

Comment

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to her. She was very much for the vote for women, but against that of the Swiss abroad.

Mr. Th. Nagel, from Sweden, was asked to talk about the history and duties of the ombudsman, and the parliamentary system in Sweden which had recently done away with the Second Chamber. The Swiss in Sweden believe that Switzerland must keep the two Chambers and that there was really no need for an ombudsman. The relief needed by the Federal Councils could be given as in Sweden by Secretaries of State.

Mr. J. Jacot, President of the "Union Suisse de Lyons", in France, spoke of the real need for the vote to be given to the Swiss abroad, followed by parliamentary representation (say eight National Councillors and two Councillors of States).

Mr. E. Sollberger spoke for the Swiss in Germany who are in favour of the vote for Swiss abroad when in Switzerland (*Aufenthalterstimmrecht*). From long experience, he said that the Commission of the Swiss Abroad had more influence than a numerically weak representation in Parliament, although the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad needed consolidating. He also elaborated on the Constitutional Tribunal which might be desirable in Switzerland.

Mr. W. Gilléron (Genova) represented the young generation. He spoke for some sort of civic service for those against military duties, although he had done Swiss military service in order to get to know the country. He advocated the vote for women, but would hate to see them in uniform! *Mr. Gilléron* thought that the young Swiss abroad would welcome a modernisation of the Constitution.

That concluded the actual discussion which was then summed up by *Federal Councillor Wahlen*. He expressed pleasure that, on the whole, there was unanimity between the Swiss abroad and those at home. In his few remarks referring to each of the speakers, *Prof. Wahlen* dealt briefly, but pertinently with the salient points. With regard to Great Britain, he had praise for the old-established constitutional rights which had existed long before the French Revolution. There was much that the free world had to thank the Anglo-Saxons for. Whether protection of the individual and his reputation should be a matter of constitutional provision or legislation, had not yet been studied in connection with the total revision of the Federal Constitution, but it would most certainly have to be dealt with.

The former Federal Councillor said that the discussion would deserve more study and interpretation; if only other "teach-in"s could be made as interesting, stimulating and constructive.

Conclusion

The Swiss abroad have shown a great interest in the proposed total revision, and whilst their contributions will not influence any decisions greatly, the discussions due to the questionnaire have helped to stimulate their general awareness of what happens in Switzerland. They may be gratified that at their Assembly at Zofingen last summer, one of the most eminent Swiss personalities, the man who was entrusted by the Government to study the complex question, former Federal Councillor *Wahlen*, honoured them by his presence, his address and his personal interest in their opinions. If one or the other of their suggestions were ever to be given any weight at all, it would be through *Prof. Wahlen's* influence; he has at all times shown and demonstrated a real interest in the "Fifth Switzerland". We shall follow future developments with keenness.

(MM)

COMMENT

THE REFERENDUM OF THE DECADE

Swiss women have been given the right of vote in federal matters by the overwhelming majority of their men. With this historical vote disappears one of the last great causes worth fighting for in Switzerland. An institution which was our country's signature and which had after all secured peace and prosperity for centuries has been abolished! Now Switzerland, deprived of one of the signs of her unique identity, must sullenly become like every other country! The referendum of 7th February will go down in the history books as something as important as the abolishment of slavery in America, and indeed it was something very important from the point of view of constitutional history. Practically, however, it won't much change the course of events in Switzerland and there is little ground for hoping that the dwindling attendance at most polling week-ends will suddenly increase. Few women felt actually starved of political rights, but most rightfully objected to a practise which after all tended to express that they were not clever enough to have a share of political life. Women might join political parties and, who knows, the Radicals, the Christian Democrats, the Migros Party or some other movement might gain power and prestige from a sudden intake of female recruits.

With the results of February 7th, the historical issue of voting rights for women in Switzerland can virtually be considered settled. True, 8 cantons said "no" to the legitimate aspirations of their women, but with the present

national consensus it is only a matter of time before their stubborn resistance will crumble. Not surprisingly, all the "landsgemeinde cantons" except Nidwalden repelled the submitted constitutional amendment. These retrograde cantons were Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Glarus, Appenzell outer Rhodes, Appenzell inner Rhodes, St. Gall and Thurgau. Appenzell inner Rhodes was the most pronounced in its anti-suffragism with 71.19 per cent of "no's". The town of Zurich on the other hand has made marked progress. Four years ago its citizens rejected by the local right of vote for women by a majority of 14,000 votes. They made a brilliant about-turn in November, and now the whole canton has followed up by voting in favour of the federal responsibilities of its women. Geneva had the highest percentage of "yes" voters with 91 per cent. For the Genevese the matter was as good as cleared up a long time ago. Vaud has an 84 per cent of "yes" ballots, followed by Basle Town with 82 per cent.

The ultimate goal of a universal female suffrage has however not yet been achieved. It is only in 13 out of the 25 cantonal "constituencies" that women can vote on the communal, cantonal and federal levels. It should however be noted that the 13 cantons in question contain over three quarters of the country's population. Four of them could be entered on the list after February 7th. They were Fribourg, Zug, Schaffhausen and Aargau. Seven further cantons give various degrees of communal suffrage to the women, but in the cantons of Appenzell (inner and outer), St. Gall, Thurgau and Schwyz, the women will henceforth be entitled to elect their national councillors but not their cantonal and communal representatives. These cantons will continue to be ruled by men for an unpredictable future, and women will continue to be forbidden entry to the *Landsgemeinden* of Schwyz and Appenzell. It will be interesting to see how many more votes will be conducted in these cantons before they fall into line. There have been no less than 80 cantonal referenda on this central issue during the past 50 years.

The mood in the Federal Palace was of "*Freude und Genugtuung*" and the Federal Council saw a rejoicing sign of the vitality of our democracy in the results of the vote. *Mr. Ludwig Von Moos* said that he was pleased with the turn-up at the polls of 57 per cent, and the national result of 66 per cent of positive ballots. The event actually caught the fleeting interest of the British information media. The news was broadcast on the BBC's nine o'clock news on Sunday, 9th February, and appeared on the front page of many national dailies the following day. It is a long time since such a thing has happened.

(PMB)