

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 11 (1945-1946)
Heft: 13

Artikel: Swiss Democracy [continued]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942861>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 19.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Probably the best known Swiss among our Colony, he had innumerable friends and was loved and esteemed by all. All his life he was a faithful patriot and his reminiscences of the Appenzell and his dry humor so typical of the quaint little Canton in Eastern Switzerland, was always appreciated by his fellowmen. Mr. Ungemuth had a lovable character and to our knowledge never offended anyone, or had an ill thought for his many friends and acquaintances. He always was deeply attached to his homeland and he certainly proved his worth through the great work done for our Colony in New Zealand.

Werner Ungemuth was one of the foundation members of the S.B.S., which was officially formed on September 2nd 1935, after a preliminary resolution during a 1st of August gathering held at the home of the Consul. Together with Dr. Blau, Consul for Switzerland (at that time stationed in Auckland) and a few other helpers, he did most of the work for our young Society as secretary. His eagerness and genuine love for all matters connected with Switzerland, soon brought good results. The modest original membership of about 30, increased to over 100 in 2 years' time. We recall one of his annual holidays which Werner spent with his life-long friend, John C. Steiner of Waihou, solely for the purpose of touring Taranaki and enrolling new members among the large farming colony there. This drive resulted in no less than 35 new members for our Society.

Another happening of considerable interest to our compatriots worth relating is a petition sent to the President of the Swiss Confederation sometime in 1931. Our friend was the instigator of sending a petition to the Bundespraesident, suggesting the appointment of a permanent Consul of Swiss Origin and not only a "Gerant" of N.Z. birth. A suitably drafted appeal, signed by a sizable number of compatriots and suggesting a fitting man for the post, was sent home. The result was gratifying in so far that a permanent Consulate, conducted by a professional diplomat was opened within about two years.

A large gathering attended the funeral services held on October 31st. An impressive service was held at the home of the deceased. The Reverend Isherwood conducted the service, and the house, although a large one, was filled to overflowing. After the benediction and the condolences to the bereaved family, the bier was carried by the following pallbearers: Paul and Walter Ungemuth, Arnold Schlaepfer and James Gray, A. Peyer and E. Merz. The Cortège proceeded to the ferry across the Auckland harbour and thence to the Waikumete Cemetery, where he was cremated.

Thus a life full of interest and a great love for his fine family has come to a close. We Swiss in New Zealand are sad to have lost such a true friend, who always remained "schlicht und einfach". We all extend our deepest sympathy and esteem to Mrs. Ungemuth and to Werner, Paul, Walter and Marie.

The Secretary,
S. B. S.

.....

Upon receipt of the sad news of the death of Mr. Ungemuth, the following telegram was dispatched to the widow by Mr. Theiler, the Swiss Consul:

"The news of the passing away of your husband and our dear friend Werner Ungemuth has come as a shock to us. His services to the Swiss Benevolent Society and his interest in Swiss affairs have always been greatly appreciated. Please accept the expression of my heartfelt sympathy

Ernest Theiler Swiss Consul"

.....

"SWISS DEMOCRACY" (Contd.)

THE PARISH.

Three different kinds of parishes are outlined:

1. A mountain parish on the Lake of Thun: Sigriswil. With one exception this parish is the most important owner of forests in the canton of Berne. It extends over eleven villages of very different types, amongst them two watering places on the shore of the lake, but also very remote hamlets. "All these places,

i.e. parts of the parish of Sigriswil, have a certain life of their own, economically and as regards self-administration. Each of these eleven places nominates one parish councillor to be elected, together with the other ten councillors, by the parish as a whole, so that, in point of fact, the parish council numbering eleven heads, is so constituted that one councillor comes from each of the eleven places. This councillor is the manager of his village. He presides especially over the local assembly which elects the roadmaster and nominates the teacher for election, which resolves, in spring, upon the distribution of work to be done in common and, in autumn, shares out the yield of the forest by lot.

The accomplishment of such jobs to be done in common is one of the main tasks of the place.

The duty to co-operate in such common work is, quite in the spirit of old Germanic ruling, not imposed upon the individual citizen but upon the family, the hearth. Where the work cannot be done personally, say by an old widow, whose household, by the way, only counts for half, a man has to be entrusted with the job. Those too who are not fit for the task have to find a substitute or else to pay compensation money. The road-master keeps a record of the work allotted to and done by every family, day by day. Inversely it is the hearth too that is entitled to a share of the fruit of the forests".

2. Oensingen, in the canton of Solothurn, is a parish chosen for the absence of any sign of peculiarity, a sort of standard parish. It may, however, appear remarkable owing to the peaceful coexistence of two confessions and a number of political parties.

"For it is a special feature of Oensingen, as of most parishes in the canton of Solothurn, that Catholics and Protestants are to be found in all the political parties. About half of the radicals, the president included, are Catholics; on the other hand some members of the popular conservative party are Protestants. The Catholic clergyman is known to be very tolerant. Thus the followers of both confessions live together on the best of terms; they say that within living memory there never was any dissension.

The parish council, i.e. the parliament of the parish, is elected, by ballot, on the lines of proportional representation. The last election was exceptional, in that there was no contest and the election was therefore a "quiet" one. In order to commute party antagonism, in a time of difficulties, into co-operation, the political parties each agreed to have its share in the 14 seats of the council. This is composed of five radicals, four socialists, three members of the Catholic conservative party and two young-liberals. They govern the parish jointly. Since, however, a "government" numbering 14, might prove somewhat cumbersome, a committee of five was appointed to manage the business of the parish. This committee includes the mayor, the sheriff, the parish-clerk and two other parish councillors. They are all men of the people, i.e. no civil servants in the ordinary sense, but men occupied in a trade or profession. The mayor, i.e. the president of the parish, is the owner of a drapery shop, the sheriff manager of a co-operative store, the parish clerk is a teacher and so on. The committee meets when required, prepares the business of the parish council and makes proposals. The latter assembles once a fortnight in the parish council room of the schoolhouse.

All the more important business is decided at the parishioners' assembly. To this end the enfranchised citizens, called up by an advertisement, collect at the gymnastic hall. At times they tacitly assent and all is settled at once. At other times tenacious debating continues for some time, before the matter is decided by vote. One of the most important matters, in recent time, was the building of a new schoolhouse. The 2000 inhabitants decided on a new schoolhouse costing half a million francs which, of course, have to be recovered by taxes.

3. As to Zurich, Switzerland's one large town whose population increases by an average of about 6000 heads every year, the question whether it is still suitable to speak of a communal life is not quite out of place. Closer examination will, however, evince that this conglomeration, exceedingly large as it may appear when measured by Swiss standards, is by no means the unresponsive product of centralization and of standardization one might expect. For, within, it is organized on democratic lines and according to federal principles.

The territory of the town is divided into eleven arrondissements corresponding to the precincts of the old town and the boroughs incorporated more or less recently. Each arrondissement represents a constituency of its own, each has its own bankruptcy office, its justice of the peace, its local office building and its police-station. Besides, there exist five school-districts. The arrondissements again are divided into quarters. Owing to the fact that each of the eleven arrondissements represents a constituency, the political parties too are organized accordingly, with the result that each arrondissement has, politically, an existence of its own. These arrondissements are cells comparable with those of a honeycomb.

Despite the town's 346,000 inhabitants the individual citizen is held in respect, in great respect even, considering the size of the town as a whole.

In point of fact every enfranchised citizen is, according to the statute of the town, entitled to address motions to the chairman of the town parliament (municipal council), and such motions have to be made the object of a plebiscite if supported by at least 2000 citizens or 30 municipal councillors. In other words, even if such a matter meets with the opposition of the majority of the municipal council, it must under such circumstances be brought before the people. The promoter of a motion, i.e. any enfranchised citizen, may even defend the matter personally before the municipal council, if ten council-members so request; a far-reaching democratic prerogative of the individual which is, however, rarely made use of.

SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

The three Cabinet Ministers, Sir Stafford Cripps, Aneurin Bevan and Miss Ellen Wilkinson, on the conclusion of their stay in our country, were entertained to an official luncheon on August 28th at the Wattenwyl house in Berne. Fed. President Kobelt submitted the toast to which Miss Wilkinson responded. Among those present was the Swiss Minister in London.

Switzerland has been elected a member of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation at the plenary session which took place at Copenhagen on September 3rd. The secret ballot returned 26 votes (unanimous) and our contribution has been fixed at \$90,000.

In adjusting the tax liability of our magistrates the finance committee of the States Council has fixed the assessment for 1946 to 1951 of a Federal Councillor at 48,000 francs.

The opening concert of the Musical Festival at Lucerne was under the direction of Dr. Malcolm Sargent; his orchestra brought together the hundred best players from different parts of our country. In the view of Dr. Sargent conditions were perfect - the more meritorious as some of the English works by Elgar and Holst must have been somewhat unfamiliar to our musicians. The success was such that even the players rose excitedly to their feet to cheer their conductor.

The British Health Minister Aneurin Bevan, accompanied by his wife, Jennie Lee, on his return journey from his holidays in the Ticino, was entertained to an official tea by the Stadtrat of Zurich on August 25th. Dr. Itchinger, the president, in his short address, was confounded in admitting that in Switzerland the fair sex had not yet attained the equality of rights enjoyed in England.

Frau Camenzind-Riegg, a pensioned-off telegraphist from the post office in Zurich, died in Ragaz at the age of 85; she had during the war knitted no less than 700 pairs of socks for our soldiers for which she received a personal letter of thanks from General Guisan.

Said to be the oldest survivor of the 1870/71 mobilisation, Christian Abegglen of Brienz celebrated his 100th anniversary; he was on duty as a sergeant when the Bourbaki army crossed our frontiers.