Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

CPYRGHT

LETTER FROM BERN

DECEMBER 1

THE election of the President of Switzerland is scheduled to take place here in Bern, the capital, on December 17th, at a joint meeting of the two houses of Parliament, which will then be holding one of its four annual three-week sessions. The Presidency is the subject of one of Switzerland's few national jokes, and it is told in all four of the country's languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansh. Swiss jokes are usually highly cantonal in character. For example, a Swiss who lives on the vine-covered sloping shores of Lake Geneva, in the canton of Vaud, will tell you that a certain vineyard in the canton of Zurich is surrounded by a fence of fine wire mesh, because a railroad runs past it and it has been found that grapes from Zürcher vineyards derail trains. Another Vaudois joke, this one directed at the people in the canton of Bern, is about a Vaudois who visited the Palais Fédéral, here in the capital, and asked a Bernese, "How many people work in this building?" The Bernese replied, "Oh, about half of them." But the inhabitants of all the country's twenty-two cantons tell one another the same joke about their President. The joke runs as follows:

FIRST SWISS: "Who's going to be the new President?"

SECOND SWISS: "How would I know? I don't even know who the *old* President is."

The most sedate Swiss is likely to burst into wild laughter at this joke, and there is some pride in the laughter, too, for the people of Switzerland regard the joke as an indication of their success in decentralizing bureaucratic power while maintaining their federal unity. Every year, the Swiss Parliament, which is modelled after the legislative system of the United States and consists of the National Council (a hundred and ninety-six members) and the Council of States (forty-four members), elects a seven-man Federal Council, which constitutes the highest administrative body of the government. Actually, this election is pretty much a matter of form because in practice, unless a Councillor resigns or dies, it is taken for granted that he will be reëlected. Every December, one of the members of the Federal Council—a different one each year—is elected the President of Switzerland by the Parliament, and for the next twelve months he also presides over the Federal Council. Here again the election is little more than a formality, for the tradition is that the Presidency passes from one Councillor to another in accordance with an annual rotation system. Because ignorance of the President's identity is considered a kind of civic virtue here, it is professed even by citizens who can rattle off the most obscure names in Swiss history, and Swiss history began on August 1, 1291, when the leaders of three forest districts called Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden, seeking mutual protection, drew up the pact upon which the present Swiss Confederation is based.

The President of Switzerland at the moment is a serious, hard-working, bald-headed gentleman of sixty-one named Philipp Etter. Actually, there are several people here in the capital who recognize him on sight and are not ashamed to admit it. Shortly after seven every morning, President Etter boards a trolley for the ten-minute ride to his office, in the Palais Fédéral—or Bundeshaus, as it is known to the German Swiss, of whom Etter is one. The fare is thirty centimes (about seven cents), but because the motorman of the trolley is one of those who recognize the President, Etter is never asked to pay it. Etter has a brand-new Cadillac limousine at his disposal for official rides, but going to work is not one of them, nor is his return home for the nationally observed two-hour lunch.

Etter was born in Menzingen, a small town just south of Zurich. He can speak all four of his country's languages, as well as Latin and Greek, and has travelled extensively in the Swiss cantons. As a private tourist, he has also visited France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Austria, but he has never been to the United States and he speaks no English. His favorite pastime is hunting; two or three times a year he takes a few days off to hunt hare, roe deer, or chamois—preferably in the old cantons of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden, in the heart of Switzerland. In Bern, Etter lives in a square stone house on a corner of the Kirchenfeldstrasse, facing a large, modern *Gymnasium* built mostly of glass. The *Tierpark* is not far away, and the President usually walks over there on Sundays to look at the animals in its zoo. He has ten children—five sons and five daughters—and four grandchildren, and he and his wife usually have a refugee child staying with them. When he visits the zoo, he takes the refugee child along. One of Etter's sons is a monk and one of his daughters is a nun, and Etter himself is a devout Catholic. He is a member of a middle-of-the-road party, the Catholic Conservatives.

This is Etter's fourth term as President and he is due to be President again in 1960, provided he is still a Federal Councillor and none of his colleagues drop out. His first term was in 1939, meaning that deaths and resignations have con-

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

CPYRGHT

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

siderably speeded up the seven-year cycle during the time he has been a member of the Council. Each Councillor is head of an administrative department, and, upon being elected President, he continues to administer it, in addition to performing such Presidential duties as receiving foreign ambassadors, and speaking over the radio to the four and a half million people of Switzerland on New Year's Day and again on August 1st, which is a national holiday commemorating the birth of the Confederation. As Councillor, Etter is in charge of the Department of the Interior, which makes him responsible for forest conservation, federal construction programs, and federal hygiene. In this capacity, he receives a salary of forty-eight thousand francs, or about eleven thousand dollars, a year, like the other Councillors, and he is paid an extra three thousand francs for being President. The office of the Chief of the Interior is a cool, high-ceilinged room with dark-brown walls; two long, narrow windows look out on a public park to the west, and two more long, narrow windows face the Bernese Alps, to the south. On the walls of Etter's office are several oil paintings of mountains, cloudy skies, grazing cattle, and the like. The Swiss government buys hundreds of paintings every year as part of a federal program to encourage artists, and because the Swiss museums cannot hold them all, a good many of them end up in government offices. Etter has one secretary, which is what the Chief of the Interior is entitled to. A Councillor gets no extra office space or clerical help just because he happens to be the President of Switzerland.

THE Councillor who is next in line for the Presidency is a gray-haired, spectacled French Swiss named Rodolphe Rubattel, who is now serving as Vice-President. A lawyer and journalist, he was born in 1896 in Villarzel, a small town between Bern and Lausanne. This will be his first term as head of the Swiss Confederation. He is in charge of the Department of Public Economy, which concerns itself with such matters as foreign trade, price controls, and the federal old-age-insurance fund. (Every Swiss contributes two per cent of his wages to the insurance fund, which entitles him to an average of about twenty-five dollars a month after the age of sixty-five.) Rubattel speaks French and German, and has visited Italy, France, and [partly obscured by stamp] Austria, as well as every canton in Switzerland. He belongs to the Radical Party, which is another middle-of-the-road group but lives up to its name in at least one respect. Before the local elections were held a couple of weeks ago in the canton of Vaud (each canton sets its own election date, usually for a weekend in October or November), some of the campaign posters in Lausanne, the canton's leading city and the center of Rubattel's legal and journalistic activities, were extraordinarily violent, and the most violent of all was the Radical Party's. It read, "Who dares to criticize the Radical Party? *Nobody!*" The Party won the election, but enough people dared to criticize it to make the Socialist Party a close second, and the election itself was severely criticized by civic-minded folk for having brought out only sixty per cent of the electorate, which, in Switzerland, is all male.

At the University of Lausanne, where Rubattel studied law, he won quite a reputation as a debater. So great were his forensic powers that his fellow-students, feeling that these were bound to lead him into politics, used to twit him by singing, "Someday we shall all be brothers and Rubattel will be Federal Councillor," to the tune of the "Internationale." Nowadays, most of Rubattel's former classmates are rather heavy, precise, slow-moving, slow-talking fathers of University of Lausanne students, but whenever he runs into two or three of them, they still burst into their old song. Rubattel's office, like Etter's—and, for that matter, like the offices of all the other Federal Councillors—is in the Palais Fédéral and is cool and dark brown. Rubattel is not paid anything extra for being Vice-President.

Both President Etter and Vice-President Rubattel will remain in their cool brown offices while the Parliament is electing the new President and Vice-President. The two houses meet in the chamber of the National Council, which is the lower house and which is much like our House of Representatives, except that it convenes against the background of a huge mural showing the Lake of Lucerne, with puffy clouds floating in the sky above and puffy mountains in the distance. Like the Councillors' offices, both chambers are in the Palais Fédéral, a large stone building with a green copper dome and a fountain at its entrance in which stone swans spout water. A large stone sculpture depicting the three forest-district leaders who formed the Confederation stands in the foyer. This winter's session of the Parliament opens at six o'clock on the evening of December 7th. At eight o'clock in the morning, ten days later, the President of the National Council will open a joint meeting of the two houses by ringing a little bell and saying, "Now we are going to elect the President of the Swiss Confederation." Ballots will be passed out to the members of both houses, and everybody will be expected to write in the name of Rodolphe Rubattel. Then the ballots will be counted, the result will be announced and applauded, and that will be that. After a while, somebody will get around to visiting the new President and shaking his hand, and on January 1st, he will assume office without any ceremony and make his New Year's speech over the radio. At the start of his term, a photograph of him may appear on the cover of a picture magazine called *Sie und Er*. During 1954, he will prepare the agenda for meetings of the Federal Council and will preside at them. He will also make a few public speeches, probably on the subject of neutrality. It is a subject on which a Swiss President can hardly go wrong.

Assuming there is no change in the makeup of the Federal Council, the President scheduled for 1955 is Joseph Escher, a lawyer, who is Councillor in charge of the Posts and Railways Department. Then will come Max Petitpierre, a French-Swiss lawyer and professor of law, who is Councillor of the Foreign Affairs Department and thus Switzerland's Foreign Minister; Markus Feldmann, still another lawyer, who is in charge of the Justice and Police Department; and Max Weber, a social-science professor at the University of Bern, who is the head of the Finance Department, the only Socialist on the Federal Council, and the only one of its members who speaks English. Weber is also the only one of its members who has ever been in the United States. He made the trip, with his wife, in 1922, in the hope of finding a job. After visiting New York, Buffalo, Philadelphia, and Chicago without success, he came back to Switzerland. Still assuming that the status quo remains the status quo, in 1959 Weber will be succeeded as President by Karl Kobelt, a civil engineer, who is in charge of the Military Department, and then it will be President Etter again.

DURING the past few months, many Swiss have been acting as if mountain climbing, a sport they have so long taken for granted, had just been discovered. Seven thousand fervent climbers have recently joined the Swiss Alpine Club, bringing the mem-

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

bership, which is restricted to men, to thirty-nine thousand. There are also Alpine clubs [illegible]ple, and more thousands are members of these. This reawakening to the challenge of high peaks is due partly to the admiration the Swiss feel for the British conquest of Mount Everest in May but even more to the admiration the Swiss feel for the near conquest of Mount Everest last year by two Swiss expeditions, one of which came to within nine hundred feet of the summit. Swiss Alpinists don't show the slightest resentment of the British achievement. They point out that there are twelve mountain peaks of twenty-six thousand feet or more in the world—all of them in or near the Himalayas, as it happens—and that of these only three (Annapurna, Everest, and Nanga Parbat) have been scaled. That, the Swiss think, still leaves the field wide open for anyone with enough zeal, ability, and money to have a go at it.

A Swiss candy called Bonbons Organos is now done up in a cellophane bag that also contains a photograph of Mount Everest, with the route taken by the British marked in, and a caption explaining that bonbons like those in the bag were carried by the two Swiss expeditions as well as by the British one and asking, "*Peut-il y avoir de meilleures références?*" Swiss almanacs for the coming year unanimously record both the conquest and the two near conquests of Mount Everest with far more dramatic appreciation than they devote to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth or to the death of Joseph Stalin. The Swiss have long been almanac-crazy, because the isolated way of life in their mountainous land has made them cherish the simple, homely verities in which such books abound. The nation's oldest almanac, called *Le Véritable Messager Boiteux de Berne et Vevey*, has just been published in the little town of Vevey, near Lausanne, for the two-hundred-and-forty-seventh consecutive year. The current issue devotes its two center pages, always reserved for the most significant event of the preceding twelve months, to a diagrammatic study entitled "La Conquête du Plus Haut Sommet du Monde," which shows exactly what the Swiss and British expeditions accomplished. For generations, the *Messager Boiteux* has had the same cover design—a woodcut of a lame messenger bringing news to a group of Swiss, comprising a solid citizen, a clergyman, a soldier, and a child, and the whole surrounded by symbols, such as a snail, representing the domestic hearth, that are greatly appreciated in Switzerland. The *Almanach Pestalozzi*, named after the founder of the present system of public education, is an almanac put out specially for children. The *Almanach Pestalozzi* for 1954 not only records the conquest of Mount Everest but includes, in addition to essays on how to read a thermometer, how to sew (for girls), and how to build a birdhouse (for boys), a long, illustrated essay on the joys and benefits of Alpinism (for boys *and* girls).

The best-selling book in Switzerland at the moment is "Avant-Premières à l'Everest," by Gabriel Chevalley, René Dittert, and Raymond Lambert, three of the Swiss who participated in one or the other of the two expeditions that came near reaching the top of Mount Everest. Published by Arthaud, in Paris and Grenoble, it sold thirty-four thousand copies in its first three weeks. The subject is the Swiss journeys to India and Nepal and treks through the jungles to the base of the mountain, and the labor and pain involved in the attempts to attain the summit—attempts that were frustrated by glaciers and monsoons. Somehow, the book describes the failures without making them sound like failures. Swiss mountain climbers are particularly proud of the tributes that the British conquerors of Mount Everest paid the Swiss expeditions. A paper band around the dust jacket of the Chevalley-Dittert-Lambert book quotes Sir John Hunt, leader of the British expedition, as saying, "*A vous autres, une bonne moitié de la gloire.*" The latest issue of a Swiss Alpine journal (its name appears on its cover in all four Swiss languages—*Die Alpen*, *Les Alpes*, *Le Alpi*, and *Las Alps*—and its co[illegible]tors write in whichever of the fo[illegible] please) carries an article by [illegible] colleague, in which they tha[illegible] Swiss for making information accumulated during the two unsuccessful tries available to [illegible] the final result," they write. "We climbed on the shoulders of our Swiss friends to the top of the mountain." Swiss Alpinists are touched to the point of tears by this last statement.

THE Swiss National Tourist Office has bravely accepted, along with many other new problems, the shift of interest from the Alps to the Himalayan region as the goal of serious mountain-climbing expeditions, and it is trying to stimulate interest in the Alps as the best training ground for would-be scalers of the highest peaks in the world. Another problem the Tourist Office faces is what is widely referred to here as the *trou dè janvier*—the January vacuum. January is the slowest month of the year in the Swiss tourist business, and, coming after the crowds that swarm to Alpine resorts around Christmastime, the slump has a particularly depressing effect. Switzerland depends on its income from tourists to make up most of the difference between the five and a quarter billion francs it spends on imports and the four and three-quarters billion it gets back from its exports. A couple of years ago, the Swiss Association of Hotelkeepers, in a determined effort to induce tourists to linger on through January, offered a bonus of fifty francs to every tourist who stayed on at a hotel for at least two weeks after the holidays. Some twenty thousand tourists—about half of them from England and about a tenth [illegible] them from the United States—to[illegible] advantage of the offer. The hotelkee[illegible] were disappointed, however, because most of the tourists, when they were hopefully asked whether they wouldn't like to take the bonus in credit for an even longer stay, asked for cash, checked out of the hotels, and spent the money—a total of 1,018,000 francs—elsewhere. At the present time, the United States is one of the few nations (Switzerland itself is another) that do not limit the amount of currency a person can take out of the country, and for a while the Swiss were looking across the Atlantic for the tourists they so badly want. For the past three years, the government has made an annual appropriation to present an alluring picture of Switzerland to American tourists, but the results were discouraging and the appropriation was not renewed this year. The Swiss are now pinning their hopes on West Germany. A survey of the situation published here not long ago states, "The spotlight is on the [illegible] West Germany, owing to

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3

CPYRGHT

only Alpine air service. It is based at Sion, in the sunny Rhône Valley. Geiger is a small, gentle, deeply sunburned man who likes nothing better than to land ski planes on small patches of ice high in the mountains. He runs his service with two American planes—a four-seater Cessna 170 and a two-seater Piper Super Cub—which he has equipped with both wheels and retractable skis. Geiger's work includes rescuing injured skiers, carrying luggage to and from mountain cabins, bringing food, wood, and mail to the Swiss who live on mountaintops the year round, parachuting doctors down to sick people, and, on Sunday mornings, bringing a priest ten thousand feet up the Weisshorn to say Mass for skiers who don't want to take the time to go to a church. The skiers start out for the Weisshorn at 5 A.M. Five hours later, Geiger delivers the priest, and after Mass the skiers, feeling well protected, set off down the mountain. Last year, Geiger carried forty tons of stone, cement, wood, glass, and equipment up to the 9,975-foot Mutthorn to build a tourist cabin, which sleeps two hundred. The job required five hundred and thirty-five landings. Geiger can carry three passengers or six hundred and sixty pounds of freight in the Cessna and one passenger or five hundred and fifty pounds of freight in the Piper Super Cub. He charges the equivalent of about seven cents a pound—of passenger or freight—from Sion to any point up to a height of thirteen thousand feet. He charges passengers seventy francs (about sixteen dollars) an hour for flights anywhere in the Alps. Geiger has found two hundred and forty glaciers in the mountains that he can land on. The smallest one—twelve thousand feet high and thirty-seven hundred feet from the top of Mont Blanc—is two hundred and twenty-five feet long and ends in a sheer drop of three thousand feet. Geiger has landed there about fifty times. At another of his frequent stops, he has to land at a forty-degree angle on a strip two hundred and sixty feet long, halfway up the side of a mountain. This is the landing strip that Geiger's wife and six-year-old son, who often accompany him, like the best.

SWISS private schools are so crowded this year that many foreigners living in Switzerland have had to enroll their children in the public schools. The parents of a couple of children, both under ten, who were until recently enrolled in a private school in the United States, are now living just outside Lausanne, and they have been overwhelmingly impressed by the fine deportment their children are learning in a public school there. At the beginning of the term, the school authorities sent the parents a list of rules that the children are expected to abide by. These rules state that students must show respect to their elders, and especially to magistrates, the aged, the infirm, and women. They must not use coarse language or commit brutal acts. They must respect private property. They must prepare their homework. They are forbidden to loiter on the streets, to smoke, to carry arms, to mistreat animals, to go out alone after 8 P.M. between November 1st and March 31st or after 9 P.M. during the other months, to enter public establishments like cafés, bars, and beer halls without their parents or a school matron, or to go to the cinema without their parents. The parents of the two children from America were asked to sign this document—and they did, happily. —LILLIAN ROSS

Approved For Release 2000/08/24 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100080009-3