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ELECTIONS IN PARLIAMENT

A Demonstration of Power in favour of the "Magic Formula"

The four Parties in the Federal Council combined to an impressive demonstration of power on the election day of the new Federal Councillor. Their candidate as successor to Federal Councillor Wahlen, National Councillor and Regierungsrat Rudolf Gnägi, Berne, was elected in the first poll with the extremely high number of votes of 176. Incidentally, 20 votes were in favour of National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt and 19 went to others. In spite of much criticism lately, Federal Councillor Schaffner received an equally unusual 198 votes as President of the Confederation for 1966. Veritably sensational, however, was the election result of Federal Councillor Bonvin as Vice-President of the Confederation; he was accorded 214 out of 237 votes. This was one of the best results in the history of the Swiss Confederate State. That this should go to the head of the Finance and Customs Department, whose abilities have been doubted again and again, was the biggest surprise of all.

Peter Braendli, in an article in the "Basler Nachrichten" said that this demonstration of power by the four coalition Parties of the Government was aimed at the misgivings heard more and more about the limitation of choice of candidates if the proportional composition of the Federal Council is adhered to. It was also directed at the people whose dissatisfaction with Party arrangements could no longer be ignored. Thus these politicians, normally at loggerheads, united for a manifestation so far unknown in Switzerland. All differences of political opinions were forgotten. All that mattered was to consolidate their position of power within the Government.

Before the election, the Zurich Professor Marcel Beck (no Party) was granted permission to make a personal statement. He protested against the "Magic Formula" which decided the composition of the Federal Government (2+2+2+1) and according to which the BGB Party took it for granted that *their* candidate had to follow Federal Councillor Wahlen, also BGB. He asked that in the election of a Federal Councillor, Parliament should revert to a more democratic way. The thought is a sound one and no doubt deserves consideration. Unfortunately, National Councillor Beck put it across badly and at the wrong moment. He was answered by a St. Gall member on behalf of the four Parties in question, Conservative/Christian Socialists, Liberals, Social Democrats and Farmers (BGB), who stated that elections were being held according to the Constitution and that in any case the whole parliamentary procedure was being studied. It was the duty of Parliament, said National Councillor Furgler, to see that the best qualified men be elected to the Government; National Councillor Gnägi fulfilled the requirements most adequately.

As it happened, Prof. Beck's intervention achieved the opposite of what he wanted and helped the four Parties to bring their action to an even greater success than might otherwise have been the case. His strong and partly undignified attack made the waverers support Mr. Gnägi's candidature. Unwittingly, he squashed the considerable opposition to a one-man nomination. It is to be hoped that those who feel the present method is no longer satisfactory, will, in spite of their defeat, continue their efforts to bring about a better solution. It is generally felt that the new Federal Councillor is a most able man who can prove that his election was justified.

An Initiative has been launched by the independent Swiss weekly "2x2", asking for popular election of Federal Councillors. National Councillor Breitenmoser (Basle), as the end of the Parliamentary Session, handed in a Motion signed by twenty-two colleagues regarding the same demand.

As was announced in the last issue, the new President of the National Council is the Vaudois Social Democrat Pierre Graber. The Vice-President was elected in the person of National Councillor Dr. Alfred Schaller (Radical) from Basle. There was substantial criticism of how the new President handled National Councillor Beck's protest. His attitude was considered cynical and not as objective as would behove the leader of a Parliamentary Session.

The President and Vice-President of the Council of States are Dr. Dominik auf der Maur (Conservative/Christian) from Schwyz and Dr. Willi Rohner (Radical) from St. Gall.

Other elections which Parliament had to carry out, were the five members of the Federal Insurance Tribunal for the next period 1966 to 1971. The Tribunal's President is Dr. Pietro Mona (Ticino) who is completely trilingual. Its Vice-President is Dr. Adolf Boner (Solothurn). The new Federal Judge in succession to the late Dr. J. Plattner is Prof. Dr. Otto Konstantin Kaufmann (St. Gall). As a reserve, Parliament elected Dr. Beat Bruehlmeier (Aargau).

The newly elected dignitaries, especially the new Federal Councillor and the President of the Confederation for 1966, but also the Presidents of the two Chambers, were well and truly cheered and their election celebrated in their home towns: pageants, bands, flowers, processions and speeches.

There was a specially impressive celebration in honour of the new Federal Councillor and of the retiring Federal Councillor Wahlen. His letter of resignation had been read to Parliament before the election of Mr. Gnägi. In the name of the Federal Assembly, the Assembly President had paid eloquent tribute to the great statesman and the services Mr. Wahlen had rendered the country. The M.P.s supported the praise with warm acclamation. Federal Councillor Wahlen expressed his thanks to all who had helped him during his term of office. He analysed the present world situation. He said that the new problems could only be solved by communal efforts and appealed for mutual trust.

Federal Councillor Wahlen was Guest of Honour at a special dinner given for him by the Director of the European Office of UNO in Geneva. The Canadian Government sent him a letter of thanks and good wishes. The Diplomatic Corps in Berne offered him and his wife an "Ehrenwein" and gave him a present in recognition of his great services. On 23rd December, the personnel of the Political Department gave a big reception for the departing chief of the EPD.

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

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