

Swiss federalism [continued]

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directly at the foot of the great Blumlisalp massive with the small lake in dark green presenting a very impressive scene. . . No less thrilling is the descent on the chair-lift, something like falling down a precipice. The Swiss are certainly an inventive people and offer the tourists great pleasures and thrills. We were so delighted with this new mode of transport, that later we visited the following places, where chair-lifts are running:

Beatenberg to the top of the Niederhorn;

Grindelwald up to the "First" just opposite the Wetterhorn;

Gstaad up the Wassergrat;

Trubsee above Engelberg.

With many short "outings" such as Meiringen, Interlaken, Brienz, Lauterbrunnen, Trummelbach, Aareschlucht, up the extremely steep Niesen-Railway (over 8000 feet high), etc., we prepared the visit to the famous Jungfrau. We had to follow the weather forecast, as it was imperative to have clear skies, otherwise one sees nothing else but thick clouds. To make quite certain, we first went to Wengen and stayed there overnight. Wengen has, excepting perhaps Murren, the finest view of the Jungfrau massive and we were overjoyed to see the mountain next morning bathed in bright sunshine.

The ascent started at 8 o'clock by this world-famous railway, climbing to 11,350 feet. From Wengen to the Eiger-Glacier station we had the imposing chain of the three principal snow-covered giants of the Oberland constantly in front of us. The train, consisting of four full length coaches, was full but did not slacken in speed, which was about 20 k.m. per hour on a very steep gradient. From Eiger station, the rail enters a tunnel for the rest of the climb, a total length of perhaps five miles. This tunnel traverses through solid rocks of the Eiger as well as the Monch right to the end of the terminal. Two stops are made, one in the centre of the formidable Eiger-Wall, the other above Hismeer Glacier of the Monch. At these stops large windows affording commanding views are provided for visitors. The end station is hewn out of solid rock, reminding one of the London tubes.

Walking through underground galleries in various directions, we paid a visit to the famous ice-rink, where the walls and ceiling are completely covered with ice, where you can sit on chairs with tables all modeled of ice, and of course, never melt, as the temperature is always below zero at that altitude. Another gallery leads for half a kilometre through rock to a lift ascending 350 feet up to the famous Sphinx. The view from this building, perched on a precipitous rock like a bird's nest, is majestic. The height is equal to Mt. Cook in New Zealand, and the great peaks all around appear only a few hundred yards higher. The air is very thin and to un-used mountaineers difficult to breathe; we saw an elderly lady unconscious for quite a while and people without strong hearts should not risk the ascent. Down at the edge of the Aletsch-Glacier, a team of Polar dogs is engaged pulling visitors around on sledges across the deep snow. Right up at this height is a finely equipped hotel, where you can rest and indulge in a fine meal. It was a never-to-be forgotten experience and we had brilliant sunshine the whole day.

(To be continued).

SWISS FEDERALISM.

(Continued)

THE NATURE OF THE SWISS STATE.

While the form of the Confederation has changed, its fundamental principle has persisted. The system of multiple alliances based on treaties has been replaced by the Confederation as the federal union of twenty-two states.

Where formerly the Diet merely existed as the organ "ad referendum et ad ratificandum" of the member states, the present Federal Assembly is the legislative power and the Federal Council the common executive power. Instead

of the turnpikes on which at one time some 470 tolls and similar duties were levied, the Confederation has now a common frontier which, embracing the whole of Switzerland, makes it one economic area. In short, the unity and common strength of the Confederation has been reinforced in the interests of defence even in a completely changed world, and thus the conditions have been created in which full use can be made of all the possibilities offered by modern technics.

Switzerland is, however, still founded on its member states, the cantons. They are, by the wording of the constitution, sovereign in so far as their sovereign rights suffer no limitation by the Federal constitution. The Swiss cantons are therefore not mere districts, and cannot be compared with the departments of the centralised French state or of Napoleon's Helvetic Republic. They resemble the States of the U.S.A., but their historical foundation goes much deeper, and they are genuine states, each with its own constitution, and its own legislative and executive bodies. The fact that their democratic constitution is prescribed by the Federal constitution is rather a confirmation of history than an act of the Federal Council. Their democratic character, however, rests on the solid foundation of the communes. Free citizens of 3107 free communes constitute in their totality the sovereignty of the Swiss state.

CENTRALISM AND FEDERALISM.

The federative structure of the State is a vital element in Swiss life. The Swiss State does not only consist of citizens, but also of member States. These member States enjoy considerable autonomy and mean more to the individual citizen than the central power, since they are the political community of his local home (Heimat). From the historical point of view, the cantons came first. Thus the Swiss state was not artificially decentralized, but built up from below. In the U.S.A. the emphasis lies on the decentralization of the public power as such, in Switzerland rather on the independence of the cantons. In the U.S.A. the federative structure answers rather to the need of independence felt by the different regions of a very big country, in Switzerland its function is rather to protect the linguistic and cultural minorities. It makes good relations possible between the linguistic groups. There are also cantons which in their turn comprise different languages, e.g., the Grisons (German, Italian, Romanche), Berne, Fribourg and Valais (German and French). Conflicts do not arise here either, since relations have long been governed by mutual respect and since the minority has the guarantee of full equality of rights, more especially of the free use of the mother tongue in daily life, at school and in transactions with the authorities. In the same way the federative structure of the country can serve religious peace. Since, finally, the racial, linguistic, religious and other differences within the people are not, as in America, the product of immigration, and largely coincide with cantonal frontiers, there is no feeling of need for assimilation. On the contrary, a higher interest demands that each part of the country should preserve its individuality.

Federalism is the political tendency which aims at preserving the power of the cantons and at conferring upon them as many and as important rights as possible. Centralism, on the other hand, aims at strengthening and increasing the Confederation and its powers. Hence the terms applied to these two trends in the policy of the Federal state are exactly opposite in Switzerland to those used in the U.S.A., where the adherents of the central power are called federalists, its opponents anti-federalists. Of late years the central power has been greatly increased, partly under the influence of European nationalism and the unification of the neighbour countries to north and south, still more as the result of the improvement in means of transport and the requirements of trade and industry, of economic interdependence and the necessity of a uniform and efficient economic policy in times of economic crisis. Further, after the army had been transferred to the central power, civil and criminal law became federal instead of cantonal; the motto "one law and one army" was an endeavour to strengthen the cohesion of Switzerland. This development, however, is now at an end, and the disputes between centralists and federalists are dying down.

It is generally realised that the conception of the Swiss State might suffer

under further centralization. Politics it is true, have remained lively in the cantons up to the present day. In spite of the transfer of powers from the cantons to the central power, the cantons have remained the more genuine and more living democracies. That is also due in part to the fact that democracy proves its worth better in small units, where the voters know the candidates and the discussion of problems is more practicable. Thus in this way the federative structure of the state comes to complete both the idea of freedom and the idea of democracy. Further, the cantons have, from time immemorial, been the political training grounds of future federal politicians. The antithesis between federalism and centralism might, for that matter, easily blind us to the fact that, in practice, the Confederation and the cantons are interdependent. For instance, some forty members of cantonal government sit in the Federal Parliament and thus establish the necessary contact. Further, the heads of departments in the cantonal governments (education, public economy, public health, police, etc.) meet at annual conferences in which questions arising in their departments are discussed in the presence of representatives of the Federal Government.

Berne, the biggest of the cantons and half-cantons, has 730,000 inhabitants, Appenzell Inner Rhodes, the smallest, has only 13,400. In other ways too, the cantons, even apart from language and religion, are very different from each other, for instance as regards geography and situation (mountain cantons, lowland cantons, frontier cantons) or economic make-up (industrial, agricultural, urban, rural). On that account, of course, not all carry the same weight in the Confederation. Again, their financial circumstances vary very widely. The first national defence "sacrifice," a single capital levy in 1940, brought in four times as much per head in the canton of Zurich as in the canton of Appenzell, and the same canton of Zurich drew only about half as much in Federal grants per head as was drawn by Valais. The Federal constitution itself compensates for cantonal inequalities by giving each the same number of seats in the Council of States and prescribes that, for the adoption of an amendment of the constitution, there must be not only a majority of voters but also a majority of cantons, each cantonal vote carrying the same weight. The differences in the power and influence of the cantons, however, are not so great that a canton could exercise a hegemony such as was exercised by Prussia, for instance, in Bismarck's German constitution.

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SWISS LODGE PROTEST WITH THE HUNGARIAN LEGATION.

Minister Zehnder, the head of the division of External Affairs of the Federal Political Department, summoned the Charge d'Affaires of the Hungarian Legation in Bern, to hand over to him a protest against an article that appeared in an Hungarian newspaper. In this article reference was made to a protest in Zurich against the Swiss communist Wood, who was found guilty of absconding with funds intended for charitable purposes which he misused, however, for political purposes. Although the Swiss authorities do not intervene in respect of articles that appear in foreign newspapers, in this particular case it became necessary because it emanated from the Hungarian Secretary of State and constitutes, therefore, an intolerable interference of a foreign country in the internal affairs of Switzerland.

RESULT OF FISCAL YEAR APPROVED BY FEDERAL COUNCIL.

The Federal Council has approved the financial result of the fiscal year 1948. There was a surplus of 176 million Frs., whereas a deficit had been expected. This surplus will be used for the reduction of the internal debt which still amounts to 7,900 million Frs.