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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Confederation and the High-speed Motorways."

Swiss public opinion is clamouring for the building of high-speed motorways. The security of the users of the roads calls for this. On the other hand, should there be a lack of keen initiative on this subject our tourist trade may suffer. We must, at any cost, remain at the same level with all that is being done by the neighbouring countries. Otherwise the latter will exercise a power of attraction on tourists, to a still greater extent than at the present, and we shall have to bear the brunt of this.

Our roads are not bad. They are well kept and they are being constantly adapted, in so far as is possible, to the exigencies of the present traffic. But this is no longer sufficient. One must face the fact that new roads must be laid out, and the country must be endowed with some transversal highways reserved for long distance traffic, nor must the arteries which are of regional interest be neglected because of all this.

Latterly, however, it looked as if the Federal Council would not give in to these demands. At the time when it became somewhat anxious regarding the amplitude of our economic super-expansion, it declared, through the medium of our Minister of Finance, that it was necessary to reduce the volume of public works. It even stated quite clearly that construction work on motorways would have to be adjourned. These declarations caused a good deal of disappointment in public opinion.

However, since a few days back, this disappointment is tending to lessen. The Federal Council, in point of fact, has just finished elaborating a new Draft Bill for a constitutional Article, the purpose of which is to attribute to the Government certain competencies which it is at present lacking in the domain of road-building. According to this Project the Cantons would remain the owners of the roads. They would be charged with the task of the building and the maintenance of these roads. But — and this is quite a new development — the Confederation would be entitled to elaborate projects for big highways and to substitute itself for the Cantons should these refuse to undertake the construction of roads which are considered to be of national importance. Moreover — and this is also something new — the Confederation

would participate financially to a much larger extent in road-building, more especially in the construction of high-speed motorways, but also in that of roads possessing a less general interest.

What is so remarkable about this is that the Federal Council has decided to carry out the work not by stages, but at one go. As is always done in similar circumstances the Draft Bill has been submitted for the approval of the political parties, the Cantons and the important economic associations. The Federal Council has asked them for their advice. But in so doing it has left them very little time for consideration — hardly a month. The replies must all be sent in to Berne by 15th July. This shows that the Federal Council is determined to expedite matters in order to be able to lay before the Chambers, first of all, and then before the People, a definite final Project, already during the course of 1958 probably.

In any case let us accept the good augury. No one now could shoulder the responsibility for a long postponement. While our road network has not been subjected to any great modifications, the number of motor vehicles registered in this country is increasing steadily. The latter is now five times as great as it was just before the war. Today there is one car for every four families. And this evolution is a long way from coming to an end. It manifests itself by a new increase each month. There can be no question of applying any brake or trying to paralyze this movement. What must be done is to adapt oneself to it.

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