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2003

https://doi.org/10.25595/403

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Studer, Brigitte: *Universal Suffrage and Direct Democracy : The Swiss Case, 1848-1990*, in: Fauré, Christine (Hrsg.): Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women (New York: Routledge, 2003), 687-703. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/403.

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UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The Swiss Case, 1848–1990

BRIGITTE STUDER

IN THE AREA OF political rights, Switzerland undeniably stands out as a unique case. It was the first modern democracy to grant universal male suffrage in 1848, and while this right remained unquestioned, Switzerland was also the last country in Europe to grant the right to vote to its female citizens. Women's suffrage did not receive approval at the national level until 1971. Moreover, it was not until 1990 that every political body at the cantonal and municipal level finally recognized women's voting rights, and this only because the canton of Appenzell Innerhoden was forced to capitulate in the face of a decision handed down by the federal court. All told, close to one hundred votes had been needed for the measure to pass electorally. How should we interpret Switzerland's exceptionalism in this matter? For the persistence of its refusal to grant women's suffrage was certainly an anomaly, even though women's political representation in Switzerland quickly caught up with European averages after 1990.

Any analysis of the question must obviously take into account the specificity of the Swiss political system, particularly its founding principles of federalism and direct democracy. Swiss direct democracy incorporates two unusual features, both of them independent of the founding of the federal state in 1848. First, there was an old democratic tradition known as the *Landsgemeinde,* which periodically assembled all citizens eligible to vote. Political theorists of liberalism in 1848 had been highly critical of this form of democracy (which predated the founding of the federal state in certain rural regions), arguing that it did not provide the appropriate mechanisms to control the exercise of political power. Dian Schefold has shown that as a result of this criticism, liberal theorists opted instead for a mode of representational democracy, which was the model for the new Swiss confederation (see Schefold). Nonetheless, the form of federalism adopted allowed the *Landsgemeinde* to subsist in some cantons of central Switzerland. Second, there are the two mechanisms that specifically define Swiss direct—or, more accurately, semidirect—democracy, namely, the citizens' right of referendum and their right to introduce constitutional amendments by a citizen's initiative. These rights were introduced later, in 1874 and 1891, respectively. Thus, women's exclusion from the political process was determined prior to the implementation of the rights granting ordinary Swiss citizens the means to participate directly in government through their ability to introduce their own particular interests into the shaping of the general will.

These circumstances limit the relevance of the main argument in the debate about women's suffrage in Switzerland, that is, the notably participatory nature of Swiss citizenship and the extent of Swiss democratic rights. The latter issue must therefore be put into historical perspective. While it is true that the rights to referendum and to introduce citizens' initiatives have weighed heavily in the denial of women's suffrage during the 20th century, this was not true in the 19th century. In fact, while the committee of the Diet charged with drafting the constitution of 1848 was concerned at the time about the political inequality reserved for Jews (only to comply with it in the end), not one word was ever uttered about women's legal rights. By instituting a system of universal male suffrage, the liberals of 1848 were guided by a premise that

seemed perfectly self-evident at the time. All Swiss men were considered perfectly "competent" to fulfill this function of citizenship. This was considered an established principle from the outset, even though its implementation on a practical level would take several decades. In contrast, the supposition of "competence"—that is, personal qualifications of a moral or intellectual nature—was not extended to Swiss women. Woman's lot in this case shows that in reality, Switzerland in 1848 had not really given up the notion of the right to vote based on "competence," even though it had eliminated property ownership as a criterion for eligibility to vote. Of the two categories of exclusion from access to political rights—property and competence—mentioned in 1932 by Karl Braunias in his massive comparative study of European parliamentary sys tems (see Braunias), the second had remained in force in Switzerland. The determining factor for exclusion was gender—although it was never explicitly stated as such.

The presumption of women's incompetence in political life in reality hides a number of contradictions with regard to their relationship to the state and to citizenship. These contradictions provided fertile ground for feminist argumentation. While women were ineligible to vote, they were nevertheless subject to taxes. This logical inconsistency—which was continually criticized' until the introduction of women's suffrage—had already been raised by a group of women in 1849. They realized they were penalized by a special tax levied upon the elites of the Sonderbund—the association of Catholic cantons opposed to the creation of the federal state—and after the association's defeat, they filed a complaint with the Federal Council on 5 January 1849. They expressed their surprise at finding themselves on equal footing with men of state and military officers: "It is unheard-of that women should be made responsible for the outcome and the success of battles or political maxims, when their legal status is that of minors." As noted in a government report to both houses of Parliament in 1850, these women rose up in protest against such hypocrisy. "If they are just holding (our) luck against us and applying the doctrine of might makes right, let them come out and say so, instead of invoking the inflexible tenets of a higher justice." Because the measure penalizing the Sonderbund elites also included stripping the people subject to the special tax of their political rights, the women asked pointedly how the authorities could take away from them "political rights they have never abused, because they don't have any."

Gender was seen as a self-explanatory reason for assuming that women did not have the necessary capabilities to vote responsibly. With this in mind, one wonders whether Switzerland's exceptionalism might not, in fact, prove the rule. That is to say, does this case not point to the normativity of the structure that regulated gender relations according to an asymmetric distribution of power, defined by the bourgeois social order of the 19th century? From vantage points almost a century apart, two Swiss feminists drew precisely this conclusion. In the 12 May 1872 issue of *Zur Bundrevision,* Julie von May (1801–75), an aristocrat from Bern, complained Mabout the "destiny" reserved for the female sex by "Switzerland, the cradle, the very model for movements of liberty and equality throughout Europe." Yet this was the very model that kept "its girls" in "a more wretched and enslaved condition than [did] the monarchies that surround[ed] it." In 1958, Iris von Roten (1917–90), whose radicalism foreshadowed that of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, echoed von May's judgment:

> No other form of government besides democracy so pitilessly illustrates women's subjugation as when it refuses them political rights because of their gender. And democracies are more likely to do this in proportion to the degree to which they are "pure" democracies, democracies without intermediaries. In this sense, Switzerland represents the most striking example of women's subjugation.

This interpretation is obviously somewhat general, given the particular conditions that shape each nation-state and its political system. Nevertheless, the Swiss political system provides what is perhaps a particularly clear illustration of the principle of difference that structures social relations between the sexes in modern industrialized societies—despite declarations of universalism on the part of democracies. Whereas the instruments of democracy are intended, precisely, to make equality a reality, in fact they serve to maintain the status quo, demonstrating the extent to which the principle of sexual difference is culturally entrenched. Moreover, the emergence of a majority that favored the introduction of women's suffrage was made even more difficult by particularities in the Swiss political system. Through its specific mechanisms of direct democracy, Switzerland's political system has historically given primacy to the political expression of particular concerns, which, in turn, have been given an institutional space. The resulting multiplicity of interests made it very difficult to achieve the majority needed to pass women's suffrage. Furthermore, the political system has a built-in safeguard that discourages constitutional change: the principle of the double majority. A popular majority in itself is not enough to enact a constitutional change; constitutional changes must also be ratified by a majority of the cantons. A final factor must be taken into account: the logic of Switzerland's institutional structures, which are designed to promote continuity. No major political change has occurred since the federal state was constituted in 1848. Therefore, no party or government has felt the need to appeal to women to legitimate its power or to help resolve a social or political crisis through the extension of the electoral body.

The factors outlined above do not imply that the issue of women's suffrage has been unmarked by changing circumstances. The debate about the inclusion of women in the civic process has evolved through several phases and through shifting historical contexts. During the first phase, prior to the 1890s, the problem of women's suffrage remained on the back burner. Other aspects of women's status as "second-class citizens" seemed more pressing.

Women as Citizens but Not Voters

As the British sociologist T.H.Marshall has underscored, the notion of citizenship comprises several dimensions. Rights— political, civil, or social—are not the only issue. Modern states also have a vested interest in the functions performed by individuals and are cognizant of the economic contributions of their citizens. Accordingly, the indispensable role of women's labor in the household economy encouraged certain politicians to advocate the institutionalization of women's groups in cantonal debates prior to the 1848 Constitution. Women's groups would be responsible for the implementation of welfare policy. Immediately following the birth of the confederation, social reformers—mostly men—began a campaign to protect children, and later women, against the most damaging effects of industrial exploitation. This effort culminated in the 1877 passage of the factory law, which banned work at night and on Sundays for all women and children. Considered at least as important during this period was the issue of girls' education and their chances for professional training. Slowly but surely, between 1830 and 1850, every canton introduced compulsory education. In fact, education—which was in the cantons' jurisdiction—was one of the first tasks addressed by the new authorities. Education was considered a precondition for the responsible exercise of political rights. Although their education did not measure up to that of their brothers, Swiss girls did quite well compared to international standards at the time. When Julie von May joined the fray in pushing for constitutional reform in 1872 and again in 1874, she interpreted the high levels of education among females as an indication that Switzerland was ready for women's emancipation. Her conclusions were a little hasty, as it turned out, although the fact that educational reformers like Johan Jacob Binder were advocating women's rights only seemed to confirm von May's position. Yet, when the time came

actually to demand women's suffrage, most voices fell silent. It seemed better to pursue this goal more gradually: to attend to education first and then to wait and see. This prudent and reasonable position— the pragmatic strategy of asking for only one thing at a time— proved to be typical of political action in Switzerland. In a system that allows for the expression of many diverse positions, no position has a chance of passing unless it creates consensus and, from the outset, holds out the potential for compromise. In the end, such a system privileges the political and social agents who already hold power.

Even Marie Goegg-Pouchoulin (1826–99), the founder of the International Association of Women (IAW) in 1868, had to bend to this political reality. When push came to shove, despite the international scope of her organization (Switzerland was the home of the Central Committee and several branches, but branches were also founded in France, Italy, and Germany) and her egalitarian feminism, she relinquished her demands for women's political rights during the debates on constitutional reform at the beginning of the 1870s. This advocate of women's individualism, who dreamed of the free and equal development of men and women alike, limited her demands to civil and economic rights. As Béatrix Mesmer has shown in her history of Swiss feminism in the 19th century, in the end, the practical solutions adopted by the International Association of Women barely extended beyond those spheres that had traditionally belonged to women (see Mesmer 1988). Nevertheless, Switzerland's first women's organization was different from those that followed it in one crucial respect: it never felt that women's equality needed to be justified. The IAW painted a bold social portrait in the broadest strokes, one in which the question of women's rights was of a piece with aspirations that "ensured freedom, instruction, morality, economic well-being and fraternal union." Above all, the association "demanded equal pay and education as well as equality in the family and before the law."

During the 1870s and 1880s, a whole series of feminist organizations emerged. However, most of them limited their scope to social and moral issues. For example, the Association of Swiss Women for Moral Improvement (Association des Femmes Suisses pour l'euvre du Relèvement Moral), founded in 1877 by Josephine Butler (1828–1906), devoted its energies exclusively to abolitionism. Offering more immediate practical help, the International Association of Friends of Girls, the Swiss chapter of which was established in 1886, struggled to end prostitution. There was also the influential Society of Swiss Women for Social Welfare (Schweizerischer Gemeinnütziger Frauenverein/Société Feminine Suisse d'Utilite Publique), created in 1888, which combined the promotion of home economics with the development of so-called women's professions. As Catherine Fussinger's prosopographical outline has shown, these various pursuits did not preclude a certain amount of permeability between traditionally oriented organizations and more progressive women's groups (see Fussinger).

The only other egalitarian feminist discourse that protested against discrimination during this initial period came from Meta von Salis-Marschlins (1855–1929), an aristocrat from Graubünden, a doctor of history at the University of Zurich and a personal friend of Friedrich Nietzsche. Von Salis-Marschlins was the first to pose the question of women's rights in terms of citizen's rights and their duties toward the state. On New Year's Day of 1887 she published her treatise, "A Woman's Heretical Reflections," in the democratic daily, the *ZüricherPost*. If women achieved the right to vote, she argued (going against the usual arguments used to legitimate claims for women's suffrage), it should not be on the basis of their special merit or superior moral qualities. Rather, women should vote simply because they paid taxes—like men. She dismissed the well-worn mantra that women needed to be educated before they could vote responsibly. "Expecting free human beings to teach those who are not free how to make good use of their freedom," she wrote "is tantamount to expecting human nature to change." She reiterated this point in a series of public lectures given in 1894. Although the issue of women's suffrage had become a widespread concern in Switzerland by this time, her radical egalitarian position remained marginal even as it continued to provoke her contemporaries.

Women's Issues Come into Prominence

During the 1890s, the Swiss suffrage movement entered a phase in which its emphasis shifted toward organization. During this period, which extended until the eve of World War I, the "woman question" emerged as an important societal issue. Once again, von Salis-Marschlins was first to bring the issue of suffrage to the fore, not as an issue specific to women, but as a universal concern. And indeed, global debate about the integration of women was resonating throughout society at that time. The issue of women's suffrage, although it occupied an increasing place in the public discourse, was only one of several women's issues being explored. For example, the project of protecting women workers was taken up by the Swiss Union of Workingwomen (Schweizerischer Arbeiterinnenverband/Union Suisse des Ouvrières), founded and presided over by Verena Conzett (1861–1947); the Society for the Legal Protection for Women (Frauenrechtsschutzverein/Societe de Protection Juridique des Femmes) championed the cause of salaried women workers; and the Society for the Reform of Female Education (Verein Frauenbildungs-Reform/ Société de Réforme de l'Éduca-tion Feminine), created in Zurich in 1893, championed the cause of women's education. Other burning issues included the status of married women in the context of debates over the new Civil Code about to be unified at the national level, and women's changing roles in the context of a government whose responsibilities and budgets were both increasing. Meanwhile, the importance of political parties was on the rise, provoking debate about the place allotted to women within them.

This period also witnessed the emergence of several organizations whose objective was to go beyond the spheres of activity traditionally allotted to women. Several examples are worth mentioning: the Geneva Women's Union (Union des Femmes de Genève), founded on 17 September 1891; the Bern Women's Committee (Frauenkomitee Bern), whose initial constituent assembly met on 5 April 1892; and in 1896, the Zurich Union for the Women's Cause (Union für Frauenbestrebungen/ l'Union pour la Cause des Femmes). The Bern Women's Committee eventually became a major political consultant for government authorities seeking advice on how to deal with women's issues. This informal status as "expert consultants" came about as a direct result of the committee's survey on women's philanthropic activities in Switzerland, a project the government had decided to subsidize despite its initial rejection by Parliament. For the first time, this study revealed the extent of women's participation in the public sphere. Almost 6,000 charitable women's organizations were registered in Switzerland. Given the rapidity of industrial development in Switzerland, these groups played a considerable role in compensating for the deficiencies of a welfare state that was still in its infancy. Indeed, the government welcomed— and even encouraged—charitable initiatives sponsored by women's groups, because they helped keep public expenditures to a minimum. Moreover, women's groups provided a means for encouraging social integration at a time when the status of women—especially single women—was a prominent concern. Thus public authorities delegated a portion of the government's growing responsibilities to women. This allowed women to establish their own fields of expertise, which provided them with new public status; in turn, they gained increased access to the corridors of power. Thereafter, thanks to their know-how in matters of social welfare, women would be counted among the special interest groups regularly consulted by government authorities on certain questions. Furthermore, women's groups gradually gained access to political institutions after the turn of the 20th century. They were often invited to send a representative to take a seat on extraparliamentary committees of experts. A woman representative first sat on a committee charged with revising the laws regulating factory operations, which began its work in 1907. Such cases notwithstanding, women's participation in these political forums was dependent upon the good will of the heads of the relevant departments, and until the postwar period, women's organizations were routinely excluded from several important committees. Nevertheless, women's organizations gained a considerable political foothold during this period, generally attaining a place in the circle of organizations recognized officially by the state.

Moreover, associations devoted to the defense of women's rights also had more informal ways of gaining access to power. Most of the women running these associa- tions came from social backgrounds that afforded them influence through politically powerful brothers, fathers, or husbands.

At first, the increased importance of the women's issues was manifested through public opinion—to such an extent that in 1897, Carl Hilty (1833–1909), a professor of constitutional law at the University of Bern and a leading proponent of women's voting rights, felt compelled to write that in his opinion, too much ink had of late been devoted to women's issues. Of course, given the intensity of the debate, not all of this ink had been put to the service of supporting women's cause. In 1895, for example, Zofingia, a student association, initiated an internal debate about women's suffrage. In the end, apparently, the debate consisted of little more than homilies in the vein of "the state for men, the family for women." But on the whole, academic elites were far from being unanimously hostile to women's rights. For example, most of Switzerland's universities were open to women by the 1860s. Academic elites also contributed significantly to shaping turn-of-the-century debates. Hilty, for example, was the first person to propose a federalist strategy for breaking down opposition to women's right to vote by beginning at the cantonal and municipal level and addressing issues such as schools, churches, and public assistance, all of which fell under cantonal jurisdiction. Some of the great academic defenders of women's rights included Charles Secrétan (1815–95), a professor of philosophy at the Lausanne Academy and the author of a book entitled *Women's Rights* published in 1886; law professor Louis Bridel (1852–1913), deputy for Geneva and also the author of *Le mouvement féministe et le droit des femmes* (1893; The Feminist Movement and Women's Rights); and André de Maday (1877–1958), professor of social legislation and sociology at the University of Geneva, who advocated women's right to work, as the title of one of his 1905 publications made clear. These intellectuals also embodied a new social type: the feminist man. Alongside academics, Socialists and Protestant activist groups were also generally sympathetic to women's demands. Even Parliament showed some encouragement of women's equality in 1900, when its members voted to make women's access to courses a precondition for receiving federal grants for professional training programs in the commercial sector.

Women had also begun to show their own political mettle during this period. In 1896, the Congress for Women's Issues (Kongress für die Interessen der Frau/Congres pour les Intérêts Féminins) suggested that women possessed both strong organizational acumen and the ability to express themselves. Another step was taken in 1900, when Helene von Mülinen (1850–1924) oversaw the creation of the Alliance of Swiss Women's Societies (Bund Schweizerischer Frauenverein/Alliance des Sociétés Féminines Suisses) which was the first national umbrella organization to champion women's legal and professional equality. Meanwhile, the Swiss Association for Women's Suffrage (Schweizerischer Verband für Frauenstimmrecht/ Association Suisse pour le Suffrage Féminin)—founded in 1909 by Pauline Chaponnière (1850–1934) and Auguste de Morsier (1864–1923), an engineer who was also the association's first president—was organized with the specific goal of achieving women's political equality.

The Contradictory Origins of the Issue of Women's Suflfrage

The distribution of issues between various organizations expressed not only a certain division of labor but also the adaptation of different political objectives and strategies. This said, some qualification is necessary on this score. The boundaries between the various women's groups hardly followed a strict line dividing egalitarian feminists and "difference" feminists (who endorsed the idea of essential gender differences). While de Morsier advocated total political equality for women, this position was far from being unanimously held by the Alliance of Women's Societies—or even, for that matter, by the Swiss Association for Women's

Suffrage. From the beginning, two conceptions of the social relationship between the sexes overlapped and competed. On one side were the partisans of suffrage as a fundamental human right. They refused to countenance any material restrictions of this right as it applied to either active or passive forms of citizenship. Their egalitarian vision thus led them to reject any restriction of their political rights to questions of "feminine" interest. "The right to vote implies the right to be elected," stated de Morsier in a brochure published by the Association for Women's Suffrage in 1912. "We see absolutely no reason why these rights should be abrogated in any way or in any field.... If the right to vote is a right, then it should be given with all of its consequences." The other side of the question was taken by those who believed that men and women had fundamentally different natures. According to their understanding, men and women were different from one another in their intellectual interests, their psychological orientations, and their spheres of activity. Nonetheless, the two sexes were complementary, and society benefited directly from the specificity of women's contributions. Proponents of this viewpoint did not feel it was essential that women be given a political voice for every issue; the right to vote could be limited to matters pertaining to religion, education, and welfare, at least in the initial stages.

According to political scientist Sibylle Hardmeier, the suffragists' political practices reveal that the differences between these two strategies often dissolved (see Hardmeier). In fact, gender difference was an axiom for both groups: "Women synthesize and are intuitive, men analyze and reason," observed Secrétan. Nevertheless, some, including the philosophers from Lausanne, insisted on the equal value of male and female character traits. But this argument could always be turned back on itself and against equality. Since women are different, it was countered, why should they enter into masculine spheres of activity, especially politics? Of course, for those who advocated women's voting rights, the whole point was to enrich the public sphere with women's special qualities, but this was the very same reason invoked by the opposition in their campaign to keep women at home, shielded from the "baseness" of political questions. In order to counter this logic, Swiss suffragists adopted a compromise strategy, one that consisted of limiting their demands to a progressive introduction of women's voting rights. This strategic position was designed not only to navigate the particular contingencies of Swiss federalism, but also to take advantage of the most commonly held understanding of women's roles. It was crucial to secure a foothold in specific important domains—at the level of both the municipal political bodies and the cantons—that coincided with the capacities presumed to be proper to women. Questions of education, religion, and public assistance were considered close to the reality of women's lives, as were the general political questions affecting local government. Indeed, the latter was often described as a larger-scale family household. "If we are serious about women's political participation," declared a cantonal deputy from Bern in 1917, "granting the vote at the community level is a good place to start ... because the community is a large family and women know how it works just as well as men." This argument, first voiced as early as the 1890s, was reiterated throughout the struggle for women's suffrage. It paralleled the gradualist strategy advocated by Louis Bridel and Carl Hilty. Moreover, the consistency of the respective arguments put forward by both sides is one of the most striking features in the history of women's voting rights. The large Zurich daily, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* reminded readers of this in 1919, when it complained that positions on these issues were all too familiar and that it seemed impossible to imagine that new elements might be introduced to the debate.

From this point of view, the first Swiss ballot on the question of women's voting rights is particularly instructive, since it already ran along the general lines of this split. On 4 November 1900, the citizens of the canton of Bern were asked to vote on a draft of legislation that would make women eligible for election to school boards. This law proposal was defeated by an almost two-thirds majority. Even in the cities, a majority voted to reject the measure, though their rejection was less cut and dried than in rural areas. The

debate in the Great Council (the legislative body of the canton), along with the newspaper campaign that had preceded the vote, had already defined the arguments of both sides and drawn the dividing line between their positions. When the opponents of the proposal actually got beyond expressing their phobias about women's emancipation, they fell back upon the arguments about a woman's function as a wife and mother—which was a discourse that both sides shared. But one side argued that it was precisely as mothers that women naturally possessed the talents to be good educators, while the other side claimed her role as mother and wife demanded that she limit her activities to home and hearth as destiny had intended. According to the social constructions of the day—and their impact on the question of the vote—it was femininity that made women either compatible or incompatible with politics.

The two decades that preceded World War I witnessed not only the rise of organized feminism in Switzerland (with its strong international links), but also the emergence of the intellectual and political framework for the debate thereafter. Hardmeier has pointed out three basic characteristics of the debate on women's suffrage that persisted throughout the century. First, the discourse on women's citizenship was marked by arguments about women's full electoral rights as opposed to partial voting rights; this distinction was a great source of tension within the women's movement itself, while offering opponents of emancipation a power tactical instrument, helping them to block initiatives on this front. Second, there was a widely held assumption that any new political rights acquired by women should be predicated upon their first having proven themselves worthy of the responsibility. Finally, it was during this phase that the model for discursive legitimacy was established, which insisted that women's interests should coincide with meeting social needs.

At the end of the war, the proponents of women's suffrage were full of hope. Had they not proven their worthiness to serve their country? Had they not accomplished many of the tasks vital to national defense? Had they not proven themselves indispensable in the social sector, especially in terms of the practical and moral support they provided for soldiers? They discovered quickly that their hopes were to be dashed. While successfully meeting the needs of their nation may have been a precondition for obtaining the right to vote, it still did not provide any guarantees that this right would be granted. The swelling ranks of the Association for Women's Suffrage did nothing to change this. In fact, the question became increasingly politicized, to the point that it turned into a platform distinguishing one political party from another. While the Socialists approved of it, Catholics rejected it overwhelmingly. As for Radicals, conscious of their role as referees, they generally preferred to keep a low profile in order to avoid polarizing society on this issue. The demand for total political emancipation became a standard feature of Socialist interventions, and by 1912 it was made into part of their official program. In 1917 Socialist-sponsored citizens' initiatives demanded women's suffrage in several cantons. But the politicization of this demand—in terms of its discursive appropriation by a specific political party—only became really conspicuous at the time of the General Strike. Of the nine points on the call for action posted as the strike broke out on 12 November 1918, the demand for women's political equality was listed second. The association of this demand with the most explosive political and social conflict in 20th-century Switzerland, as well as with a leftist party, put feminist organizations in a difficult position. The Genevan egalitarian feminist, Émilie Gourd (1876–1946), the president of the Association for Women's Suffrage at the time of the strike, personally sent a telegram to the government. She distanced herself from the methods being used by the strikers. But she also "urgently recommended that the High Federal Council (the Swiss government) adopt point II of the Olten Action Committee's agenda, that is to say, active and passive political rights for women." Gourd's personal initiative provoked a leadership crisis within the women's suffrage association, whose membership was largely made up of women from the middle and upper classes. The strike was broken only three days later in the face of an ultimatum issued by federal authorities. The political option of extending the vote to women

in order to help stabilize democracy—an option chosen by other European countries—was not exercised here. Undeniably, the first vote in the cantons on this matter served as a test case—especially since the usual arguments were now bolstered by the added threat of Bolshevism.

The Triumph of Gender Conservatism

The antifeminist shift that marked the interwar period was not immediately apparent. In December of 1918, following the strike's collapse, Emil Göttisheim and Hermann Greulich, who were members of the lower house of Parliament (the National Council), affiliated with the Radical and Socialist movements respectively, each put forward a motion in support of women's suffrage. These motions were supported by every feminist organization in Switzerland, with the exception of the Swiss Union of Catholic Women (Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund/ Union Suisse des Femmes Catholiques) founded in 1912. Both parliamentary houses accepted the motions as *a postulat* (a parliamentary resolution instructing the government to examine the need for legislation) in 1919. But then everything remained on hold until 1951, when the government finally issued its report, which only concluded that women's suffrage had not yet matured into a pressing current issue. In fact, the year 1920 marked the beginning of a long series of failures for the women's movement, accompanied by a cultural trend back toward a very traditional model of femininity. That trend was particularly obvious throughout the 1930s and World War II, and it reemerged again during the 1950s with the advent of the cold war and the baby boom. It was not until the mid 1960s that this traditional representation of women began to break down.

More than half a dozen referenda were held on the issue of women's suffrage at the municipal and cantonal level during the 1920s. They all failed to pass. The last of these took place in the city-canton of Basle in 1927. There was then a total eclipse of this issue until the 1940s, when at last the subject finally resurfaced on the political horizon. There was one exception: a petition of unprecedented magnitude had been circulated in 1929 to remind political leaders and the general public that support for women's suffrage was widespread. Two hundred fifty thousand people signed the petition, including 170,000 women, which was roughly one-seventh of Switzerland's total female citizens of voting age. The 80,000 male signatures would have been enough on their own to sponsor a citizens' initiative on the issue, leading us inevitably to wonder why Swiss women's groups did not pursue such a course of action. They could have held the first national vote on the women's suffrage issue based on the petition. As it turned out, this did not happen until 1959. It is difficult to formulate a clear picture of what motivated their decision not to press the issue, since the Association for Women's Suffrage at that time only argued that the petition provided a means for the will of the general population, both male and female, to be heard. We can nonetheless advance a few hypotheses about why a citizens' initiative was not pursued, based on who signed the petition and how it was organized in the first place. The petition was initially planned as part of the Great National Exhibition on Women's Labor in Switzerland. But the initiative proposed by the Association for Women's Suffrage was rejected by the exhibition's organizing committee. This was not the only problem the project faced: among the hundreds of women's organizations contacted, only a handful indicated any willingness to collect signatures. A few trade unions and the Socialist and Communist parties added themselves to the meager list. Given this initial lack of enthusiasm, no one was more surprised than the organizers at the sheer number of signatures gathered on the petitions. Despite this, so many of the signatories were associated with the Left and with temperance movements— the French-speaking Swiss League against Alcoholism (Ligue Suisse contre l'Alcoolisme) as well as a women's organization of similar aims were among the petition's active participants—that they did little to legitimize the suffrage movement more broadly. Besides, these signatures made it difficult to predict anything, since the Socialist Party, and to a lesser extent, the Communist

Party, showed patchy support on the issue from within their ranks. This was verified when a citizens' initiative was rejected in the city-canton of Basle, where both parties held strong constituencies. Finally, a geographic breakdown of the figures revealed a divide between country and city, Catholic and Protestant cantons, as well as between Swiss Germans and French-speaking Swiss.

An elaborate ritual was staged to mark the presentation of the petition to authorities at an official government reception. However, despite this gesture, which was quite unusual at the time, the petition languished at the bottom of a drawer for many years. Generally speaking, the question of women's suffrage went underground until the end of World War II. A few small incursions were made at the communal and cantonal levels, where women were made eligible to serve on school boards, in parishes, and on social welfare committees. But these functions corresponded perfectly to the traditional conception of women's roles. This was equally true of the "family vote" proposed in 1934–35 by Carl Doka, the "theoretician" of the Conservative-Catholic Party, in discussions surrounding a corporatist-inspired citizens' initiative for a complete revision of the Constitution. While his proposal to double the vote for the head of the household did not explicitly exclude women a priori, it is clear that widows with children would be the only women likely to benefit from his plan. The political climate during this period was extremely hostile to the expression of any interests that might be considered particular interests—and women's political rights were classed in this category. In the context of World War II, which demanded great social solidarity, and which followed so closely on the heels of an economic crisis that affected employment up until the outbreak of hostilities, women's suffrage was perceived at best as a kind of individualist luxury, and more often as a provocation in the face of national unity. At the time, moreover, many feminists essentially shared this perception. At a time when the legitimacy of their paid work was on the shakiest ground and when democracy itself was under threat both internally and internationally, women simply had other priorities.

After 1945, the battle over women's suffrage picked up where it had left off in 1919. This occurred not only on a social level, but also on the institutional level. For example, in 1944, a parliamentary intervention, spearheaded by Socialist Hans Oprecht, saved *in extremis* Greulich and Göttisheim's 1919 *postulats*—which were still pending—from being permanently dismissed. Although they were more cautious than they had been in 1919, women's groups remained moderately hopeful. But the first postwar ballot held in 1946, again in the city-canton of Basle, was once more a total defeat. Compared to the previous 1927 ballot, support for women's suffrage had increased only from 29.2 percent to 37.1 percent. Six other votes between 1946 and 1948 were also unsuccessful. The Association for Women's Suffrage thus returned to the tactic of campaigning for partial rights. In order to demonstrate its civic maturity, in 1949 the association requested that women be given the right to vote but without the right to hold office. In the meantime, the cold war had started, providing a new, anti-Communist, justification for denying women's rights; after all, weren't women in all Soviet bloc countries emancipated? We all know where that led! Even the Swiss government hinted at this in its February 1957 address, which laid the groundwork for the first national referendum on women's suffrage two years later. Predictably, the referendum was again defeated, being rejected by two-thirds of the citizens and all but three cantons. Generally speaking, it would seem that in 1959 the political strategy of taking small steps, securing partial political rights, and making modest demands (which always risked being limited still further), had not paid off.

According to historian Yvonne Voegeli, propaganda produced at the time by the political action committee on the suffrage question showed some signs of change (see Voegeli). With the exception of the Society of Swiss Women for Social Welfare, all of Switzerland's women's groups united in 1957—including Catholic groups, which signaled an important shift—to form a single political action committee, the Working Community for the Promotion of Women's Political Rights (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der schweizerischen Frauenverbände für die Politischen Rechte der Frau/Communauté du Travail en Faveur des

Droits Politiques pour les Femmes). This coalition expressed a new consciousness in the suffrage movement and allowed a more egalitarian argument to be put forward. Their first line of reasoning was no longer that women should be allowed to vote because they were useful to state and society. While this argument did not completely disappear, it was relegated to the background. The argument that now prevailed was women's affirmation that the legitimacy of their claim was based on basic rights—on human rights. If women met their responsibilities toward the public good, they also deserved to enjoy all the benefits of citizenship. This new attitude attests to a slow change in mentalities, but it was also precipitated by a political event.

The referendum on women's voting rights had been preceded by a campaign for the introduction of a mandatory civil defense plan that included women. The Association for Women's Suffrage and the Alliance of Swiss Women's Societies were joined— at least on this issue—by two Catholic organizations. They immediately protested the plan, arguing on that there should be "no new responsibilities without new rights." For a series of reasons, not all of which had to do with women's suffrage, the government's proposal was rejected in a referendum held on 3 March 1957. The growing confidence of advocates for women's political equality was reinforced by polls of the female population in the canton of Geneva (1952), the city-canton of Basle (1954), and the city of Zurich (1955). These polls showed that a clear majority of women wanted the vote and put paid the notion that women themselves did not really care about the issue. Furthermore, an assessment of the constitutionality of women's political exclusion by eminent legal expert Werner Kägi (commissioned by the Association for Women's Suffrage in 1955) concluded that such exclusion was indeed unconstitutional.

Kägi stipulated, however, that a new interpretation of the federal Constitution (by the Federal Court) was not enough—the issue demanded a popular vote. The Association for Women's Suffrage saw things differently. In three French-speaking cantonal chapters, members of the association submitted requests that they be registered on electoral lists, but their requests were denied in the Federal Court in June 1957. This was the third time this strategy had failed. In 1887, the Federal Court had rejected a complaint brought by Switzerland's first woman lawyer, Emilie Kempin-Spyri, that her rights were being denied according to Section 4 of the federal Constitution. The Constitution stipulates that "All Swiss citizens should be considered equal before the law," and Kempin-Spyri argued that the definition of Swiss citizen included both men and women. During the 1920s, lawyer Leonard Jenni (1881–1967), future founder of the Swiss branch of the League for Human Rights, launched two new campaigns against the courts. His challenges were prompted by the fact that in another, unrelated case the Federal Court had reversed its own historic line of interpretation (which was based on the intentions of the framers of the Constitution) and approved an interpretation more in step with contemporary society. But the Association for Women's Suffrage distanced itself from Jenni's initiatives. In the words of its president at the time, Émilie Gourd, the association's position was motivated by its respect for "the political institutions of our country."

In contrast, by the 1950s suffragists showed far less conformity in terms of institutional norms. They were themselves the authors of strategies designed to circumvent the obstacles presented by direct democracy. The outcry provoked by Iris von Roten's feminist writings in the late 1950s, illustrates, however, that this transformation was only a relative one. In 1959, she published a book called *Frauen im Laufgitter* (Women in the Playpen), a caustic but extremely substantive indictment of male domination. It created such a storm that even women's groups distanced themselves from the critique. When she later published her "breviary" on voting rights, women's groups hardly thanked her for the publicity. Von Roten was considered threatening because she adopted an approach that women's groups had avoided like the plague—she suggested that political rights were only the first step in the march toward women's eventual

equality on all fronts, that "gender parity" should follow in every part of the government, including federal administration. As it turns out, it was this maximalist strategy that eventually prevailed.

Escalating Demands and Intergenerational Encounters: From Suffragists to the Women's Liberation Movement

The breakthrough for women's federal voting rights finally occurred on 7 February 1971. In a national referendum, 65.7 percent voted "yes," as opposed to 34.3 percent who voted "no." The ratio of supporters to opponents had been reversed in the years since 1959. What had happened? Why were women given in 1971 that which had been denied to them in 1959? Many factors contributed to this, but space allows for discussion of only the most important ones here. Without going into depth, let us first recall the tremendous structural transformations that redefined industrial societies in the 1960s. Switzerland was no exception. Economies were internationalized, the tertiary sector ballooned, governments developed and diversified their social infrastructures, and women went to work while birthrates fell, among other changes. Shifts in mentalities and mores must also be taken into consideration. An increase in the standard of living was a contributing factor in these shifts, but a major change also took place as a result of family planning and the institutionalization of birth control during the 1960s, including the introduction of the Pill, which was used by an estimated one-sixth of all Swiss women by 1971.

An analysis of debates, both in the media and in the political arena, shows a general awareness of the changes in women's roles, as well as an awareness that the separation between public and private spheres had also been eroded. In looking back at the debates in Parliament, what is striking is that even those who described these changes as regrettable—which included many Catholics—no longer perceived them as a threat to the social order or even to social relations between men and women. What was important to them was that women kept their "femininity." In reality, the notion of "difference" invoked by the representatives of the people concealed the hierarchical principle that they sought to preserve. Almost without exception, members of Parliament insisted that the right to vote would do nothing to change "female specificity," which was proved by foreign examples as well as those provided by the women's vote already established in the cantons of Vaud, Geneva, and Neuchâtel. Femininity and politics were thus no longer conceived as mutually exclusive. In the end, whether or not the members of Parliament really believed their own rhetoric to justify this political action is irrelevant: what matters is the fact that the rhetoric disarmed the opposition. When the proposal for a referendum on the issue was actually brought to the floor in Parliament, both houses voted for it unanimously.

The question remains: was the political conversion of Parliament and the people rooted more deeply in practical or intellectual considerations? On one level, the introduction of women's suffrage represented only a minor institutional reform. The electoral system was not modified in any way; the only change that occurred was in the number of citizens voting. However, the symbolic weight of women's suffrage was very important, especially in the context of Switzerland's democratic tradition. During the late 1960s, both internally and in terms of new international standards, Switzerland's democratic prestige had begun to slip. In 1968–69, at the time of the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Swiss experienced a brutal awakening when it became clear that their nation was no longer considered a model democracy. In fact, Switzerland discovered that it was not even eligible to sign the convention until it passed a series of constitutional reforms, including women's suffrage. This realization coincided with the emergence of the secondwave feminism that catalyzed the movement to finally pass the reform.

Despite the disdain the Women's Liberation Movement (Frauenbefreiungsbewegung [FBB] / Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes [MLF]) expressed about the issue of women's political rights, it was

hardly an accident that the first problem the new organization tackled was suffrage. On 10 November 1968, in the Schauspielhaus, Zurich's main theatre, a young woman grabbed the microphone during an anniversary celebration for the Association for Women's Suffrage. The entire press corps and many public representatives were in attendance. Her call to arms made the intended impact. For one, she and other radical feminists felt there was nothing worth celebrating. These feminists believed that even with the eventual granting of the right to vote, formal equality would not be enough. Not only that, they charged that traditional methods of political mobilization were not sufficient for achieving the kind of changes women were now demanding.

The Swiss Women's Liberation Movement quickly demonstrated what it meant by a new style of politics. The radical nature of their demands combined with the provocative and innovative kinds of political actions they staged—which were often funny and playful, but also scathing and ironic—could not have been more different from the somewhat muffled protests voiced by women's groups from the previous generation. Even their frames of reference were fundamentally opposed. The new feminists overwhelmingly tended to come from the New Left, which systematically attempted to distance itself from Swiss society and its institutions, while the suffragists, by contrast, had never ceased protesting their alliance to these things. Nonetheless, the two generations forged a fruitful political alliance on a series of questions surrounding women's rights. During the 1970s, militants from the Women's Liberation Movement gathered signatures and made common cause with more traditional feminists on a citizens' initiative to decriminalize abortion launched in 1971. They also joined forces in 1975 for a citizens' initiative to recognize the equal rights of men and women, although they had boycotted and even disrupted the conference sponsored by traditional women's organizations that had initiated the campaign. In fact, the collaboration often proved to be a difficult one. The first demonstration they jointly organized following the action at the Schauspielhaus provides an excellent example of the kinds of difficulties they faced.

Energized by the enormous media response provoked by the young woman's actions in Zurich, a portion of the older women's rights movement organized a "March on Bern" to protest the government's proposal to ratify, with reservations—in particular on women's vote—the European Human Rights Convention. The proposal was to be debated in Parliament during the spring session of 1969. Despite the refusal of many women's organizations to participate, not least the Association for Women's Suffrage, the demonstration mobilized a large number of women. The Women's Liberation Movement, which had been enthusiastic at first, finally ended up backing out as well. The younger women's movement found it inconceivable that the demonstration's organizers had planned for it to take place one day prior to the opening of the parliamentary session, rather than during the session. Nonetheless, the demonstration caused enough pressure that the Council of States (the upper house of Parliament, which gives equal representation to the cantons) decided to abandon the ratification proposal and that the government felt compelled to pass a law legalizing women's suffrage quickly. By December of 1969, this was done. In the summer and fall of 1970, both houses of Parliament debated the issue, and the national referendum on women's suffrage was finally passed in February of 1971. The majority of cantons quickly followed suit, with 17 cantons passing legislation for political equality as early as 1972. The cantons of Solothurn and Graubünden would pass such legislation in 1983, followed by the last two cantons of the Appenzell in 1989 and 1990. All told, then, it took more than 100 years for the world's "oldest modern democracy" to concede political rights to women, from the earliest demands of Meta von Salis in 1887—taking that as a pivotal date—and the final ratification of women's suffrage in every part of Switzerland. At the federal level, more than 120 years elapsed between the time when "universal" suffrage was granted to men and the final granting of the vote to women. The question remains, is there a causal connection between these two facts?

The Effects of Direct (or Semidirect) Democracy

Most authors who have studied the institutional dimensions of women's suffrage in Switzerland, especially Neumayer, Banaszak, and Hardmeier, tend to lay the blame for its belatedness at the feet of direct or semidirect democracy. This was also the conclusion of that most lucid and committed observer, Iris von Roten. In her contribution to the debate of 1959, she observed that direct democracy had given women's rights opponents a peerless legal weapon. This observation would seem to bear out in at least two ways. First, and this is incontrovertible, the fact that the question had to be submitted to the popular vote and possibly to a referendum, created a breakwater against institutional change for a very long time. Second, specific features of Swiss political culture, for example, the tendency toward creating consensus and a certain normative pressure for modesty and discretion, seem to have contributed to limiting the opportunities and the capability of suffragists to mobilize politically. These features have been closely analyzed from the perspective of history and political science by Banaszak, as well as by Hardmeier. We can also conclude that these factors helped to delegitimize women's suffrage by branding it "radical." This label, in turn, encouraged supporters of suffrage to minimize their demands in the aim of achieving consensus.

This portrait becomes increasingly complex the more one looks at it. Switzerland's political system has other institutional particularities, among them a strong interpenetration between the administration and interest groups and relatively easy access to the decision-making process thanks to the decentralization of political power. Political science tells us that any opportunity to participate institutionally has an effect on both the forms and the content of political mobilization. One could say, then, that the political opportunity structure of the Swiss federal state, which opened its doors to moderate feminist groups, also contributed to limiting the general orientation of the women's suffrage movement by helping to delegitimize more radical demands.

All of these elements obviously privileged a tendency toward compromise, but they also afforded women access to the political arena at a relatively early date. Are these grounds for concluding that had the popular vote not existed, female suffrage would have been passed earlier? Such a conclusion is contested by Voegeli's historical research. She argues that the executive, the administration, and Parliament were as responsible for resistance to women's suffrage as the people. Before World War II, only eight law proposals had been submitted for voting at the cantonal and municipal level, while 12 such propositions ran aground at the government or parliamentary levels. We could object that the reverse was also true. The first vote on women's suffrage in 1900, which took place in Bern, occurred as a result of the cantonal government's initiative in response to women's petitions. It should be added, however, that at that time parts of the dominant classes tended to regard feminism with a fair measure of benevolence.

It seems to me that this question cannot be reduced to institutional responses alone; it must also take historic and cultural dimensions into consideration. The first problem is to determine why the vote did not happen before the end of the 1960s, and then to examine why it happened at that time. The major cause lies most likely in the Swiss conception of national identity. If exclusion, it is precisely because the construction of Swiss na- this conception was left untouched by the problem of women's tional identity was based in large part upon the belief of the special nature of Swiss democracy. Swiss democracy was considered not only the oldest democracy in Europe, but also the world's most extensive democracy—one that hardly needed improving. The introduction of women's suffrage was seen as a modern invention, unnecessary in Switzerland. Moreover, in terms of private rights Swiss women were no worse off than women in other countries. This understanding of things was consolidated and almost became state doctrine during the 1930s, when the concept of "spiritual defense" was emerging as a cultural construct. (The centerpiece of a political discourse that aimed both to rally the nation and to close it off from foreign influences, "spiritual defense"

defined Swiss identity as being totally at one with the institutions and traditions of the country, which are not only legitimated by history, but also intrinsically unique.) This created the idea that Switzerland was a *Sonderfall* (a special case)—an idea that predominated until at least the 1960s. One government minister, Hermann Häberlin, summarized how this conception of national identity influenced suf frage in a university lecture delivered in 1930: "If we analyze the woman's vote generally, we must insist that this civic project be understood in terms of the actual practice of male suffrage here. We cannot just copy from other nations. If we must, we should even accept the risk of not being modern."

Swiss historiography has amply demonstrated the hold of this cultural construction on Swiss mentalities and practices. At a symbolic level, Swiss women were excluded from politics. On a material level, however, their integration into the functioning of the state apparatus was historically precocious. Through this, they gained access to management and even became involved in the modalities of the political decision-making process. But as long as the definition of citizenship, which placed its emphasis on the right to vote, was not rethought, women's suffrage would continue to be regularly rebuffed by the state. In this sense, direct democracy was, in effect, an obstacle to women's suffrage in Switzerland. Direct democracy was the means through which a culturally constructed interpretation of collective references, including individual outcomes shaped by this socialization, could be articulated almost without interference from competing interpretations or new frames of reference.

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