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COMMENT

PLUS CELA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST PAREIL

On unfolding to-day's copy, the reader is no doubt surprised to find the S.O. has had a face-lift. Reactions will vary — just like they do when a friend unexpectedly emerges from a beauty parlour with "something done to her face". Some will say: "About time, too!" Others will comment regretfully: "Why not leave well alone?" I remember the to-do when "The Times" decided to break with established tradition and put news on the front page. I myself regretted it, and perhaps I, too, felt a little hesitant to alter in the S.O. what I have frequently been told, was more than acceptable. Not that we are able to put news in the real sense on the front page—for that the time factor is too great and inevitable in the production of a fortnightly periodical. We hope, however, that by introducing "Last Minute Information", which we did a few weeks ago, we can fill the gap to some extent.

Changes are inevitable; there have been several in the nearly 50 years of the S.O.'s existence. Once again, Advisory Council, Publishers and Editor have agreed to make a few alterations. As a first step, we have changed over to the new international standard A4 size. The introduction of three columns per page rather than two is in keeping with trends in modern lay-out. We hope that a few additional changes, too, will be pleasing and make for easier reading.

Whenever an opportunity presents itself or somebody puts forward a good and practicable idea, we try to improve the paper in order not only to please our old and trusted readers, but also in the hope of attracting new subscribers.

Although printing costs have gone up to double the figure of what they were a few years ago, we have not increased the subscription rates for more than seven years. Publishers and Editor go on making financial sacrifices, but the time will come when this is no longer possible. We must get increased support if we want to survive.

Please make your influence felt and induce others to advertise and take out subscriptions. Many pass on the S.O. to friends and colleagues at the office — a laudable gesture, but unfortunately not profitable for us! If they, in turn, cannot be persuaded to subscribe in their own right, perhaps they might be willing to take out a gift subscription for a friend or for an anonymous old-age pensioner. If every reader became a subscriber, our fears for the future would be considerably allayed.

By making changes, we are able to increase printing space and to give you additional reading matter. We hope that this will be appreciated. In return, we trust, you will give us increased support.

Fifty years ago, the "Swiss Observer" was founded, and the first number appeared in 1920. Will you help us to double our subscriptions so that we may celebrate our Golden Jubilee with an easy mind and with the future secure?

Thank you for your understanding, and many more years of what we hope will be happy reading.

MM

THE PARLIAMENT IN BERNE

Spring Session 1969

Whilst stone masons and workmen were engaged in brightening the outside of the Swiss Parliament, the two Chambers sat to decide on matters of importance to the Confederation. With 90 to 19 votes, the National Council accepted the decree regarding **compulsory permission for foreign banks** intending to open branches in Switzerland.

For over a year, the two Chambers have been trying to reach agreement on the *Bodenrecht*, the new proposed **law on land and property**. The majority has now accepted the following formulation:

—*The Confederation sets up principles by way of legislation which will compel the Cantons to use the land sensibly and to adhere to orderly town and Country planning.*

—*The Confederation promotes and co-ordinates the efforts of the Cantons and supports them.*

—*Within the Confederation's competence, it considers the requirements of national, regional and local planning.*

So far the constitutional basis. Now it will be up to the electorate to agree or dissent. The most important question remains what will be done with this basic principle.

There were women's demonstrations outside the "Federal Palace" whilst Parliament was sitting. Their opposition was against the Government's proposal to sign the Human Rights Convention before **franchise** in federal matters had been granted Swiss women. This demonstration was in no way connected with the statement by Federal Councillor von Moos a few days later who said that the Government would prepare a draft bill by the end of the year, which, if accepted by the electorate, would grant women suffrage on a federal level.

A federal **poison law** is in the making, according to which all dealings with poisons would be subject to permits.

In the Council of States, it was **agricultural questions** which stood in the forefront. The small Chamber accepted a credit of forty million francs for an agricultural research station at Grangeneuve (Fribourg). The Council, after lengthy debate, accepted the federal decree to promote cultivation of sugar beet.

The "Buehrle affair" came up, and whilst the Government's decision to give new arms orders to the said concern was acceptable, the whole question of **arms exports** remains open, and the Council of States has asked for a report by the expert commission set up by the Government.

The second week began with a debate on the **partial revision** of the **penal code**. Criticism was voiced of the Department of Justice, which was not capable of undertaking the necessary administrative work. This was one of the reasons why the whole revision was taking so long.

The National Council had to deal with a new draft of the **tobacco law**, the first one having been rejected by the electorate. There will now be no price control on cigarettes.

A commission of experts which includes eight women, is preparing a revision of the **family law**. It will be done in four phases; the first will deal with adoption rights, the second with the status of the illegitimate child, the third with marital property and the last with guardianship law.

The Council of States debated the creation of an **Intercantonal Mobile Police Force**, to be used for international conferences, in catastrophes and for general keeping of order and peace. The force would have 600 men in three regional companies. The Chamber gave the proposal a favourable reception.