

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 14 (1949)
Heft: 7

Artikel: Swiss federalism [continued]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942893>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. 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. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

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. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

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. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 17.05.2025

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

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
X THE MARSHALL PLAN AND SWITZERLAND. X
X XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

In a speech on Switzerland's foreign policy and European economic co-operation delivered before the National Council (lower house) on the 31st of March, 1949, Monsieur Max Petitpierre, member of the Federal Council and head of the Federal Political Department (Foreign Office), expressed himself as follows with regard to the Marshall Plan:

The Marshall Plan and American aid to Europe, which do not affect Switzerland directly, have for her both favourable and unfavourable aspects. By furthering the economic development of the countries hit hardest by the war and enabling them to rehabilitate and improve their means of production, the Plan abolishes the privileged situation we have enjoyed since the end of the war. We are already witnessing and shall certainly witness in ever increasing measure, the return of competition on the markets of the world. We shall have to adapt ourselves to more normal conditions than those by which we have profited during the last three years.

However, there is another side to the matter. American aid is bringing a flow of dollars and gold to Europe. This wealth is being caught up in the economic process and the recipient countries have now increased possibilities in the sphere of bilateral trade. There can be no doubt that we are benefiting thereby. Thanks to American aid, certain difficulties on the bilateral level can now be solved to the advantage of export trade, tourist traffic and money transfers. It is certain that without American aid the economic position of our European partners would have continued to deteriorate, this in its turn leading to a progressive shrinkage in our commercial exchanges with them and to considerable damage to our export trade. Free competition in a healthy Europe is better than a virtual monopoly in a stricken one.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
X SWISS FEDERALISM. X
X XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

(Continued).

The people as a whole, as well as the cantons, are responsible for the election of the legislature, i.e. the Federal Assembly. One of the two chambers, the National Council, is representative of the people and is, by the constitution, so elected that there is one National Councillor for every 22,000 citizens, each canton, even the smallest, having a representative. Every canton forms an electoral area. At the elections to the National Council held in Autumn, 1943, 194 members were elected. Out of a population of 4.26 million, it was calculated that 1,300,784 were eligible to vote. The seats were then, as the law prescribes, allocated among the parties according to the strength of their polls. The present National Council, which remains in office till the end of 1951, comprises 44 Catholic Conservatives, 52 Radicals, 7 Liberal Conservatives, 21 members of the Party of the Citizens' Farmers and Artisans, 48 Social Democrats, 8 members of the National Ring, 5 of the Democratic party, 7 of the Party of Work (Communists) and 2 with no affiliation.

The second chamber, called by the old cantonal name of Council of States, is elected, according to cantonal legislation, by elections in the Cantons or by the cantonal authorities. It consists of 44 members, which means that each canton has two seats. Three cantons have been divided by Federal law into half-cantons each, Unterwalden, by a very old tradition into Obwalden and Nidwalden, Appenzell into Catholic Inner Rhodes and Protestant Outer Rhodes, and Basle, after the

violent conflict between town and country in the 1830's into Basle City and Basle Country. Each one of these half cantons is as independent a state as any canton, but in Federal matters they have only half a vote, and hence only one seat in the Council of States. This gives rise to the curious situation by which the city of Basle with over 170,000 inhabitants has only one vote, while the canton of Uri with only 27,302 inhabitants has two.

Thus the bicameral system of the legislature keeps faithfully to the federal structure of the country as a whole. For a decision to be passed by the Federal Assembly, it must be approved by a majority in both chambers, the National Council and the Council of States, the representatives of the people and the representatives of the cantons. Only a few matters are dealt with by the united Federal Assembly meeting under the chairmanship of the President of the National Council; these are, the election of members of the government, that is the Federal Council, of its President and Vice-President, of the Federal Judges, and of the Federal Insurance Tribunal, as well as questions of pardon.

The principles of the Federal Constitution, though influenced by the French Revolution, derive entirely from old Confederate sources. The bicameral system, on the other hand, was formed on the American pattern, the Senate serving as model for the Council of States, and the House of Representatives for the National Council. The U.S.A. had to solve the same problem of the representation of the people and of member states some decades before Switzerland. This solution has stood the test in America as well as in Switzerland, which, though much smaller, follows the same principles. The members of both Councils, however, vote without instructions; the Council of States, for instance, has no instructions from the cantons.

The Swiss solution of the problem of federal government on the other hand, is entirely different from the American. In Switzerland, the collegial republic stands in contrast to the presidial republic of America, and the manner of election of the Federal Council is entirely of Swiss origin. It corresponds to the collegial system which the cantons have developed for their own governments, except that in the cantons the determining factor is the people's vote.

The Federal Council is appointed every four years at the first session of the Federal Assembly after the election of the National Council in Autumn. It consists of seven members and they are jointly responsible for the government as a collegial body, while exercising at the same time the functions of head of the State. The same as for the National Council, every Swiss is eligible with the exception of the clergy, the only restriction being that several citizens of the same canton cannot at the same time belong to the Federal Council. On the other hand, the various regions of the country, languages, confessions and parties are taken into consideration in the election of the Council. Of the seven Federal Councillors in office, three are Radical Democrats, two Catholic Conservatives, and the other two from the party of the Citizens Farmers and Artisans and the Social Democratic Party. Four are German-speaking, two French, and one Italian-speaking. One characteristic of the Swiss government, both in the Confederation and in the cantons, is its stability. Election to the Federal Council always means re-election of the members in office as long as no resignation has been announced.

The annual election of the President and Vice-President of the Confederation by the Federal Assembly is a mere matter of routine. The former Vice-president invariably becomes President, the Vice-President being next on the list which is drawn up by an old-established rule. The President of the Confederation is merely the President of the Federal Council and "primus inter pares" in a collective authority of seven Federal Councillors, each in charge of an executive department. In addition to his duties as departmental head, he has various representative functions. So there is no head of the State as in the U.S.A. or Great Britain; the President cannot dismiss his colleagues, there can be no cabinet crises and no votes of censure. Neither a parliamentary vote nor a referendum can cause the Council to resign. The Federal Council is responsible to the Federal Assembly, the representative of the people. The Swiss system of the formation of the political will of the State, with its reservations in favour

of direct intervention by the people, may be complicated and cumbersome, but these drawbacks are amply compensated for by the solidity and stability which saves the country the costly adventures through which other countries have to live,

The third power of the State is the Federal court, the Supreme Federal Tribunal, which has its seat at Lausanne. The Federal judges are elected by the Federal Assembly for a period of six years. This court, with its four divisions, is the supreme court of Switzerland; its constitutional division is charged with the highly political duty of protecting the rights of the citizen, yet it has no power to examine Federal laws for their constitutionality.

What may seem a matter of secondary importance, and is yet typical of the whole structure of the Confederation, is the fact that there is no real capital in Switzerland. Berne is the seat of the governing bodies of the Confederation, the Federal Council and the central administration, as well as of such public institutions as the Post Office and the Federal Railway Department. Here too, the Federal Assembly meets, so that it is in a peculiar sense the Federal city. Berne, however, has not become the centre of Switzerland; the forces that work for federalism have always been and still are opposed to it. Berne has remained the capital of the important Canton of Berne, but she is no Swiss Washington (with her proper federal territory) nor is she a Swiss Paris. Each canton has its capital, urban or rural, according to its nature. Economic and cultural life have often proved to be factors more important than the political, which fact makes Switzerland a free state for free individuals, and not an artificial state to which the individual is subordinated; this is true democracy brought about by the right kind of federalism.

XXX
X
X BRITISH PARTY TO SWITZERLAND. X
X A Birthday Present to Princess Elizabeth. X
X
XXX

On the occasion of the birth of Prince Charles, the town of Lucerne, with the collaboration of the "Société des Hôteliers" offered, as a birthday present to H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, an invitation to fifty needy British children (orphans and bomb victims) for a month's stay in Lucerne. Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh accepted this offer.

The party consisting of twenty children from London and ten children respectively from the cities of Plymouth, Birmingham and Manchester left London, under the auspices of the International Help for children, - the President of which is the Lord Mayor of London, - on Wednesday, April 20th, from Victoria Station.

Shortly before the departure of the train, Princess Elizabeth, to the delight of the children, arrived at the station to say good-bye to them and to wish them a pleasant holiday.

Amongst the distinguished visitors at Victoria Station to see the children's departure, were - The Swiss Minister and Madame H. de Torrenté, accompanied by M. and Mme. Ch. Weibel, Secretary of Legation and Dr. A. R. Lindt, Press Attaché., Sir Percy Greenaway, representing the Lord Mayor of London, the Rt. Hon. Mr. J. Bowen, Chairman of the London County Council and Mr. Arno Krebs, President of the Lucerne Hotel Proprietors Association, to the latter Princess Elizabeth expressed her thanks for the invitation extended to the children.

The Swiss Press was represented by Dr. H. W. Egli (N.Z.Z.), Mr. J. Menessier (Journal de Genève), and A. Stauffer (Swiss Observer).

As the train drew out, the children gave the Princess a big cheer, and some of them leaned from the carriage windows to wave goodbye to her.