

The recent Swiss federal elections (October 1939)

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Bleib jung, du alter Schweizerbund,
 Aus Drang und Kampf erstanden!
 Steig auf, du Kraft aus Grat und Grund
 Und mach die Not zu schanden.
 Rot, wie die Alpenrosen bluehn,
 So moeg' der Stern der Eintracht gluehn
 Hoch ueber allen Landen!

Alfred Huggenberger

Aus "Erntedank", Gedichte von Alfred Huggenberger.

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THE RECENT SWISS FEDERAL ELECTIONS (October 1939)

The Swiss elections held recently have not only shown impressively the stability of our political life at home, but have proved anew how unanimously the Swiss adhere to their traditional neutrality. In the following article we shall consider the elections for Parliament and for the Federal Council.

Stability in Swiss Politics.

The federal elections after the outbreak of the war have proved afresh how firmly political conditions are stabilised in Switzerland. In the December session the united assembly of the two chambers confirmed the previous composition of the Federal Council. By that we can clearly see how completely the activities of the Federal Government during the last few years have enjoyed the approval of Parliament, both in the political and in the economic sphere. In addition, the line of action for its future policy indicated by the socialistic opposition is comprehensively in accord with the slogan: Co-operation with the other parties. From this we can form an appreciation of the policy of the Federal Council and of the "bourgeois" parties backing it.

It must not be overlooked that the re-election of the Federal Council took place shortly after Parliament itself was chosen anew after a general election. No one can therefore make the objection that if the former members of the Federal Council were re-elected unopposed this was due only to courtesy, to party routine in Parliament or to traditional custom.

The stability of Swiss politics had shown itself similarly in the results of the General Election for the National Council which was held on the last Sunday of October 1939. The Swiss citizen is, whatever his politics, of a strongly conservative nature. That is seen right through Swiss history in a dislike for political experiments. Now and then, indeed, the effects of foreign events and revolutions have been adopted only after a Swiss character had been given to them. For more than 100 years the solid democratic foundation stands based on the cantons, with the corner posts of sovereignty of the people, equality of all citizens in the State, the rights of man and of the citizen, and the self-government of the communes. In 1848 the constitution was built on these democratic principles. "The decades following have extended this construction, seldom remodelled it and never demolished it." Here is seen the character of Swiss politics.

Professor Max Huber said nothing new to the people of Switzerland, but merely gave a precise formula to a fact universally recognised, when he wrote: From a historical consideration of the State we get the view that the State is nothing belonging to the individuals existing in it today, but a thing belonging to generations that succeed one another. The present generation does not possess the State, to do with it as it wills, but is the trustee of past and future generations. It is for the moment

responsible for the maintenance and development of the State. Therein lies the greatness of its task. In comparison with the whole effort of the nation through the centuries only a very limited sphere of activity has been allotted to the present.

Stability in politics is considered also not as something passive, something merely preservative and conservative. It is rather an active, living force that promotes the State's interests.

The national elections of this year were marked by the fact that a great number of the voting citizens had been called to arms. But this had effected no essential change in the results. In this fact, we can clearly see the proof of the correctness of a remark made by General Guisan. Some years ago he wrote that through the centuries the army had carried on its mission; that thanks to military institutions the Switzerland of old lived on in the democratic Switzerland of today; the spirit of yore was kept alive by the army, and was revealed in every expression of individual and social life; and that the interpenetration of military and civil life was daily apparent.

The results of the national elections held in October (1939) reveals a division of the political parties into three groups: The "bourgeois" government parties; the leftist opposition and the opposing bourgeois parties. There are 187 seats. The government parties hold 122 of these against 120 they held after the elections of 4 years ago. The Leftist opposition has fallen back from 59 to 56. The small oppositional bourgeois group, which follows the well known economist and politician Duttweiler, has 9 instead of 7 representatives. A further characteristic of this year's parliamentary elections is seen in the elimination of the extreme wings - on the one hand, the representative of the so-called "Fronts" which in the spring of 1933 had marched forth with much blowing of trumpets to rebuild the State, but which subsequently have sunk into unimportance. They had the mistaken idea of grafting foreign ideas on Switzerland, ideas that ran counter to her traditional development. On the other hand, the 2 representatives of the Communistic party, on the extreme left, who had belonged for some years to the Federal Parliament, could not obtain enough votes to be returned to Berne.

No essential alterations have taken place in the big national parties. The Socialists have been reduced from 50 to 45 seats. Their loss is partly attributable to the secession of a small militant group in Geneva, whereby an old quarrel about policy in the Socialist party has resulted in a temporary rupture. In spite of the attacks made by the Young Peasants Group, the Peasant Party managed to keep its former strength, with 21 members, while the Young Peasants themselves lost one seat. The two big government parties, the Liberals (Freisinnigen) and the Catholic Conservatives have each got two more representatives than they had 4 years ago.

The election campaign was fought quietly and restrainedly. The Swiss people had grasped the fact that there is no place today for declarations about military questions or foreign policy. In any case there was no need for such. For with a unanimity never known before the whole nation is backing up its army and the army's leaders. Just as unanimously as regards foreign policy, the nation takes its stand on the principle of neutrality, which remains so indisputably the maxim of state policy that no mention is ever made of it in public and in the press, except when some tendency is given to the sense and spirit of our neutrality by foreigners, or when wayward interpretations arise, which do not harmonise with Switzerland's neutrality as it has been traditionally exercised. In this matter the Swiss people makes its voice heard clearly and, with well justified indignation, rejects any such attempts to spread incorrect conceptions.

The results of the recent Federal elections may also rightly be considered as a confirmation of Swiss foreign policy, as it has been steadily pursued by the government. Here too, we find the same stable conditions as in the rest of the country's policy.