

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1965)

Heft: 1469

Artikel: A voting week-end in Switzerland

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686080>

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THE SWISS ALPS — CROWN OF EUROPE

Until about a century ago, the high mountains of Switzerland were regarded with dread and awe by the peasants living in the valleys below. As in the Himalayas even today, fearsome legends were woven around the peaks — tales of death and disaster at the hands of the evil spirits that haunted them.

Superstition aside, high mountains always are dangerous. Lovely, serene, alluring in fine weather, the peaks are prone to turn angry and treacherous when provoked by a sudden storm, enshrouding themselves in impenetrable mist and hurling down rocks and stones on the heads of hapless climbers.

No wonder, therefore, that those who lived at their feet and witnessed their rages gave them a wide berth. In the Swiss Alps there is in fact, only one record of a first ascent of a major peak before the middle of the last century: the conquest — in summer — of the Jungfrau by the Meyer brothers of Aarau in 1811. The first winter ascent of the peak — which today can be "climbed" by railway as far as the Jungfraujoch, 11,333 feet — was accomplished only in 1874 by American-born W. A. B. Coolidge (1850-1926), together with his aunt Miss Brevoort and five mountain guides from Grindelwald.

Coolidge, who loved the Bernese Oberland and — significantly — is buried in Grindelwald, lived most of his life in England. It was, in fact, the British who first "discovered" the Alps and, with their proverbial bulldog determination, set out to conquer them. 14th July 1865, marks the centenary of the sensational but tragic first ascent of the Matterhorn, at the seventh attempt, by Edward Whymper, and his party of seven; only Whymper himself and two of the three guides survived when their rope broke during the descent.

It was also in the year 1865 that the first party of winter sports guests arrived at the now world-famous

Alpine resort of St. Moritz. A local hotelier — so the story goes — had promised them free board and lodging for every day of bad weather. Though it is not recorded whether there were any Scots among them, they spent three months "on the house"! These and numerous other events recorded just a century ago in the annals of pioneer mountaineering in Switzerland have made 1965 the natural choice as "The Year of the Swiss Alps".

Mountain climbing is a virile, challenging sport which is gaining in popularity year by year — on the distaff side as well. In Switzerland, of course, there are virtually no more virgin peaks left to climb — even the fearsome Eiger North Wall has been "done". But there are plenty of formidable summits presenting thrills and a challenge; and for the less active or less enterprising mountaineers there are paths, tracks and easy walks to quite respectable altitudes which do not unduly tax the stamina of the elderly.

Crumpled Switzerland is a land of sweeping panoramas. The central region around and beyond Lucerne rising to the great St. Gotthard divide, the eastern section backed by the Lake of Constance, then the Jura, the Bernese Oberland and the Valais towards the west — all afford glorious climbing — as well as breath-taking views from lofty vantage points which can be reached without exertion by the young and old via aerial cableways, funiculars and chair-lifts.

At Rosenlau, near Meiringen in the Bernese Oberland, is what is probably the most famous climbing school in the world — the Swiss Mountaineering Institute. It is run by veteran alpinist Arnold Glatthard. Many Americans, too, have followed his courses. In fact, a certain American statesman, by the name of McNamara has expressed interest in taking part this coming summer.

[S.N.T.O.]

A VOTING WEEK-END IN SWITZERLAND

The first week-end in December was fixed for the federal plebiscite on the continuation of limited price control measures. With a participation of 37%, the proposed law was accepted by the electorate and all the Cantons. 480,407 were for and 118,772 against. The largest turnout of voters was in the Canton of Schaffhausen (71.1%), closely followed by the Valais (70) and the Aargau (69.9%). The Ticino showed the poorest participation with 17%.

The biggest majority resulted in Fribourg (9,161: 1,243), and other Cantons with a large majority were Zurich (105,341: 19619), Berne (71,786: 14,085), Lucerne (16,401: 2,845), Obwalden (1,124: 231), Nidwalden (1,835: 496), Glarus (3,186: 540), Zug (3,080: 607), Baselstadt (19,515: 3,722), Schaffhausen (10,810: 2,081), Appenzell-Innerrhoden (874: 168), and Grisons (11,556: 2,549). Geneva showed the smallest majority with (9,863: 9,103), followed by Schwyz (4,976: 3,397), Neuchâtel (7,126: 3,707) and Solothurn (14,472: 5,458).

Other results were Uri (3,164: 742), Appenzell-Ausserrhoden (5,147: 1,754), Baselland (9,199: 2,342), St. Gall (29,981: 7,995), Aargau (48,475: 16,343), Thurgau (16,868: 5,466), Ticino (7,372: 2,017), Vaud (24,334: 5,464) and Valais (24,761: 6,798).

Many Cantons and Communes used the same week-

end to submit various proposals to the popular vote.

In the Canton of Zurich, both proposals — change of legal constitutional and administrative laws and a state contribution of 11.2 million francs towards the home for epileptics — were accepted by a large majority.

With a participation of 33%, the voters of the Canton of Berne accepted the two proposals, the law regulating public holidays and the partial revision of the water laws.

With a large majority, the citizens of Uri approved the law concerning state help in the case of damage caused by the elements, and the proposal to drop an article in the cantonal legal administration law.

36% of the Schwyz electorate rejected the new law governing inn keeping and the sale of wines and spirits dating from 1899. Thus, the proposed examination which publicans have to pass in each Canton except the two Appenzells, has still not become compulsory in the Canton of Schwyz.

A similar law which had been recommended by all Parties in the Canton of Solothurn, was, surprisingly, only accepted with 11,068 to 9,994 votes.

Baselstadt passed the new citizen rights law by rejecting an alteration of and addition to the old law. With a

large majority, the proposal to give a rent subsidy to families was rejected (15,384: 6,020). The voting participation amounted to 35.5%.

On the other hand, in the Aargau, 70% of the voters went to the poll and accepted the proposal to tax at source all employed foreigners. They also agreed to the measures for improving social housing, all by a large majority.

With a large majority, too, the citizens of the Canton of Thurgau accepted the three proposals, two of them increasing the financial scope of the Grand Council and of the cantonal government, and the third prodiving for a subsidy to the nurses' training college Lindenholz in Berne.

An incredibly low participation was shown in the Canton of Neuchâtel where only 15% of the voters went to the poll. They accepted the proposal to improve the sickness insurance (12,123: 1,196) and granted the necessary credit for the erection of a vocational training school (10,586: 3,161).

Obvious political stability was in evidence in the Valais where the authorities and the judges for 168 Communes were elected. Hardly any changes resulted.

No fewer than eight proposals were put to the vote in the town of Zurich. All were accepted: a contribution by the municipality to the home for epileptics, for the foundation "Housing Welfare" towards the building of an old age settlement, for the building of an old age home (also at the Hegianwandweg at Wiedikon), a credit for the installation of a long-distance gas pipe from Dietikon to Baden, another grant for a school and teachers' flats in Seebach, and a cost of living grant for pensioners. The largest opposition was in the voting for a credit of one and a quarter million francs to let the municipality take part in the increase of share capital by Swissair (13,566: 20,824). Participation was 45.6%, and in the last proposal which was submitted to citizens of the town only (credit of 1.1 million francs for the new work building of the "Stadtforstamt"), it was 54.8%.

The citizens of Winterthur (67%) accepted the four proposals to extend the old age home Neumarkt, to increase the annual subsidy to the college of music, to contribute to the group insurance of the members of the municipal orchestra, and to cantonal technical college. The revision of the rulings regarding old age and dependents' insurance was accepted, too.

Horgen agreed to the proposed second stage of rebuilding the centre of the town, and Wädenswil accepted the extension of the waste water plant (third stage) at a cost of three million francs.

34.5% was the participation in the voting in Berne where the budget for 1965 (161 million francs income to 165.8 million francs expenditure) was approved, also a revision of the personnel and salary regulations, and several building proposals.

The budget was only just accepted in Biel, and the proposal to buy land was rejected with seven votes.

Lyss agreed to acquire more land reserves, but opposed the purchase of a badly planned children's home to be used as a holiday home.

Thun and Interlaken, as well as Steffisburg accepted the budget proposals for 1965, the latter surpassing the seven-million-franc limit.

The voters of Langenthal (77.1%) accepted four proposals including a grant of over five million francs for extending the district hospital, and four million francs for constructing a subway. When the full-time commune

president Hans Ischi was confirmed in office, 640 voting slips were deposited empty!

In many communes of the Bernese Jura the authorities had to be elected. At Delsberg, the former municipal president Georges Scherrer was re-elected, but a Socialist Francis Ermatinger replaces the former president at Reconvilier. The new head of Malleray belongs to no Party — André Houmar — and at Neuveville none of the three candidates reached the absolute majority, which meant another poll later.

Muri (Berne) and Urtenen-Schoenbuehl have new presidents, the former Dr. Franz Wenger, the latter Fritz Jaussi.

Lucerne had seven proposals to vote on; all of them were accepted, the budget, a loan to the Engelberg electricity works, the construction of a bathing beach at Tribschen, and other projects concerning the building of two gymnasias, and waste water and refuse disposal. Rothenburg also accepted the two latter proposals.

Schaffhausen had to re-elect the Commune Parliament which now consists of 20 Social Democrats (20 so far), Liberal 14 (13), Catholics 6 (6), Farmers' Party 2 (2), "Landesring" 3 (4), Evangelicals 2 (2), Liberal/Socialists 1 (1) and Young Liberals 2 (2).

Several communes voted in Appenzell-Ausserrhoden. Urnaesch and Walzenhausen clearly rejected proposals for building regulations. Stein rejected the re-introduction of open voting on certain proposals. Speicher agreed to the interior renovation of the church.

Davos accepted the budget for 1965, the rate of tax of 110% for the new year and the purchase of shares in the Angleterre & Golfhotel A.G.

Just under 50% of the voters of St. Gall agreed to the plans of a new school "in Winkeln" (3.2 million francs).

The high number of 83% of Zofingen's and 78.6% of Brugg's voters accepted the introduction of an Inhabitants' Council in place of the Commune Assembly, both for 1st January 1966. The majority at Brugg was only small, viz. 783: 701.

The voters entitled as members of the Christian/Catholic Church of the Canton of Aargau (55%) agreed to the introduction of the vote for women and the granting of voting rights to foreigners.

"Higher powers" are the reason why St. Antoonien in the Grisons was not able to vote in the federal plebiscite, for the danger of avalanches was such that polling was impossible.

(Based on news received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

ELECTIONS IN THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

On Thursday, 10th December, the Federal Assembly (National Council and Council of States) elected Federal Councillor Hans Peter Tschudi President of the Confederation for 1965. The new Vice-President for 1965 and presumptive President in 1966 is Federal Councillor Hans Schaffner (Aargau and Berne). Dr. Fritz Häberlin (Thurgau) has been elected to the highest office in the Federal Tribunal, President of the Court of Justice in Lausanne. Dr. André Panchaud (Vaud) has become Vice-President.

The new President of the National Council is Dr. Franz Josef Kurmann (aged 47) from Lucerne (Conservative), and Dr. Jakob Müller (aged 69) from Thurgau (Liberal) will preside the Council of States in 1965.

[A.T.S.]