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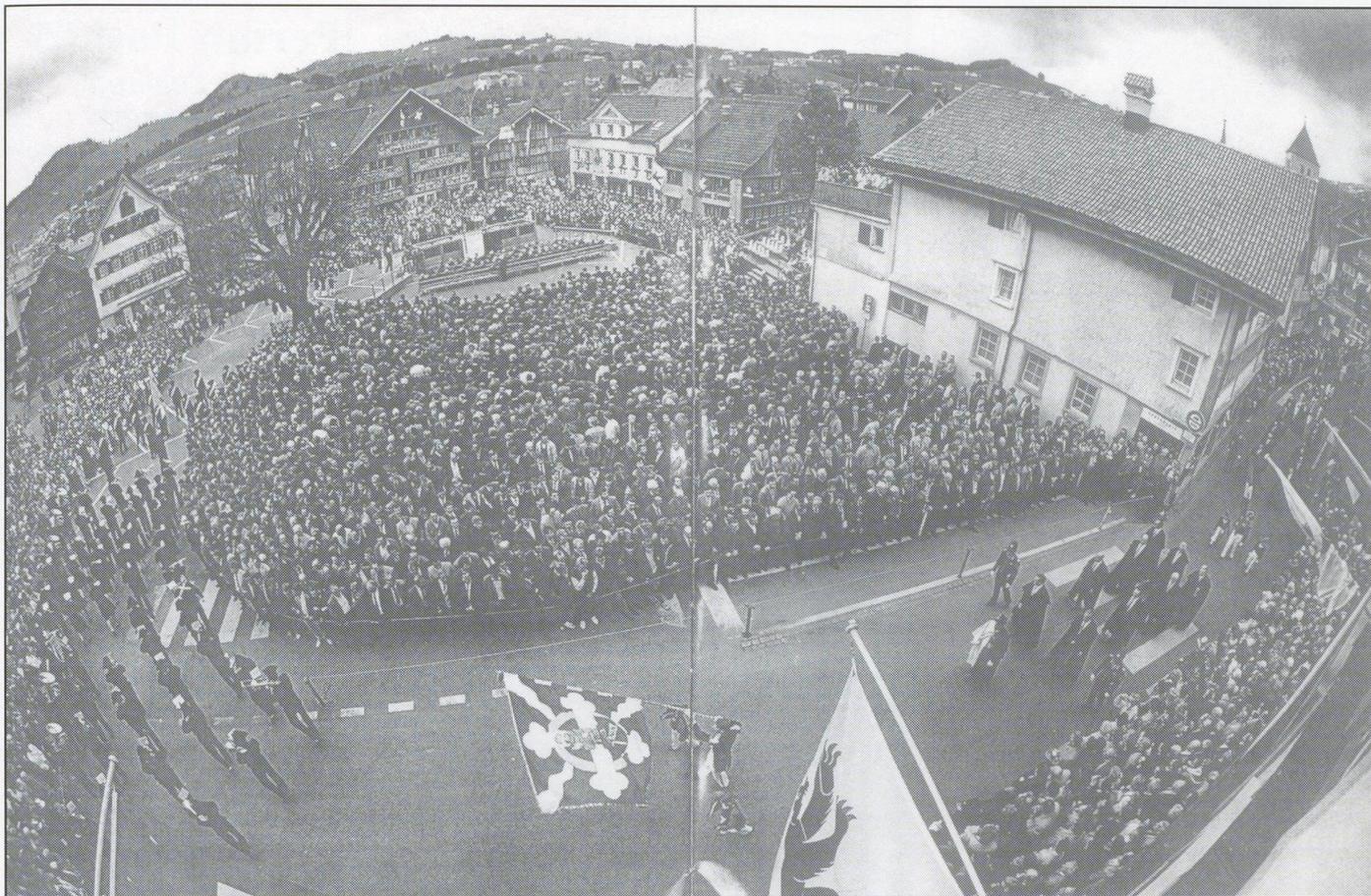
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Tradition supported with show of hands

Only card and sword carriers from the half canton are allowed to have their say.

Voting by a show of hands is still practiced in a few corners of Switzerland. The annual vote – or “Landsgemeinde” – in the half canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden in eastern Switzerland is one of the more colourful affairs.

The vote is an example of Switzerland’s direct democracy in action. Eligible voters in the half canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden crowd into “Landsgemeinde” square on the last Sunday in April (April 29) to vote on local issues and elect the council.

The day begins with a religious service in the St Mauritius church – the town’s most imposing landmark. To the peal of church bells, the local authorities and guests of honour slowly make their way through the narrow streets of the old town to the podium in Landsgemeinde square.

Even though the tradition goes back about 600 years, the women of Ap-

penzell have only been allowed to take part since 1991. Appenzell was the last place in Switzerland to enfranchise them.

Women are required to present a voter identification card, while men can choose to present their card or stick to the age-old tradition of showing a sword as proof of their eligibility. In most cases, the swords are family heirlooms.

When the votes are eventually held, the officials judge the outcome by a quick glance at the crowd. In keeping with the social aspect of the affair, the day ends for most residents with a lively debate in one of the town’s many restaurants or bars.

Article by Swiss Radio International

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