switzerland, she added, and in the towns and streets there they had seen not a scrap of litter anywhere. It was a dreadful thing that people coming from abroad to Warminster, or to anywhere in the country, should have to put up with seeing a mess about the place.

However, the newspaper also reported a cautionary remark about Switzerland by another council member. He commented: “There was no trouble there, I'll admit. But everybody seems to go to bed at eight o'clock.”

Except, of course, youth demonstrators.

The Swiss football league programme resumes this month after the traditional winter break. Latest league tables were published in the January edition of the Swiss Observer.

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