

The fundamental principles and forms of representation of the people of the Swiss Confederation and the Swiss Cantons

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For each ration of seven ounces you must also take as much white flour as will cover the tip of a knife and stir it thoroughly into a liqueur-glass of kirsch. Also a tiny pinch of bicarbonate of soda.

Heat the pot over a moderate flame and start beating the mixture at once. Do not stir with a circular motion, for this would result in a horrid, indigestible, rubbery ball; and what we want is a rich smooth cream. Beat diagonally with a wooden fork to make all the particles amalgamate perfectly. Beat without stopping, and remove the pot from the fire when the molten mixture starts to bubble. Pour in the kirsch with one hand, while still beating with the other; then mix in the pinch of bicarbonate to make your fondue lighter.

The phase of operations just described can be carried out in the kitchen, on the gas range. At this point your work is done. All that remains is to sprinkle the surface of the fondue generously with pepper and place this gastronomic masterpiece on the table; a small table with an adjustable spirit dishwarmer in the centre. The table may be laid for two or three; four is the perfect number. For six persons it is better to make two fondues. In front of each one there is a plate with a sufficient ration of bread broken into small pieces- not cut, for the pieces would not be so absorbent. Grasp your fork in your right hand and spear a bit of bread; dip it in the smoking-hot cream and move it around until it is covered with a thick coating; then convey it religiously to your lips. What a succulent morsel!

Each guest dips in turn. No other dish in the world is more sociable, one might even say fraternal. One should partake of it among pals. It would not be right to prevent the ladies from enjoying it, but the fondue does not inspire gallantry. Nor does it require you to get all dressed up; a dinner jacket would be absurd, and you can even address it in your shirt-sleeves.

Fondue is a meal in itself. It may be followed by a slice of ham or sausage, an apple and a cup of good, hot coffee. Real connoisseurs and strict traditionalists do not drink wine with fondue, for they know that this might give them indigestion; they rightly advocate a glass of kirsch at half time. But they are not averse to drinking before - to get an appetite - and after - to slake their thirst - and also for the pleasure of drinking each other's health according to the local custom.

It is incredible that there are tourists who visit Western Switzerland and leave without tasting fondue. They would even go to Athens and not see the Parthenon!

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The Fundamental Principles and Forms of Representation
of the People of the Swiss Confederation and the Swiss Cantons.

CONFEDERATION AND CANTONS.

The Swiss Confederation is a democratic Republic, composed of 22 sovereign States or Cantons, which are not mere provinces of a Central State. In view of this sovereignty of the Cantons, which is maintained beside the sovereignty of the Confederation, Switzerland is a union of federated States.

Thus there is a double sovereignty in Switzerland, a federal one and a cantonal one. Under these circumstances it naturally became necessary, to determine as precisely as possible the objects, upon which each of the two sovereignties can legitimately exercise its authority, i.e. to define the competences of the Confederation on one hand, and those of the cantonal Governments on the other hand. The entire Home Policy of Switzerland is dominated by the necessity of protecting or defending both of these sovereign authorities, in order to avoid any prejudice to the federal form of the State.

In a State, which ethnographically is so little homogeneous as Switzerland, political concord can only be based upon a highly developed cantonal autonomy, which alone is able to mitigate inevitable divergencies of public opinion.

CITIZENS.

Swiss citizens act within the range of their two citizenships - one federal, the other cantonal. Besides this, they take a very active part in the political life of their "Commune."

Switzerland is not merely a representative Democracy, in which the People only have the right to elect their representatives, as in France, Great Britain and the United States etc. It is a composite Democracy, which is representative and direct at the same time, because the People can, and in certain cases must, ultimately decide for themselves what solution should be given to political problems, dealt with by their representatives.

Thus the political rights of the People have a wide scope in this country. To be able to exercise them, one must be of the masculine sex and at least 20 years of age. About one-fifth of the total population answer these conditions. There are three ways of exercising the political rights; by the Vote, the Referendum and the Initiative.

By the right of Vote every citizen can elect his representative and also give his personal vote for or against certain important laws (the term "Law" used in a very broad sense). The right of Referendum implies, that a certain number of citizens can demand that a law, that has already been passed by the Parliament, should still be submitted to the People's vote. In this case the electoral body will be called upon to approve or to reject the new law. By the right of Initiative a certain number of citizens can propose a new law. Finally, the right of Petition allows each citizen individually to ask the Authorities to take the decision which he proposes. He cannot be sued or punished, even if his petition be of a revolutionary character.

These are the different ways in which the citizen can act on the public Authorities. The Constitution and the federal laws determine the exercise of these rights in federal matters. On the other hand the Constitution and the laws of each Canton also contain the necessary dispositions concerning cantonal affairs. There is a great diversity between the various systems adopted by the Cantons, as will be seen from the following indications.

In each case the Referendum is obligatory for projects of law involving changes in the text of the Constitution. On the other hand there are Cantons where the Referendum is facultative, and some where it is non-existent for legislation or financial decrees. As to the Initiative, this is admitted in all Cantons and in the federal Constitution for a revision of the Constitution. However, it is not admitted in every Canton for legislation (esp. not in federal legislation) and in some Cantons only for parts of the legislation. The Petition can deal with any object whatever, but it possesses no obligatory character for the Authorities.

THE PRINCIPLE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY.

The preceding explanations are intended to show, how each citizen can act upon the Authorities in a direct manner, either by inviting them to take action, or by opposing their decisions.

Naturally, the People dispose of the general means of expression, existing in many other countries, viz., the Parliaments, which they have elected. According to the system generally adopted, the People elect the Legislative Assembly. But there are also other systems, which are traditional in a few of the Swiss Cantons:-

- (a) The participation of all citizens in the Legislative Assembly, called "Landsgemeinde," which virtually amounts to the election of the Government by direct vote of the People.
- (b) The plurality of Legislative Assemblies, e.g. two Chambers of the federal Parliament; Landsgemeinde plus elected cantonal Parliament.

The system adopted by the federal Authorities is rather complicated. It reflects the diversity of the components of the Confederation.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE
IN THE CONFEDERATION.

By its quality as a federal State, the Swiss Confederation is composed of two distinct elements, the People and the Cantons. Both contribute to the formation of her supreme organ, the Federal Assembly, which is composed of two Councils - the National Council, representing the People, and the Council of States, representing the Cantons. Both Councils have the same rights and the same competences, and neither is superior to the other. Their Sessions are held separately.

Switzerland has thus adopted the American system of two Chambers, which permits each Chamber to exercise a certain control of the activity of the other. They only meet exceptionally in a Session of the Federal Assembly held once a year, in order to discharge certain legal business, including the election of the Members of the Federal Government and the Federal Tribunal. The Federal Assembly also exercises the supreme authority of the Confederation.

(a) The National Council.

This Council is composed of the representatives of the People, one Member standing for every 22,000 individuals of the total population of Swiss citizens and foreigners. According to this rule, which was made in 1931, fractions numbering more than 11,000 persons are reckoned as 22,000 and authorize the election of a deputy. Each Canton or "Half-Canton" elects at least one representative to the National Council.

The National Councillors are elected by secret vote, according to the proportional system, each Canton or Half-Canton forming a Constituency, for which as many Councillors are elected as the number of inhabitants permits (one per 22,000 inhabitants). At present there are 194 Deputies to the National Council; they have no fixed remuneration, the federal Treasury, however, pays them a certain amount per day of session.

(b) The Council of States.

This Council is composed of 44 Deputies, who represent each of the Swiss Cantons in the Federal Assembly. Each Canton delegates two Deputies, and each Half-Canton names one. The form of nomination of these Councillors, their eligibility and the duration of their activity are determined entirely by the Cantons. Federal Government officials can become members of the Council of States; the Cantons thus have full scope for the designation of their representatives, who are not remunerated by the federal Treasury, but directly by the Cantons, who have nominated them.

(c) Sessions.

Both Councils assemble in their respective halls in the Parliament House, Berne, at the same time, in four or more sessions per annum.

For the elaboration of Laws, Ordinances or Decrees it is indispensable that both Chambers agree in the wording of the texts. If a legislative project adopted by one Chamber is modified by the other, the alterations made are submitted to the Council who discussed it first, so that it can pronounce itself on these modifications. Such a project can be sent back from one Council to the other until both Chambers agree, or till one or the other passes a formal declaration to the effect, that its decision is final. In this eventuality an ad hoc meeting is called, which makes every effort to find a formula for an amicable arrangement. If such a formula is not accepted by both Councils, the project is abandoned.

(d) Relations with the Government.

Both Legislative Councils meet, in order to proceed to the election of the Government of the Confederation, viz., the Federal Council. The latter is liable to conform to the Laws voted by both Councils. However, the Federal Council is not bound to a system of government responsibility to the Chambers. Even if they should disapprove of an action of the Federal Council, the latter

would be under no obligation to resign office.

(e) Resume.

The Confederation consists of the Swiss People, considered as a solidary unit, as well as the Cantons, considered as 22 federated States with equal rights. The People are represented by the National Council, yet they reserve their right of opposition by a veto against the decisions of the Chambers in the shape of the facultative Referendum. Moreover, no modification of the Constitution can be made, if the People of a majority of the Cantons oppose it. If eight Cantons demand a Referendum, the Laws voted by the Chambers will have to be submitted to the People's vote.

The equality of the two Councils is based upon the equality of the constitutive elements of the Confederation. The rights of Initiative or Referendum, safeguarded by the people or by the Cantons, correspond to the principle of the sovereignty of the People. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of an assembly government and of undisciplined parliamentarism have been avoided, as the Federal Council, i.e. the Government of the country, is elected for a term of 4 years, and is not liable to resign office, if its action meets with the disapproval of the Parliament.

In all these institutions one can recognise the will to put the rule of the People's Sovereignty into practice, and at the same time to give the public Authorities the necessary stability and independence.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE IN THE CANTONS.

In most of the Cantons the Legislative Assembly consists of one Chamber, in which the representation of the People is assured in a similar manner to that adopted by the Confederation, to guarantee the Democracy of the People and the stability of the Government.

Most of the Cantonal Governments are elected by the direct vote of the People.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE.

In all sections of the Administration and of the various Authorities the collegial system is preferred to that of individuals, who bear the sole responsibility. Reminding one of the Anglosaxon "team spirit," it is the result of a double pre-occupation. In the first line the Swiss have an instinctive aversion to every form of personal power in politics. Secondly, they cultivate the habit of electing to positions of Public Authority representatives of the principal political, social, religious and language groups existing among them.

The collegial system, therefore, is the expression of a democratic need and also of the diversity of the population. It is so carefully applied, that it is often said that Switzerland has no Chief of the State nor a supreme Commandant of her Army in peace times. In the Confederation the Executive Power rests with the Government as a whole, i.e., the Federal Council, consisting of 7 members of the Parliament which elects them and each year nominates one of these magistrates as President of the Confederation. While continuing to supervise his Department in the Administration, the President, who is just "primus inter pares," represents the Government at State receptions and ceremonies, without taking any political action on his sole responsibility.

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SUNDRY NEWS.

FEDERAL. Switzerland has entered the field of atomic research, called nuclear physical research in scientific circles, and will spend an annual amount of one-million francs for this purpose under a decree submitted by the Federal Council to our two houses of parliament. It is stressed that we shall never make atomic bombs and that the subsidy is intended only for research for peaceful purposes.