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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

**The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain**

*Advisory Council:* R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER.

EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

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## THE NATIONAL COUNCIL AT THE END OF A TERM OF OFFICE

Article 71 of the Swiss Constitution says that, subject to the rights reserved to the people and the Cantons, the supreme authority of the Confederation is exercised by the Federal Assembly which is composed of two chambers, the National Council and the Council of States. The legislative body has the power to make all federal laws and to appoint members of other federal organs, such as the Court of Justice and the Federal Insurance Tribunal. In Switzerland it is the Federal Assembly which is the highest authority and the ultimate responsibility for the direction of the government rests in the hands of the representatives of the people (National Council) and the Cantons (Council of States), the two Councils having equal rights.

In Switzerland it is the Federal Assembly which elects the Federal Council, the Chancellor of the Confederation and, in times of national emergency, a Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss army.

The fact that Parliament chooses President and Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation is of particular interest when compared with the happenings in Great Britain after the Prime Minister's resignation and prior to the choice of his successor.

By approving the annual budget and accounts prepared by the Federal Council, by sanctioning all federal loans and unexpected expenditure, the Federal Assembly has further control over the affairs of the nation. All other major bodies have to submit annual reports to the legislative organ. Another task is to study all amendments to cantonal constitutions. The Assembly is also responsible for internal peace and matters of army policy.

The National Council consists at present of one member for every 24,000 inhabitants. This brought the total up to 196 seats when the National Council began its present term of office on the first Monday in December 1959. With the growing population, the new Parliament in proportion to the number of inhabitants would now have to have a considerably increased number of seats. A proposal to limit members of the National Council to two hundred was accepted by the electorate on 4th November last year.

The Council of States consists of forty-four deputies, two for each Canton and one for each Half-Canton.

On 27th October the whole of the National Council will be renewed, and two hundred M.P.s will take their seats on the first Monday in December. Though the Council of States is not renewed in its entirety, in fourteen of the twenty-five Cantons and Half-Cantons elections of Councillors of States will take place on the same day. In Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus and Appenzell-Innerrhoden the "Landsgemeinde" is responsible for the election of

Councillors of States. In the Cantons of Berne, Fribourg, St. Gall and Neuchâtel it is the duty of the Grand Council to elect them. In the Canton of Zug the Councillors of States are always chosen in the year preceding the elections of the National Council, and in the Ticino in the following November.

This year there have been nine resignations from the Council of States, an unusually high number from amongst the forty-four members: The three Radicals Vaterlaus (Zurich), Ackermann (Ausserrhoden) and Perréard (Geneva), the two Conservative Christian Socialists Stoeckli (Aargau) and Antognini (Ticino), Lieb (Schaffhausen) and Ullmann (Thurgau) of the Farmers' Party and the two Liberals Fauquex (Vaud) and Gautier (Geneva). Solothurn lost its Social Democrat representative Klaus through an accident shortly before the end of term, which means that ten seats have become vacant.

The large number of resignations from the Council of States gives the Socialists a chance to regain some more seats and has put up fifty-two contestants, and Aargau, the Council of States, having just lost the second. It is quite possible that the new representation of the parties will be different. At the end of the last period there were eighteen Conservative Christian Socialists, fourteen Radicals, four Farmers, three Liberals and three Democrats.

In the National Council there have been no drastic changes as to party representation during the last two decades. The Radicals, Conservatives and Social Democrats have held approximately 25% each, the Farmers 11% and the others, notably the "Landesring der Unabhängigen", have shared the rest. It is not expected that the composition of the new "Council of Two Hundred" will show any great surprise.

Forty-six National Councillors are not seeking re-election. This is a record in the history of the National Council. Three of them, all from Zurich, have been in Parliament since 1925, Dr. h.c. Rudolf Reichling (Farmer), Dr. Hans Eprecht (Socialist) and Mr. Philipp Schmid-Ruedin (Democrat), the latter well-known to many Swiss in England as former General Secretary and Central President of the Swiss Mercantile Society in Switzerland and a great friend of the Swiss abroad.

The new National Councillors for Glarus and Zug have already been declared elected as the number of candidates tallied with the allocated seats. The four Cantons of Uri, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Appenzell-Innerrhoden, which have the right to one seat each, need not submit a list of candidates as they are elected by the system of

simple majority. This leaves 192 seats which will be filled according to the system of proportional representation with flexible lists. And for these seats the parties have nominated 1,194 candidates. The largest Canton, Zurich, has thirty-five seats (three more than hitherto) and 335 candidates will contest them. Berne has again thirty-three with 313 citizens standing for election, Vaud sixteen seats and eighty-eight candidates. St. Gall has a right to thirteen seats and has put up fifty-two contestants, and Aargau, with an equal number of seats, eighty-seven. Geneva will have two more with ten seats in the new Council. Lucerne has nine M.P.s, Baselstadt eight, Solothurn, Valais and Ticino seven each, Fribourg one less than before with six, Baselland one more with five, Neuchâtel and Grisons five each, the latter having lost a seat in the new distribution. Schwyz has three seats and Glarus, Zug, Schaffhausen, Appenzell-Ausserrhoden have two seats each, and, as already mentioned, Uri, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Appenzell-Innerrhoden are entitled to one representative each.

Looking back over the last four years of legislature, quite a few changes amongst the M.P.s have taken place. On 25th October 1959 forty-seven new members entered

Parliament. Nine have since died, four resigned, five relinquished their post because of incompatibility of the duties with those of a cantonal post. One member, Monsieur Roger Bonvin, was elected into the Federal Council, Dr. Erich Dietschi (Basle) and Dr. E. Bachmann (Aargau) changed over into the Council of States, and Dr. H. Huber (St. Gall) was elected a Federal Judge.

In the Council of States the changes were even more marked. Already on 17th December 1959 four members were elected Federal Councillors, viz. Councillors Bourgnicht (Fribourg), Spuehler (Zurich), von Moos (Obwalden) and Tschudi (Baselstadt). A year later Dr. Kurt Schoch (Schaffhausen) was elected a Federal Judge. In addition, two Councillors of States died and three resigned.

The present session and with it the legislative period ended on 4th October. Much work has been done, and we intend giving a review of what has been achieved in the next issue as the results of the elections will not be to hand by the time we have to have "copy" ready for setting.

*(Based on news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse and "Basler Nachrichten".)*

## INTER ARMA CARITAS RED CROSS CENTENARY

The activities of the Red Cross from its beginning were depicted in an article in the "Swiss Observer" of 14th June. The Centenary has been marked in various ways all over the world and in particular all over Switzerland. As keeper of the International Red Cross Convention the Federal Council sent a message to the governments of member states in the whole world last November. It explained why, after some regrettable political differences following the last International Red Cross Conference in New Delhi in 1958, the next Conference scheduled for 1963 in Geneva had to be postponed till 1965. The Federal Council appealed to the governments to do everything in their power to eliminate difficulties which would hinder the magnificent humanitarian work of the Red Cross Organisations throughout the universe.

The Centenary Celebrations in Geneva began on 18th February with a meeting at the auditorium of the University. The President of the International Red Cross Committee, Prof. L. Boissier, gave an address in which he reviewed its activities and thanked the Swiss people for its constant moral and material support.

At the end of February, a press conference took place at which the President of the Swiss Red Cross, Prof. Dr. Ambrosius von Albertini, announced the motto of the Centenary Campaign of the Swiss Red Cross "Don't just watch — help!" This was followed a few days later by an appeal to the Swiss people by the President of the Confederation Federal Councillor Spuehler. He asked men, women and youngsters to join as volunteers and as blood donors or subscribing members. He recalled that the Red Cross like few other works had contributed to raise our reputation in the opinion of the world.

Exhibitions and meetings have taken place all over the country. In Basle Federal Councillor Wahlen attended the double jubilee, the Centenary and the 75th Anniversary of the Basle Red Cross. He called the Red Cross the biggest present Switzerland had given to humanity.

On 8th May, the birthday of Henry Dunant, Federal Councillor Wahlen unveiled a monument in honour of the great man. It stands under the beautiful old trees on the Promenade des Bastions near Geneva University.

In June, incidentally, the Swiss First Aid Society (Samariterbund) celebrated its 75th Anniversary. 1,500 people attended the celebrations in Berne, amongst them Federal Councillor Tschudi. The Henry Dunant medal was presented to the Presidents of the three Red Cross Organisations, the Swiss Red Cross, the International Red Cross Committee and the League of Red Cross Societies.

Many Cantons, towns and organisations have made special donations to the Red Cross. The Zurich students, for instance, donated 354 litres of blood which 884 students had given.

Special films were made and books published to mark the Centenary and a five-franc piece was minted in Switzerland.

The official commemoration was held early in September. Previous to it, a study group for leaders of young Red Cross Societies was organised in Geneva. Sixty-one participants from forty-four countries assembled thanks to a gift from the Federal authorities. Dr. Lindt, Delegate for Technical Co-operation, called it "an excellent investment by the Swiss Government in the field of Technical Assistance."

Demonstrations by Red Cross Groups from forty countries took place at the Federal Gymnastics and Sports School at Magglingen near Bienne, and a Red Cross world conference on education was held in Lausanne.

At the end of August, the Vice-President of the International Red Cross Committee, Monsieur Frédéric Siordet (until recently Vice-President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad) gave an address at the University of Geneva "The Red Cross, a unique organisation, independent yet full of solidarity". This was only one of many conferences, lectures and technical exercises held on the eve of the Jubilee Congress which was under the motto of "One hundred years in the service of humanity". The President of the Swiss Red Cross opened it at the Palace of Nations in Geneva in the presence of 400 representatives of nearly all the 102 member societies of the Red Cross.

On 1st September the Official Commemoration Act took place in Geneva. It started with a service at the Cathedral of St. Peter. At the Palais Eynard the Procla-