

Votes for Swiss women

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ST.

VOTES FOR SWISS WOMEN.

Under this title "The Swiss Observer" No. 1216 of November 13th, 1953, published an article in which ST. came to the conclusion that there was no great enthusiasm amongst Swiss women to be put on the voting register. He then went on to give a few suggestions, which if carried out, might have the desired result (votes for women).

May it be allowed to a woman active in the suffrage movement at home to make a few remarks on this article. By doing so, I fully acknowledge the positive attitude of ST. towards the women's vote in Switzerland. However, he seems to misjudge certain facts and attitudes in his home country, due, I am sure, to his having lived in England for many years.

First of all, I should like to point out that there has been, so far, only one test poll for women. This was in November, 1952, in the Canton of Geneva (a second one will take place in the Canton of Basle-city, on February 20th/21st, 1954). 71,500 adult women were invited to the Geneva test poll; 42,400 actually went to the poll, that is 59% of the total, 35,970 voted for the women's vote, 6,430 against. The majority of those in favour of the women's vote was therefore indeed overwhelming. The total attendance at the poll, 59% of the adult women, must be considered in the light of the attendance shown by men. For more than 10 years, the attendance of men voters, in the Canton of Geneva, has always been lower than 50%. And yet, the men were not called to the poll for a test only, but for decisions.

Furthermore, it may be mentioned that in the first half of the last century, when the modern democratic rights were to be introduced in the Swiss Cantons, there were but a small minority of men fighting for them. — Is it not a commonly known experience that new ideas have always been fought for by a minority only? The masses follow on the path that has been prepared for them.

A minority of Swiss women have been fighting for the vote since about 50 years. If they did not succeed so far, this is due to a series of circumstances special to Switzerland. I do not hesitate to admit that the Swiss suffragists were, on the whole, too cautious and timid. However, this is not peculiar to them, but a trait of Swiss mentality. Other circumstances have been much more responsible for the unsuccessful fight. I can but mention them: the more and more conservative trend of the Swiss people especially in the political field; hard social strains caused by wars which elsewhere opened the way to the women's vote having been absent in Switzerland since decades; the referendum or the constitutional necessity to introduce the women's vote by popular votation whereas in other countries it was introduced by Parliamentary decision only.

Personally, I have been active in the women's movement in the Canton of Berne for more than 10 years. Out of my experience and knowledge of the Swiss character, I do not believe that the aggressive tactics which ST. suggests would be successful here. We are bound to choose our methods according to the prevailing Swiss customs. As conditions are, nothing but a long campaign without any interruption *in the masses of the whole Swiss population* will lead us to success. This mass-campaign demands an unusual measure of perseverance and tenacity. I dare say that our fight is a harder one than it was in other countries. But I am convinced, as well, that we shall win eventually.

Dr. Marie Boehlen, Berne.

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