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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

## The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

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### GENEVA

#### City with an International Vocation

Can a city be said to have an international vocation? It is conceivable that an individual could feel the urge to accomplish a deed normally beyond his power, but it seems incredible that a town, a heterogenous community, should be animated, throughout the centuries, with a continuity of purpose comparable to a vocation.

There are, it is true, places where the spirit stirs, and for centuries long Geneva has been one such place. It is evident, too, that the astonishing part, spiritual as well as moral, which the city has played in world affairs has carried weight in committing the world's conscience to the keeping of Geneva.

The better to circumscribe this strange phenomenon, it must be emphasised that Geneva has not, as Rome has, a 2,000 year-old institution to guide the consciences of millions, nor has she, like Washington and Moscow, military or political influence; neither is she, like London, the head of a Commonwealth of Nations; and, all things considered, she has not the wealth of traditions that, beyond any doubt, radiate from Paris.

And yet, Geneva's is a very important role. Florence, Venice, Madrid are museums; Lyon is the silk capital, and Vienna in Austria the city of rapturous memories.

How many great cities are merely capitals? Geneva's name is written daily in decisions of vital importance for all peoples.

Earthquakes, epidemics, tidal waves or other catastrophes caused widespread confusion. Calls go out from Geneva simultaneously to governments, the World Health Organisation, the International Red Cross, the World Council of Churches, the International League of Red Cross Societies and a host of other organisations with headquarters at Geneva. Nothing is left undone, to send the sorely needed assistance immediately. Whether it be under the auspices of the International Labour Organisation, Aid to Children, Refugees or Displaced persons, not to mention war victims, the rights of man to be defended against oppression and to safeguard freedoms, it is to Geneva that the initiative falls in taking a decision, to mitigate the plight of victims, to restore calm.

Why Geneva? Why not Berne, Bordeaux or Buenos Aires? It is precisely because of this vocation, this veritable mission for bridging the gulf between nations. To appreciate the evolution of this city throughout the ages, one must go back to the beginning.

Nothing whatever is known about those who founded the city. Some few years ago, Geneva celebrated the two-thousandth anniversary of Julius Caesar's passing through Geneva; it was in 58 B.C. Sixty years earlier the city, together with the entire country of the Allobroges of which Geneva was then part, had been conquered by the Romans. Guardian of the bridge over the Rhône — the only means

of communication between south and the countries north of the Alps, Geneva, from earliest times, held a unique position in the old world and continued to do so until the end of the Middle Ages. Before the occupation and fortification of the hill — somewhere about twenty-five centuries ago, a city of lake dwellers existed for several thousand years between the shores of the lake, making communication possible. On this site, to-day known as Geneva, populations of considerable size were preparing it six or seven thousand years before our era for the role it was to play during the succeeding centuries, and which it still continues to play. This bridge over the Rhône symbolises the whole history of Geneva, explaining it better than anything else could do. It was to cut off the Helvetes who were preparing to invade Aquitaine that Julius Caesar brought his legions on forced marches from Rome. It is to this bridge, then, that Geneva owes her adoption as capital of the Kingdom of Burgundy at the fall of the Roman Empire and, following that, of the second Kingdom of Burgundy. Emperors on their way to Italy passed through Geneva; Popes and Princes of the Church took the same road from Rome; from Charlemagne to Bonaparte, the list is a long one . . . But it must not be forgotten that Geneva owes her international vocation as a meeting place of the nations not only to her geographical situation, to the marches of the Roman Empire — *extremum oppidum allobrogum*, as Julius Caesar wrote, but to this route, virtually the only road across western Europe from south to north and from the north to the Midi, and this vocation she has followed on every occasion when she was not entirely herself.

The Reformation venture itself, by cutting her off from neighbouring countries who had kept their old faith, was to give a further impetus and project her influence as far as the Americas, where the "Mayflower" puritans were to bear it as a banner, giving it a sort of universality which was to reappear, symbolically, in her flag: when the struggles between Guelphs and Gibelins, partisans of the Pope and partisans of the Emperor, had left medieval Europe in a turmoil, Geneva, before the arrival of Calvin, having become an independent republic, took the eagle and the keys of St. Peter combining them in one emblem, an unconscious manifestation, perhaps, of her will for universality, her *Vocation*.

Henceforth, the nature of her adversaries are witness to her importance on the world stage; Pope and Emperor, the King of Spain, the Duke of Savoy, the Queen of England herself, all of them reigned over half the world almost, vowed to destroy this little city of a thousand or so souls, surrounded by walls hardly more than a mile round but which was imbued with an unbelievable faith, sending across the world the seeds of liberty and con-

sciousness of the high dignity of man. History from that moment onwards continues in that perspective. The beginning of the nineteenth century saw a Society for peace founded by a Genevese. At the exhortation of another Genevese, Henry Dunant, the Red Cross Society became a reality in 1864; a few years later, the first international arbitration tribunal settled the Alabama question between the United States of America and Great Britain. The first world war saw the setting up of the Prisoners of War Agency, and in 1920 it was the League of Nations and the International Labour Office which sanctified the international vocation of Geneva which recent events have still further accentuated, and which show her entirely given up to the world. (By courtesy of "Genève Magazine".)

### THE SWISS ELECTORATE AT WORK

In Central Switzerland, the citizens of Altdorf confirmed their Commune authorities in office and granted over half a million francs for a civil defence station, a grant for a snow clearing machine, the renovation of the R.C. Church and a canalisation scheme. The Schwyz voters agreed overwhelmingly to the purchase of land for a holiday and sports centre at Oberiberg. The Lucerne electors were less kind and rejected a grant for a private multi-storey car park. On the other hand, they accepted eight other proposals including a new administrative building for the electricity, gas and water works, as well as five road improvement schemes.

The cantonal electorate of Zurich rejected an initiative by the Christian Socialist Party regarding children's allowances for employees and accepted a counter proposal by the Cantonal Parliament. The former proposed an increase from 20 francs to 30 and 40 francs, whilst the latter limited the allowances to 30 francs also for third and subsequent children. Stepchildren and illegitimate children are to be treated like ordinary offsprings. The town people of Zurich agreed to a 15.85-million franc project for a new work hall for the electricity works, and one of 2.53m. for flats for the workers at the water purification plant at Werdehoelzli. Voting participation was 35.5%. With a participation of 64.3% (small for Winterthur), a new Municipal President was elected in the person of the Independent National Councillor K. Ketterer to replace the retiring Socialist H. Naef. Over 2,000 voters polled a blank form. Thus, the Winterthur Executive has undergone a chance — the Socialists have lost one of their seats and for the first time, the "Landesring" has joined it. Of the 60 seats, 19 are held by Socialists. The voters also agreed to a renovation of the *Oekonomiegebäude* in the Lindenhofpark and to contributions to social welfare institutions, whilst they rejected a 1.3-million project for a road "in der Au" near Toess. Amongst various communal polls, there was a decision by the Zollikon voters to accept the credit of nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million as compensation for the green-belt zone in the Rueterwies.

With a low participation of only 31%, the electorate of the Canton of Berne accepted the new finance law and the proposed reduction of subsidies to Communes (by 28m.). The Jura Communes rejected both. The Berne citizens granted their women the vote in communal affairs, and several other Communes introduced women's suffrage. Of the 492 Communes in the Canton, 133 have now accepted it. Five have so far refused. In the town of Berne, 60,000 women will be added to the electorate of 45,000 men. What a chance! In Berne, school, kindergarten and social housing projects were accepted. In Thun, the voters granted 14.14m. francs for an extension

of the trade and commercial training schools. A 17-storey hotel will be built at Interlaken, the station renovated at Burgdorf, and swimming baths will be constructed at Tramelan. In Bienne, the first time with the women, the electorate accepted the new noise abatement law, and at Muri, the citizens created a full-time office for a guardianship and welfare secretary.

The Solothurn voters accepted five proposals, to rescind a law of 1944 for procuring work in the wartime slump, to add to the water rights regulations, to revise the publication of Solothurn decrees, to further housing for the aged, invalids and large families, as well as to create an *Oelwehr* (service to deal with leaks in oil pipes, accidents with oil tank lorries and other similar accidents).

Men and women of Baseland refused the proposed revision of the tax law. At the same time, the 70,000 Protestant voters had to elect 300 Church wardens and 87 delegates to the Synod, and in some Communes also the Parish Council Presidents.

Half of the 80 M.P.s of the Canton of Schaffhausen, are put up by the Capital. 320 candidates competed, and on 29th October, the elections produced the following picture: Social Democrats 27 (so far 27), Liberals 19 (20), Catholics 7 (8), Farmers and Citizens 19 (18), "Landesring" 5 (3), Evangelicals 1 (2), Liberal Socialists 1 (1), Young Liberals 1 (1). Three weeks previously, the Cantonal Government had been elected in which the Socialists gained a second seat: H. Wanner (Lib.), F. Fischer (BGB), R. Schaerrer (Lib.), E. Hofer and E. Neukomm (both Socialists).

In St. Gall, elections took place to the Commune Councils for the next four years. In the cantonal capital, the "Landesring" gained five and the Socialists one seat, thus giving the Liberal Democrats 19 (22), the Conservatives 18 (20) the Socialists 15 and the "Landesring" 11 seats. No very great changes in other Communes, though in some the absolute majority was not reached, and a second poll will be necessary. The Municipal Councillors of St. Gall were all confirmed in office, including Dr. A. Hummler as *Stadtammann*. Four Communes had to vote on a proposed fusion of the school parishes Nesslau-Krummenau. Though three accepted, Ennetbuehl refused, and thus the fusion won't take place.

The voters of the Grisons denied suffrage at Cantonal level to their women by 13,522 to 8,616. In Chur men and women agreed to a credit for a school and a permanent mother and baby welfare clinic.

The Aargau electorate accepted the new law on *Verwaltungsrechtspflege* and the proposed plan to create middle schools also at Zofingen, in the Freiamt and the Fricktal (in addition to Aarau and Baden). Obersiggenthal with 6,400 inhabitants is to spend 3.2m. francs on swimming baths according to a decision of its electorate. Aarau is to have an *Einwohnerrat*, a Commune Parliament of 50 members to replace the ever increasing Commune Assembly which every citizen is entitled to attend.

In a first cantonal poll, the Thurgau voters agreed to an extension of the Cantonal School at Frauenfeld and additional schools at Romanshorn and Kreuzlingen, granted 3.72m. for an enlargement of the Agricultural College Arenenberg and to an increased grant to the Eastern Switzerland Baby and Children's Hospital in St. Gall. At the end of October, the electorate had to vote again, this time for a new law on road taxes. Though it had been approved by all the Parties, the voters rejected it by 11,487 to 10,821. It would have meant an average increase of 15%. Frauenfeld voters agreed to the purchase of an electronic computer and of two buildings in the centre of the