Foreword by the Swiss Ambassador

It gives me great pleasure to write some introductory words to the present volume, *25 Years Emancipation? Women in Switzerland 1971–1996*, which contains the papers given at the conference of the same title held in the University of Strathclyde from 29th to 31st March 1996. 1996 marked both the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of the University and also the twenty-fifth anniversary of the introduction of female suffrage at federal level in Switzerland. The conference was not only a fitting celebration of these two anniversaries, however, but was also the most significant collaboration between the Department of Modern Languages at the University, Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Council of the Arts) and the Swiss Embassy in London. Co-operation between the three in the development of Swiss Studies in the Department of Modern Languages goes back many years and has taken many forms, and it was thus highly appropriate, at a time of increased awareness of the history of women and of their present role in society, that a conference on this topic should take place at the University of Strathclyde. It therefore gave me great pleasure to accept the invitation of the Principal of the University of Strathclyde, Professor John Arbuthnott, to join him in opening the conference. That the conference was seen as important is evidenced, firstly, by the fact that women prominent in Swiss life found time to participate and give papers, secondly, by the enthusiastic response of those who attended and participated in the discussions, and thirdly, by the publication of this volume which will make the material of the conference available to an even wider public.

François Nordmann

REGINA WECKER

The Oldest Democracy and Women's Suffrage:
The History of a Swiss Paradox

If it were not such a well-known fact, it would be quite incredible that
– apart from Liechtenstein – Switzerland was the last European coun-
try to introduce women's suffrage. In fact, there were important political,
economic, and social factors which might have led us to expect Swit-
zerland to be the nation to set the pace and be among the forerunners
of women's political equality. In the first part of my paper, I shall deal
with this paradoxical development, showing Swiss social, political, and
economic structures and institutions which one might have expected
to advance political equality of women at an early stage. In the second
part I shall try to show how the very same factors – given these spe-
cifically Swiss conditions – hampered the realisation of women's suffrage.

The fact that women were enfranchised as late 1971 does not mean
that there were no activities in favour of suffrage. Quite the reverse, in
fact, for from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the demand
for equality was part of any political agenda. In the nineteenth century,
it occurred only sporadically in connection with the so-called Demo-
cratic Movement, which fought for a reform of cantonal constitutions,
with informal groups of women advocating the improvement of the
legal status of women in general.[1] Marie Goegg-Pouchoulin's 'Associa-
tion internationale des femmes', the first formal association advocating
legal and political equality for women in Switzerland, was founded as
part of an international movement for peace in Geneva in 1868.[2] Since

---

1   Annamarie Ryter, 'Die Geschlechtsvormundschaft im 19. Jahrhundert', in Mey-
    er/Kubli (eds), *Alles was Recht ist* (Liestal: 1992); Beatrix Mesmer, 'Pflichten er-
    füllen heisst Rechte begründen', in Studer/Wecker/Ziegler (eds), *Frauen und
    Staat. Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 3, 1996; Beatrix Mesmer, *Ausgeklam-
    mert–Eingeklammert. Frauen und Frauenorganisationen in der Schweiz im 19. Jahr-
    hundert* (Basel: 1988); Lotti Ruckstuhl, *Frauen sprengen Fesseln. Hindernislauf zum
    Frauenstimmrecht in der Schweiz* (Bonstetten: [n.d.]); Regina Wecker, *Frauen in
    der Schweiz. Von den Problemen einer Mehrheit* (Zug: 1983).
2   Compare Susanna Woodtli, *Gleichberechtigung* (Frauenfeld: 1975), pp. 24 ff.

the Women's Congress of 1896 the question of women's political eman-
cipation was broadly discussed. In 1897, Carl Hilty, Professor of Con-
stitutional Law at the University of Berne, published his famous arti-
cle on the vote,[3] holding that women's suffrage should be introduced
from 'the bottom up', which meant first on the communal level: Switz-
erland is a federalist country, the cantons being sovereign states within
a state.[4] Thus political decisions are taken on two or even three levels:
on a communal level, individual communities being relatively independ-
ent, administrative units[5] deciding on matters such as primary schools,
communal buildings, communal road-building, welfare, communal fi-
nances, voting on communal matters; on a cantonal level,[6] the cantons
being responsible for the cantonal bills,[7] dealing with secondary edu-
cation including universities, health and legal matters, political questions
and institutions such as voting on cantonal matters, plus social and eco-
nomic questions of the canton; and on the federal level, where a two-
chamber system deals with federal legislation and politics, including the
right to vote on federal matters, international treaties, 'law and order',
the independence of cantonal constitutions and military questions.[8]
Hilty's influential opinion that women's political participation should

3   Carl Hilty, 'Frauenstimmrecht', *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Eidgenos-
    senschaft*, 11, 1897, pp. 245 ff.
4   'The cantons are sovereign within the bonds of the Federal Constitution and
    exercise all rights which have not been transferred to the Federation by the
    Federal Constitution' (Art. 3 of the Federal Constitution of 1874).
5   A typical community has a council (executive), elected by the enfranchised citi-
    zens of the community, a small administration and a consultative organ, a com-
    munal meeting in which every enfranchised citizen may participate. Most de-
    cisions are taken by the communal meeting, including fiscal and financial mat-
    ters, only most important or highly controversial decisions may be decided by
    ballot.
6   A typical canton has a governing council and a parliament, both elected by the
    enfranchised citizens of that canton. Only in the so-called 'Landesgemeinde'
    cantons does this cantonal assembly of all enfranchised citizens of the canton
    exercise the functions of parliament.
7   Before the bill becomes law citizens decide on it by ballot. In some cantons
    all bills are put to the ballot.
8   Both chambers, the National Council ('Nationalrat') and the council of States
    ('Ständerat') have the same powers and duties. Together ('Vereinigte Bundes-
    versammlung') they elect the Federal Government ('Bundesrat'). Parliament

first be established in the communities, dealing with matters of com-
munal autonomy such as school, welfare, and church, led to several pe-
titions by women submitted to communal or cantonal authorities on
the matter of women's suffrage before and after World War I.

From 1915 onwards, women's suffrage was discussed regularly on a
cantonal level, in the parliaments of the various cantons – resulting in
many cantonal plebiscites on this very question. On a national level, the
issue became one of the demands of the famous national strike of 1918
along with other issues of democratic representation. These endeavours
will be dealt with in the third part of my paper which will discuss the
struggle of the women's movement and the long evolution towards suf-
frage beginning in the nineteenth century and ending shortly after
World War II.[9]

*1. The Political and Economic Structure of Switzerland – Factors which
   might Have Advanced Female Emancipation*

– Switzerland was among the first countries to concede adult male suf-
   frage and to abolish property qualifications and the prerogative of
   birth by the Federal Constitution of 1848.[10] While a considerable
   number of Swiss men were not enfranchised at the beginning of the
   19th century, it then became a matter of common consent that class,
   the region of domicile and religious denomination should not be
   factors in an exclusion from political rights. This was considered a
   matter of human rights and justice. It seems to be a small step to in-
   clude women in this consent.

   The communities were proud of their traditionally democratic in-
stitutions within which political decisions were taken by an assembly
of the citizens ('Gemeindeversammlung'), and where citizens had the

meets for four annual session (12 weeks). In Switzerland only the federal gov-
ernment and most of the members of cantonal governments are professional
politicians drawing their income from their office. All the other politicians have
another job and draw comparatively moderate expenses and travelling allow-
ances.
9 Brigitte Studer's paper deals with the period after 1945.
10 Federal Constitution Article 4.

right to elect the representatives of their community: the head of the local administration as well as, for example, the teacher.

– Swiss democracy not only conferred the right to vote but from the end of the nineteenth century citizens had acquired the right to accept or reject laws ('Referendum') and to initiate change in the political order by amending the constitution ('Initiative') even on the federal level. Exercising political power was not a question of a decision taken every couple of years, but part of everyday life – in which it seemed desirable that women should participate. When women started petitioning for women's rights and the improvement of women's conditions of life in the middle of the nineteenth century, their demands were in agreement with the democratic movement as such. They directed their petitions to the cantonal constituencies in order to make women's rights part of the new constitutions. Their petitions showed that they were well informed about the political scene and the formulation of their demands was linked to the on-going political discussion.

Switzerland and Swiss institutions served as a model democracy for other countries or for movements striving for a democratisation of their national institutions as, for example, in Germany in 1848, or in the United States. Swiss politicians duly provided support. The functioning of the Swiss political system relying on democratic principles and structures became part of Swiss national identity. Swiss people were proud of the 'ancient' element of Swiss direct democracy, where the common man had the power to decide political questions.

– Towards the end of the 19th century, the belief prevailed that the Swiss state and its institutions were founded in 1291. A combination of this founding myth 'Gründungsmythos' with the story of the mythological figure of Wilhelm Tell (reinforced by Schiller's drama), who was said to have defended Swiss freedom and independence, became part of the historical mythology of Switzerland – just in time to celebrate a centennial in 1891.[11] Wilhelm Tell had his female counterpart in Gertrud Stauffacher, who was said to have advised her husband. Thus even the myth provided the figure of an independent woman involved in politics.

– Associations were an important means of promoting political, economic and social interests in the European revolutionary movement of 1848. Especially in the various German states women organised as well as men striving with revolutionary zeal for their goals, though women organised themselves separately from men. The failure of the revolution forced leading politicians to flee to Switzerland. In some Swiss cantons, those political refugees were highly respected in the middle of the nineteenth century. They could expect asylum in Switzerland and some of them were even granted Swiss citizenship in order to protect them from German or Austrian authorities and their ideas on democracy were highly respected. Although Swiss asylum policy was highly selective and general approval was often contested by political pressure from the German States, Austria and France who demanded that Switzerland surrender the refugees,[12] it became part of the Swiss national image to be a protector of refugees persecuted because of their fight for freedom and democracy.

The Geneva International Women's Association ('Association internationale des femmes'), which is considered the first independent women's movement in Switzerland (founded 1868), was influenced by those circles of émigrés operating from Switzerland which – despite the failure of the 1848 movement – were struggling for better political and social conditions in Europe. The founder of this international women's association, Marie Goegg-Pouchoulin, had married a German revolutionary, who was both engaged in the international peace movement ('Ligue internationale pour la paix et la liberté') and the international labour movement.[13] Armand Goegg was co-editor of a newspaper called 'Les Etats Unis d'Europe', the 'United Nations of Europe'. Marie Goegg supported him in his endeavours but at the same time used his political connections for her own objective, which was to involve women in the international peace movement.

---

11 See Werner Meyer, *Mythos und Geschichte* (Basel: 1991).

12 See Marc Vuilleumier, *Flüchtlinge und Immigranten in der Schweiz* (Zürich: 1987).
13 See Susanna Woodtli, *Gleichberechtigung. Der Kampf um die politischen Rechte der Frau in der Schweiz* (Frauenfeld: 1975).

Thus, the role of Switzerland as a country which granted political asylum influenced the political climate in favour of women's emancipation. From the very beginning of her small but well-known international organisation, Marie Goegg made it clear that women could only take part in the common struggle for peace on equal terms with men. Her group continued to exercise its influence by petitioning in favour of a law for economic and civil equality for women at the time of the revision of the Federal Constitution. They addressed their petition to the National Council in 1870. In 1872, Julie von May, a Bernese aristocrat, submitted a similar petition. Although she did not ask for the vote, she advocated equality in education, equal pay and an equal right to inherit.

– Switzerland was industrialised early on, and its industry relied on female labour. By the middle of the nineteenth century, about half the factory workers were women. The economic development in Switzerland – its early industrialisation and the importance of trade – furthered women's independence: factory work provided an income independent from one's family. Because of this independence, the so-called 'Geschlechtsvormundschaft', a bizarre form of guardianship, based on gender, was abolished, and unmarried, divorced, and widowed women were now granted the right to trade and to dispose of their own property. Industrialisation and growing mobility furthered the foundation of supra-regional federations of women workers: the first 'Arbeiterinnenvereine' were founded in the 1880s. Industrialisation furthered at the same time bourgeois women's associations which were founded in order to solve the so-called 'social question' ('soziale Frage') as growing poverty among working class families was called. The 'women's question' ('Frauenfrage') became part of the 'social question', and several women's organisations of very different persuasions – ranging from associations for the abolition of prostitution[14] to the so-called 'Schweizerischer Gemeinnütziger Frauenverein'[15]

14 See Annemarie Käppeli, *Sublime croisade. Ethique et politique du féminisme protestante, 1875–1928* (Geneva: 1990).
15 The SFG supported the idea that the social question and the 'women's question' had to be solved by educating women especially in housework and helping them fulfil their 'female duties'.

(SGF) a female group parallel to the influential 'Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft' – came into being. Although their attitude towards suffrage was very different – the SGF, for example, never discussed it publicly – they were a reservoir of female involvement in state affairs.

– School attendance was mandatory for boys and girls, and primary education had not only been free of charge but more or less equal for boys and girls since the nineteenth century. Educating girls was considered important, too. Zürich boasted the first German-speaking university to admit women, and many of the first women doctors in Russia, Germany, England, and the United States held a degree they had acquired at a Swiss university.

– The first woman to take an ordinary degree at a university was the Russian Nadesha Suslowa, who became a physician at the University of Zürich in 1867. Again, her extraordinary achievement was made possible by the specific political situation of that time. The University of Zürich was a comparatively young institution, founded in the 1830s. Many of its professors were part of the circle of émigrés from Germany of democratic persuasion who did not question a woman's right to study. It is obvious that émigrés developed a keen understanding of other 'oppressed groups' and were, therefore, willing to support their aims. Apart from that, women had already attended lectures in Zürich for some time – though not as regular students. When Suslowa wanted to take a degree, this caused some discussion, but was finally granted by the government because of widespread academic support. Usually early female academics formed a 'reservoir' of emancipationist thought.

2. The Very Same Factors Hampering Women's Emancipation

Despite these modern traits of Swiss society and the democratic traditions of Switzerland, women remained in the backward position normally associated with a pre-industrial, feudal society. What were the reasons? Why was Swiss equality only equality among men?

– The fact that men were enfranchised early on proved to be disadvantageous for women. The introduction of the vote for women in other

countries was usually combined with the enfranchisement of parts
of the male population and with a restructuring of the electoral sys-
tem. When woman's suffrage was introduced in Britain in 1918, there
were groups of men (for example, agricultural workers) who did not
have the vote as yet. The Reform Act thus was a general reform in
favour of women *and* men. In Switzerland, however, it was exclusively
a question of gender. All Swiss men were enfranchised and had to
give up the prerogative to the other sex, and this seemed to devalue
politics and democracy in their opinion.

- Although women's groups striving for the vote referred to the found-
ing myth and Schiller's Gertrud Stauffacher by calling their group
'Stauffacherinnen', this provided no successful argument. The date
itself – 1291 – the first centennial of 1891 and the following annual
celebrations stressed the military elements more than later founda-
tion dates (historians consider 1798 or 1848 much more important).
Thus women and their participation were excluded.

- The biggest obstacle, however, was the political system, which gave
'the people' the right to decide on matters which other countries re-
solved by parliamentary decisions. For women's suffrage this meant
that – like any other change of the Federal Constitution – the issue
was decided at the polls. In the cantons, a majority of enfranchised
men decided. On the federal level, a majority of the voters and the
cantons had to agree to any change. This made change a very slow
process in the best of cases. But unlike other constitutional or legis-
lative changes, those who were most concerned – women that is –
had no say in the matter. They had to convince politicians who pre-
sented their request to Parliament, which could then present it to the
people. Then those interested in the issue had to campaign and con-
vince every single voter – male voter that is. Direct democracy was
actually detrimental to women's rights. All attempts to circumvent
this difficulty and to by-pass male popular consent by means of re-
interpretation of the constitution – in fact women were not explic-
itly excluded from the vote – were rejected.[16]

16 See Regina Wecker, 'Staatsbürgerrechte, Mutterschaft und Grundrechte', in
   Studer/Wecker/Zeigler, *Frauen und Staat. Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschich-
   te,* 3, 1996.

- There is another disadvantage of democracy in Switzerland: it makes
people excessively patient. Groups fight for a change, they collect sig-
natures for an 'Initiative', they work with groups of politicians in fa-
vour of change, the issue is put to the vote, they start campaigns and
try to convince voters personally, they invest time, and then at the
polls, the 'people' say 'Nay' nevertheless. Whom can they blame? No
change of government can help, no election, they can only change
the people. So they hope for the next time. Normally those who lose
a campaign will soon start to prepare for the next one. Concerning
women's suffrage, there were many 'next times', and it seemed so
logical to have the vote that for all activists – whether they were living
in the nineteenth or at the beginning of the twentieth century – vic-
tory seemed at hand, a better campaign, more work, more money
and then ... Thus women were patient. Besides, they felt obliged to
show that they knew the democratic game in order to show them-
selves worthy of the vote. It is an unwritten law that if you lose a
'democratic' plebiscite you will have to accept the decision and 'un-
derstand' the argument of your political adversary. This is part of our
political culture. Women could always be convinced to behave well,
because they were afraid they would not get another chance. Thus
democracy turned down equality.

- The Swiss 'International Women's Association' was very active in the
middle of the 19th century on an international level and took an
egalitarian stand on this issue; that is, women referred to the innate
rights women had as human beings. But this part of the movement
relied on very few women. Most of the women's organisations –
about a thousand were established in the nineteenth century – in-
clined to what has been called a 'dualistic ideology', that is, women
were considered different from men and having different rights, and
even concerning the political institutions the prevailing opinion was
that while politics and economics were considered men's prerogative,
women should deal with social institutions and were judged respon-
sible for social welfare. This dualistic view allowed them to pretend
they were living in a democratic nation.

- Even when women demanded equal rights, they were very often not
talking about the vote, but aimed at equal economic rights, for example,

an equal share in an inheritance, equality concerning property rights and economic freedom, which in particular applied to business women having the right to sell and to sign contracts without the consent of either a husband or a guardian. From a pragmatic point of view, these rights seemed more important than the vote – especially in an industrialised country, where more and more women lived on their own income.

– Although women were – compared to other countries – well educated, they were often educated according to that dual model which assigned men and women different places in the family and within society: even if boys and girls attended the same class, girls had additional lessons in needlework or other so-called female skills instead of mathematics. In this respect Switzerland does not differ so much from other countries. But in the given specifically Swiss situation it led to a kind of vicious circle: teachers and politicians were convinced that Switzerland needed well-educated people because Swiss industry relied on skilled work as a result of the absence of mineral resources. Although Swiss women worked in factories and were highly skilled, their skill in textile techniques was not considered the result of training or education but of their gender role. In addition, women's factory work was more and more deemed problematic and, therefore, even vocational education became a male privilege. On the other hand education was considered so important because of politics, the fact that 'everybody' decided about the general policy to be adopted. Therefore, politicians said that everybody must get a considerable amount of education as a citizen – but 'everybody' was male, while women held a different kind of citizenship and needed less education in this respect – which, of course, was later used to say that they did not have enough knowledge to be enfranchised.

– With some modification this also applied to university education. Although women were admitted to university comparatively early, most students were foreign nationals. Swiss women were a minority. There are many reasons for this, but one important reason in our context is that a university degree did not help women in the labour market: they could study law but could not become lawyers or judges because 'active citizenship' (which meant suffrage) was a precondition.

And in the civil service, they had to leave the job as soon as they married. University education was worth less for women.

Paradoxically – thus my argument – the same political factors which furthered women's political activities and were responsible for the improvement of women's civil rights and which you might expect to lead to political rights delayed the introduction of political equality for women.

3. The Women's Movement and the Struggle for the Vote 1872–1945

There was no direct influence of Julie von May's petition concerning women's rights on the new constitution, but the constitutional change of 1874 nevertheless had its impact on the structure of women's organisations: although most of the federalistic structures of Switzerland and the autonomy of the cantons remained untouched by the constitutional change the power of the federal institutions and the federal government was strengthened, making it necessary for political associations to organise on the federal level. This held true as well for women's organisations and led to the formation of supra-regional women's associations, of bourgeois as well as of working class character, gaining political influence. The bourgeois organisations like the 'Verein zur Hebung der Sittlichkeit', a descendant of the abolitionist movement and 'Gemeinnützige Frauenverein' were aiming at moral and social reform of society by women.[17] Working women's associations, founded in 1886, and forming a national association in 1890 were connected to the national and international working class movement. Women's political emancipation was part of their programme but did not make specific action necessary as, according to their ideology, the discrimination of women was to be abolished by the realisation of a socialist society.

In the 1890s some women's organisations of a new type were founded in Geneva, Zürich, Berne and Lausanne. They called themselves 'progressive' and were explicitly striving for equal rights: such as access to higher education, equal pay, equal job opportunities. They organised a

17 See Brigitte Schnegg, Anne-Marie Stalder, 'Zur Geschichte der schweizerischen Frauenbewegung', in *Die Stellung der Frau in der Schweiz*, published by the Eidgenöss. Frauenkommission, Teil IV: *Frauenpolitik* (Bern: 1984).

congress, 'Kongress für die Interessen der Frau' in 1896, in order to demonstrate the importance of women's achievements in society. Delegates of all kinds of women's organisations including working women's organisations participated as well as (male) politicians who expressed their opinion on women's role in public. To further co-operation with the progressive associations they founded an organisation, the 'Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine' (BSF) in 1898.

Whilst this organisation proved incapable of taking decisive steps on the question of women's suffrage, a number of cantonal associations for women's suffrage were organising around the turn of the century: Zürich (1896, 1906), Neuchâtel and Olten (1905), Geneva, the Canton of Vaud (1906). They were united in 1909 in an organisation the 'Schweizerischer Frauenstimmrechtsverein' (Women's Suffrage Movement), but continued their work as well on the cantonal level. Since Carl Hilty's article, it had become commonly accepted that it would be easier to achieve suffrage in the cantons and then apply it to the federal level.

In 1912, another decisive step in matters of women's suffrage was taken when the Social Democratic Party decided at their congress, to take up the question wherever possible. As a result social-democratic politicians began to demand cantonal plebiscites on this issue.[18] The first cantonal plebiscites took place in Neuchâtel in 1919, and in Basel in 1920. 69 per cent of the male voters in Neuchâtel and 65 per cent of the male voters in Basel decided against women's suffrage. The very same day (February 8th 1920), Zürich held a plebiscite, the result was even worse (80 per cent nays). Geneva was to follow in 1921 with about the same result as Basel. There were about 25 cantonal plebiscites altogether, in some cantons like Basel and Geneva it took several attempts before the male citizenship granted women full political citizenship. In Basel it took 7, in Geneva 5 attempts before women were successful on the cantonal level. Before the Second World War seven cantons took up the issue of women's suffrage – all with distinctly negative results. Both sides used concepts of equality and difference and referred to the principle of equality in the constitution. Supporters of women's suffrage argued that because men and women were equal as human beings, women had

an innate right to decide on political matters, others argued that because women dealt with political questions differently, because they differ from men, it was at once a matter of justice and of prudence to take their view into consideration. Opponents argued that article 4 of the constitution – 'all Swiss are equal before the law' – did not legitimate – what they called – an 'absolute and mechanistic notion of equality' but allowed, or even demanded, to take existing differences into consideration.[19] For them motherhood represented the profound difference between men and women, establishing a status of dependence not compatible with the notion of a free and independent voter, while for the supporters of female suffrage motherhood was a positive argument: the responsibility of women for children furthered their insight in social affairs, decided at the polls. Neither supporter nor opponents contested the view that political participation of women was a question to be decided by the male citizenship, thus accepting the supremacy of Swiss traditions over a supra-national concept of human rights.[20]

Despite the failure on the cantonal level women's organisations did not give up and took the issue up on the federal level in 1929 by petitioning the federal parliament. The petition was signed by about 250,000 people, mostly women. The government accepted the petition but did not consider any concrete measure.

It was only after the Second World War that the question was taken up for the first time by the Federal Parliament. The first debate on women's suffrage on this level took place in 1945 in the National Council. Apart from the Social Democratic Party all other parties were divided on the question but at the end of the debate the National Council decided for women's suffrage and commissioned the government by a majority of 104 votes to 35 to solve the question and to propose measures of introduction of a constitutional amendment (of course to be approved by the male citizens) and ordered them to report to Parliament. This took them a full 12 years.

This development was only possible because the majority of Swiss men and a considerable number of Swiss women accepted that the

---

18 Women and their organizations could of course not do this – they were not members of the parliaments after all.

19 Fleiner / Giacometti, *Schweizerisches Bundesstaatsrecht* (Zürich: 1949), p. 406.
20 Only in the 1950s did the Association for Women's Suffrage try to reinterpret the Constitution.

structure of Swiss political measures – especially the plebiscite – was more important than human rights. The political structures – above all a constitution which made (and still makes) even fundamental human rights[21] subject to the consent of the majority of voters and of the cantons – gave them the chance to delay the introduction of suffrage.

The question, however, why Swiss men wanted it this way, and why they feared the political participation of women has only been answered partially by this analysis of rather complicated political structures. There probably is another explanation: like all privileged groups, Swiss men only reluctantly share their rights and give up their privileges. Political participation did not only mean voting, and politics was not only a matter of a few politicians but it was – especially in smaller communities – part of everyday male life. It took a lot of men's leisure time and it was held to confer high status. There were many political decisions to be taken, there were several plebiscites every year, and there were weekly or monthly meetings of commissions and meetings of the community assembly, and there were elections and so on – and there was always the pub afterwards. Politics was part of a male-defined culture, a resort – a haven free of women – and after all men could not imagine women usurping their last retreat, one of the last bastions of male supremacy.

---

21 This not only holds with political rights, but also with other fundamental rights
   such as asylum or the naturalisation of foreigners.

At the end of the 19th century, the Swiss political institutions 'Initiative' and 'Referendum', instruments of Swiss direct democracy were adopted by several American states. Ironically, in propaganda cartoons it was a Swiss lady who presented these instruments of direct democracy to an American lady. At that time a Swiss woman had no political rights, but in some of the American states women were already enfranchised. From: James H. Hutson, *The Sister Republics. Die Schweiz und Vereinigten Staaten von 1776 bis heute* (Bern: Stämpfli, 1992: 76).