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## "LANDSGEMEINDEN" AND VOTING DAYS IN SWITZERLAND

The "Landsgemeinden" have been called red-letter days for democracy. Only in a few parts of the Swiss Confederation does the assembly of voters gather on a Sunday in spring for the Landsgemeinde or folk-moot. The voters of Obwalden met on the historic Landenberg above Sarnen on 28th April, where once a fortress was destroyed during the struggle for freedom, while the citizens of Nidwalden foregathered at the spot that has been dedicated to the purpose since the late middle ages in open country at Wil an der Aa near Stans, noted for its ramparts and trees. The picturesque village square at Trogen made a wonderful setting for the Landsgemeinde in the Half Canton of Appenzell-Ausser rhoden, while the other Half Canton, Appenzell-Innerrhoden, held its open-air parliament in Appenzell town itself. Only a week later Glarus was the scene of a similar event.

The 2,500 Obwalden voters, including Federal Councillor von Moos, elected *Landstatthalter* Leo von Wyl as the new *Landammann*. Various credits were granted for water plants, electricity grids and three alpine pasture improvements. The "Landsgemeinde" was followed by a thanksgiving service at the Chapel and the traditional meal at the *Rathaus*.

Nearly four hours were spent in the "ring" by the Nidwalden citizens. *Landesstatthalter* Dr. Alfred Graeni was elected new *Landammann*, the judges were appointed and the Councillor of States Dr. E. Amstad, Beckenried, confirmed. New legal procedure, four projects regarding education and two laws on fishing and a change regarding the Swiss Civil Code were all accepted without opposition. A heated debate took place with regard to the Initiative that *Verh rrichter*, *Staatsanwalt* and *Grundbuchverwalter* should in future again be elected by the "Landsgemeinde". Finally, the electors rejected the Initiative by a large majority. The citizens who had taken the Referendum against the cantonal *Wasserrechtsverordnung* were successful, and the electors also agreed with the *Flurgenossenschaft Wasserversorgung Kehrsiten* who wanted a contribution of 25% towards the new water plant. The *Landrat* wanted a much higher rate of repayment and lost.

The President of the National Council was amongst the guests who attended the "Landsgemeinde" at Trogen where between 9,000 and 10,000 voters stood in the "Ring". After the traditional hymn, they accepted the accounts for 1967 and confirmed the seven members of the Cantonal Government by a very substantial majority. The new law on *Jagd*, *Wild-und Vogelschutz*, the partial revision of the law on direct taxation, the proposals to have extraordinary accounts to cover road construction, the regulations for the new federal law on *Schuldbetreibung*, credit for the renovation of the Cantonal School at Trogen, were all accepted by the voters. The new *Landammann* took the oath, and that brought to a close a most harmonious "Landsgemeinde".

2,000 electors gathered in Appenzell after a divine service at the "Pfarrkirche" and a picturesque procession to the *Platz bei der Linde*. The annual accounts were accepted, and one of the speakers strongly criticised a member of the administration. *Landammann* Dr. R. Broger was confirmed in his office. Then followed the oath, first of the reigning President and then of the people. All other members of the Government were confirmed, also the judges. The new tax law was accepted, as was the revision of the Cantonal Bank law which visualises unlimited credits.

In the Glarner "Ring", there were 6,000 citizens.

They elected a new Councillor of States in the person of Dr. Peter Hefti (Liberal). The second Councillor of States, Dr. Fritz Stucki, was elected *Landammann*. The remaining members of the Cantonal Government and the judges were confirmed. Eight million francs was granted for road construction on the Sernftalstrasse, for contributing to the Sanatorium Braunwald, a new bridge over the Linth between Glarus and Ennenda and for the Canton's part in the erection of an Intercantonal Technical College at Rapperswil.

The annual accounts were accepted, a proposal to lower the tax rate was rejected, and the changes in the Constitution dealt with, necessitated by last year's grant of the partial vote for women. The electors empowered owners of holiday houses and cottages to levy *Kurtaxe* from the tenants.

Other proposals were put off to next year's "Landsgemeinde", such as the plans to build a cantonal home for the aged. Like at other "Landsgemeinden", there were prominent guests from politics and the Army, etc., amongst them Federal Councillor Celio and the Government of the Canton of Lucerne.

The "Landsgemeinde" is a matter for men, even though there were two girl trumpet players in the band at the Trogen gathering. It is expected that the Total Revision of the Federal Constitution will be undertaken within the next few years, and with it the vote for women will most likely become a fact. Thus, women could be imposed on the "Landsgemeinden" by law. A well-considered article in the "Appenzeller Zeitung" deals with this aspect, and the writer states that it is nonsense to say that "Landsgemeinde" and votes for women are not compatible. *The "Landsgemeinde" has proved an exceptionally efficient instrument of democracy, and therefore we should adapt ourselves. We surely prefer to go to the poll with the women rather than to give up a valuable tradition.*

The Canton of Uri has no more open-air parliament, but the traditional first Sunday in May has again been used to decide a number of subject matters. The voters elected their Cantonal Government for the next four years: Messrs. Weber, Arnold and Huber were confirmed, and the following three were newly elected; Joseph Bruecker (Altdorf), Hermann Sigr st (Fl elen), Raymond Gamma (Goeschenen). The seventh seat has to be filled in a new vote. Dr. Alfred Weber is *Landammann* for the next two years. The plan to build a *Unterseminar* for the training of teachers was accepted. The elections for the Cantonal Parliament took place at the same time, and the 61 seats are distributed much the same way as before with Conservatives 26, Christian Socialists 15, followed by Liberals (14) and four Social Democrats.

In Schwyz, Messrs. Ulrich, Ab-Yberg, Diethelm, Husi and Leimbacher were re-elected, and the two retiring Conservatives were replaced by National Councillor H. Fuchs (Willerzell) and *Kantonsrat* Xaver Reichmuth (Schwyz). The distribution remains unchanged with the three Conservatives in the lead. In the Cantonal Parliament, the Conservatives lost 5 seats (34) to the Liberals (32), whilst the Christian Socialists gained two seats (20) from the Social Democrats (14).

The 15 members of the *March Bezirksrat* were elected, eight of them new ones. The *Bezirksgemeinde* Schwyz met at the historic "Ring" at Ibach to elect a new *Bezirksammann*, Arthur Inderbitzin, Schwyz, in succession to Willi Heinzer who retired after 16 years in office. Accounts and budget were accepted and money granted for river correction.

The voters in Zurich granted credits of 50 million francs, rejecting only one project, that for an emergency garage for the Municipal Police (5.6m.).

In the six districts of Appenzell Innerrhoden, the elections took place on 5th May. At Gonten and Oberegg, the so-called *Regierende Hauptmannämter* had to be newly filled. One of the most original Appenzellers, *Hauptmann* Restoni Raess, retired after 36 years on the Council and was replaced by Josef Streule (Bruelisau). The equally renowned and witty Emil Manser of Gonten had to be replaced after 29 years by Willi Signer, although he objected because he had just had his eleventh child and therefore no time to rule!

The Grisons electorate agreed to participation in the new technical college at Buchs (St. Gall); this will mean 3.285 m. francs towards the building cost ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) and 180,000 francs for the first three years each. After that, an annual contribution of 3,460 francs per every Grisons student will have to be paid.

The Grisons people also elected their Government. Messrs. Schlumpf, Stiffler and Ludwig were re-elected, and Dr. Georg Vieli (Cons.) was newly elected. For the fifth seat, a new vote is necessary.

The *Landschaft* Davos has rejected the project for a gymnasium and *Aula* at Davos-Platz.

With a terribly small Participation of only 12.5%, voters in Neuchâtel agreed to the revision of the *Strafprozessordnung*, to a grant of 160,000 francs to the Cantonal Office for work medicine and hygiene, to a credit of 17m. for the new building of the cantonal *gymnase* in La Chaux-de-Fonds, to a credit of 8.6m. for the erection and equipment of buildings in the university district of Neuchâtel, to the proposed changes in the vocational training laws and to a maximum contribution of 10m. francs for the promotion of housing.

The Solothurn voters agreed to an increase of the basic capital of the Cantonal Bank from 25 to 35m. francs.

Uzwil citizens agreed to several million francs for road construction, but rejected the project of a football training ground and the proposal to purchase the "Epp" estate at Niederuzwil. Participation was 75%.

Women have been given the vote at Delémont, Villeret, Montignez, Bémont and Pontenet, Crémines, Courtelary, Grandval, also Renan and Burgdorf. This means that well over twenty Bernese Communes have granted their women citizens the vote.

The electors of Chur, too, have voted in favour of women's suffrage, and in the Canton of St. Gall, women have been given the vote in church matters.

(Compiled from news received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

## MAY DAY IN SWITZERLAND

Labour Day on 1st May was marked this year by two anniversaries: the 50th of the General Strike and the 20th of the Declaration of Human Rights. Speakers in many places recalled certain demands which had still not been met, such as an improvement in the Swiss Old-Age Pension, centralisation of sickness funds, university reform, vote for women, etc. The large contingents of Italian and Spanish workers in the processions were remarkable, also the Viet Cong flag carried again and again by students.

In Berne, five processions gathered outside Parliament, for the first time with a group of Socialist students of the *Forum Politicum* of Berne University. Solidarity with the workers was stressed "workers bring decades of experience — students a thousand ideas".

The Zurich demonstration was held under the motto "Peace in Vietnam". 5,000 people listened to the Berne Municipal President Tschaepaet who spoke on Vietnam, Israel and Greece as well as on Switzerland's social problems. This was followed by protest marches against Greece, U.S.A. and Swiss Machine Industrialists.

5,000 people took part in Basle, and for the first time, Baselland trade unions held an open-air meeting rather than a procession. Federal Councillor Tschudi gave an inventory of unfurnished national tasks at a gathering in the *Stadt der Arbeit*, Winterthur. In Schaffhausen, Municipal President Bringolf took the opportunity to thank the electors for their trust in him during nearly 36 years.

In Western Switzerland, the status of women was the theme frequently, and in the Ticino, too, May Day Celebrations were well attended. The President of the Swiss Trade Union Federation, National Councillor Leuenberger, addressed the Swiss people over the radio. He said that the 1st May had lost its former character of class war, but that it was still its aim to stand up for a better and fairer social structure.

[A.T.S.]

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