

# Our democracy

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **20 (1957)**

Heft [7]

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942467>

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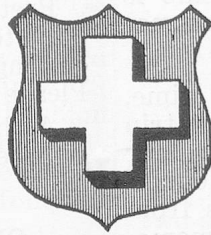
# HELVETIA

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MONTHLY  
PUBLICATION  
OF THE



SWISS SOCIETY  
OF  
NEW ZEALAND (INC.).

GROUP NEW ZEALAND OF THE NEW HELVETIC SOCIETY

21st YEAR

NOVEMBER, 1957

HAMILTON

## OUR DEMOCRACY

It has always been difficult for other people to understand why such a small country as ours has been able to unite under one flag people speaking four different languages and practically three different races.

All this started hundreds of years ago with the beginning of our history, when small groups of people lived in secluded mountain valleys and who came together for mutual help and common defence against foreign tyranny, and so through the centuries built up the present districts and cantons, still based today on these almost self-governing units. And the individual grew from father to son into a citizen with a great sense of responsibility and sense of duty to the community and what automatically came with this—a great love for his country. Then whatever you feel responsible for, you can't help loving, and this may be the one great secret of our true and enduring democracy. However humble he may be, his civic consciousness places him on the same level with all others.

Our country is a federated State and rests on the fundamental principle of the sovereignty of the people. The state is governed by the federal assembly (Bundesversammlung), which consists of two houses, the national council (Nationalrat—one deputy for every 24,000 electors), and the council of States (Staenderat—consisting of two deputies from each canton). The federal council has seven members (Bundesraete), and is the central executive body. These members are elected by a joint meeting of both houses. Each year, one of them is chosen as president. This position is largely nominal and entails mostly representative duties. Few Swiss know the names of all seven federal councillors. When recently home in Switzerland, I wanted to know those names and when nobody could tell me—there were always one or two names missing—I rang the information bureau, and they did not know either and had to look it up in a book! This illustrates the fact that no one man (even in the highest position) has more power than any other.

Our 25 cantons and half-cantons (three cantons, i.e., Unterwalden, Appenzell and Basle, have been divided by Federal law into two half-cantons each; these half-cantons are as independent as any canton) are the basis of our State, and they are divided into a great number of communes (Gemeinden), who in their turn guarantee the cantonal democracy. Even communes of, say, 50 inhabitants elect their own officers, i.e., president and councillors (Gemeinderaete), levy their own taxes, etc., and are practically self-governing. The canton co-ordinates the communes and carries out functions they cannot do separately, and the Federal State co-ordinates the cantons and carries out the functions they cannot do themselves. Only a few items such as post and telegraph, army, railways, supreme court are controlled by the federal state, and they in turn are responsible to the people as a whole.

The actual political right of the individual is extensive and is safeguarded through the "initiative" and the "referendum". Voting papers are posted to each Swiss individually.

Perhaps, in many years to come, our country might be taken as a base or as an example of how some day our whole world could live in peace.

—A.B.

## WELLINGTON SWISS CLUB FOUNDED

On the occasion of a Swiss Film Evening, which was held on October 5th at the Community Hall, Brooklyn, the new Wellington Swiss Club was founded.

As all previous Swiss gatherings had found such good response, proof was here that a club would be desired by a large group of Swiss residents of Wellington. Mr. K. Bischof, who had been the driving force behind our previous meetings, undertook to organise a committee of willing helpers. This committee will be acting until our first general meeting. When announced during the evening, everybody welcomed this move and confirmed satisfaction by signing a list of membership.