

# Switzerland---A Real Democracy

Switzerland was the first of all countries to adopt progressive laws to benefit the people generally. Nowhere has substantial liberty been more adequately secured than in the more advanced cantons (or states). The following is a short description of their government and some of their best laws:

1. The cantons are divided into two classes, absolute democracies and representative democracies. In the former, all measures must be approved by a majority of the people, who meet once a year to pass laws and regulate the taxes and expenditures of the canton. In the latter, a great council is elected by the people, and to it are deputed most of the powers of the Landsgemeinde (or meeting of the people.)

2. The federal assembly consists of two chambers—first, the state council; second, the national council. The former is composed of two members from each canton—forty-four in all; the latter varies according to population, one member being elected for every 20,000 inhabitants. These bodies depute the executive authority to the federal council, consisting of seven members, and holding office for three years. The president is elected yearly, not eligible for re-election, and has none of the quasi-royal privileges of the American president. There is also a court called the federal tribunal, which consists of nine members elected by the federal assembly from members of the legislative body. Three years is the term of office for members of the two houses.

3. Generally speaking, new laws are elaborated by the federal government or at the suggestion of either of the houses. Within a delay of ninety days of its passing, a petition of 30,000 voters can insist on the law being submitted to popular vote. From 1874 to 1906, twenty-eight referendums have taken place; nineteen times the measure was rejected; nine times only was it accepted.

4. The projects for revising the constitution are, by right, proposed by the people on 50,000 signatures being collected. Cantons have the right to propose laws to the assembly by correspondence.

5. The whole political system of the country is based on the commune. These communes resemble to a certain extent a beneficial society or a chartered stock company, owning certain rights, privileges and capital. Every inhabitant inside of a certain commune has their right as if they were a stockholder and every one of the proper age has a voice in saying what disposition shall be made of the common property. It is the communal system told of in the Bible and as old as the time of Abraham.

6. Most of these communes own property in forests, rents, lands and houses, and dividends are declared in the shape of free wood for winter, free books at school, free use of lands and reduced taxation. The price to join the commune varies with its worldly condition. In case of necessity, each commune is bound to support its members like a beneficial society would. The poor, as well as the rich, share in all profits the commune derives each year.

7. The referendum, providing that all laws must be submitted to the approval of the people if requested by a certain number, was first adopted in one of the cantons in 1831.

8. The initiative, providing that the people have the right to suggest laws to the councils was first adopted in 1845.

9. The federal tribunal has no power to declare any act that has been passed as unconstitutional. The people's will is supreme. All citizens are equal before the law in fact as well as name.

10. The government regulates the management and building of railroads. The post and telegraph management belongs exclusively to the government.

11. Primary schools are free and their attendance compulsory. They are supported by the cantons.

12. The tariff on articles of luxury is the highest. The manufacture of salt and gunpowder is a monopoly of the government.

13. The general government has the right to regulate the time of labor in manufacture and determine the age of children employed in same.

14. The expenses of the government are paid with the revenues from public property, as forests, etc.; from customs—post and telegraph receipts—interest on the war fund, and from the state monopoly of gunpowder and salt, military service, etc.

15. The postal service is most liberally endowed and is the first in the world.

16. The government and cantons subsidize asylums for lunatics, epileptics, deaf and dumb. Provide public assistance for those in need, school kitchens, outings for destitute children and all other friendly societies.

17. While the government's resources are derived from customs and indirect taxation, the cantons resort to direct taxation; in other words, a tax on capital or on income; and in many cases on both together. All cantons tax capital, in the shape of unearned increment. Tools and implements, and in many cases, cattle are exonerated. Allowance is made in event of debts, except as regards mortgages. Nineteen of the cantons tax both capital and income. Incomes above a certain figure, when more than required for a living, are taxed. In a general way, widows, aged people, the impotent and orphans are exempt from income tax.

18. Many ways in view of preventing fraud are employed. One of the best is an inventory after death enabling the state-comptroller to see whether taxes have been regularly paid. In a general way, it is an easy thing to approximate a man's fortune and income in Switzerland. Other direct taxes are death duties, on a sliding scale, particularly heavy in the case of distant heirs; on legal documents, on naturalizations and permits of residence. There are other taxes in addition on those best able to pay, nearly all going back to the people again in various ways after paying the expenses of government, which are very low as compared with other countries.

19. The professional trade schools are of various kinds. Here the head men, foremen, artists and tradesmen are trained. Watch and clock making is taught and there are mechanical and electrical schools. Also commercial schools, etc.

20. The watch-making trade is in a very unsatisfactory condition now, largely owing to competition from American watches, which are sold cheaper abroad than at home.

21. The government has established a control over gold and silver goods to see that there is no cheating in making same.

22. The law guarantees all employees of railroads, posts, telegraphs and customs 52 days rest yearly. The responsibility of railroad and steamer companies in case of accidents is guaranteed by law. The same rule applies to factories. In addition to Sundays, the law allows a half-holiday for workers in factories, 5 p. m. being the latest hour of closing permitted that day.

23. Agricultural enterprises are not inspected and the condition of the workers in this line is least satisfactory of all, with the result that labor for same is sometimes lacking.

24. Machinery as well as all parts of the buildings are carefully inspected.

25. Wages must be paid in cash at least fortnightly. Two weeks notice must be given before discharging a workman. About seventy per cent of the workers now work less than eleven hours a day. Women and children have shorter hours. Night work is regulated.

26. Large numbers of the people belong to societies which receive a subsidy from the government. A sick person receives free medical treatment, an allowance daily, a pension in case of incapacity of sixty per cent of the salary, and for widows and orphans, fifty per cent of the salary and forty francs for the funeral. Some of the cantons already give old age pensions for people over sixty-five years of age, the money for same coming partly from the inheritance tax.

27. There are no really destitute people but strikes still continue because Switzerland has not yet solved the labor question as satisfactorily as some of the other countries of the world. They are generally settled for a certain time limit by mutual agreement between the employers and workers.

28. State employment bureaus bring employers and workers together. Relief stations and travellers' homes for the unemployed. Labor colonies for those who can not find work or will not work when able to do so.

29. The government inspects and controls all banks of issue, regulates the circulation of notes, compels the reserve fund method of redemption and the circulation of reports. The Swiss National bank, which commenced business in 1907, is obliged to make and receive payments on account of the government without remuneration and to accept the deposit and to attend to operations of bonds belonging to the state. Its

operations have been satisfactory and remunerative.

30. Girls are taught every branch of house-keeping in schools established for that purpose. The women especially are very economical in this respect and are generally excellent help-mates. As education is compulsory and trade schools are everywhere, the Swiss are among the most enlightened people in the world, have many good qualities and few vices (as compared with some of the other nations.) They are intensely patriotic, believe they have the best government and certainly live in one of the most beautiful lands.

Result—They have the only government in the world which can not be betrayed because the people, as a whole, can not be bought and trusts, railroads, etc., can not rule politics. The per capita circulation is \$31.39—average bank deposit per inhabitant, \$86.36. The former is less than in the United States, but the latter nearly twice as much, showing that money is more evenly distributed.

WILLIAM H. B. HAYWARD.  
Philadelphia, Pa.

## THE SONG OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE

There's an army of dwarfs who inhabit this world,  
And from them an echo comes twisted and twirled;  
Their ways are a menace, their god is a prig,  
Their existence a show:  
"We want to be big, we want to be big—  
But we don't want to grow!"

Their gaudy apparel is ragged and worn,  
Their mantles are tattered, their laces are torn;  
And yet drifts the chorus all nature has loathed,  
And heard but to grieve:  
"We want to be clothed, we want to be clothed—  
But we don't want to weave!"

Their houses are poverty-stricken and old,  
Their windows are broken, their hearthstones are cold;  
And yet comes their cry in hysterical pitch,  
To the tune of a jig:  
"We want to be rich, we want to be rich—  
But we don't want to dig!"

Their minds are a mockery, gossip is rife,  
Their praises are empty, their days filled with strife;  
Yet e'er from among them complainings arise,  
And jealousies burn:  
"We want to be wise, we want to be wise—  
But we don't want to learn!"

They grovel and grumble in sore discontent,  
They struggle and ache with internal dissent;  
They shudder and shiver and wrangle and hate  
And cry as they shirk:  
"We want to be great, we want to be great—  
But we don't want to work!"  
—Lilla B. N. Weston, in National Magazine for January.

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