1789-1798

Revolution in Switzerland

The French Revolution led to the collapse of the Confederation.

In several towns and cantons, the aristocratic regimes were overthrown. France invaded Switzerland, which was too weak and divided to resist.

Switzerland became a satellite of revolutionary France and then of Napoleon.

In 1792, Bern and Zurich sent their troops to Geneva to prevent a French invasion. An agreement was reached between the two sides and both withdrew. The revolutionaries nevertheless seized power a few weeks later, and it was in Geneva that the Revolution enjoyed its first Swiss success.

Echoes from Paris

- In 1789, what became known as The French Revolution broke out in Paris. It lasted a decade and brought about the fall of the monarchy.

- Events in Paris soon found echoes in the Swiss cantons. Patriotic ideas and **demands for democracy** spread, particularly among the intellectual and business elites. However, the cantonal authorities, in the hands of a few privileged families, refused any idea of reform and suppressed all attempts at change.

  From 1790, the bishopric of Basel, lower Valais, Vaud, Valtellina, Zurich and St. Gallen were particularly affected by popular demonstrations.

- Those Swiss who supported the Revolution found refuge in Paris, where they founded a "Helvetic Club," whose influence was limited, since it was active only from 1790 to 1791.

- Events in Paris were reflected in the newly created Swiss press. A high point of emotion was reached with the news of the massacre of the Swiss Guards on 10 August 1792. They were defending the Tuileries Palace, under attack by the mob who were trying to capture Louis XVI. Further massacres took place in September. In all, 5000 Swiss died during this unrest.

  In Lucerne, a statue of a dying lion was erected in 1823 in memory of the Swiss killed in Paris.

"...THE LATEST PARIS FASHION..."

"...HEADS ARE NO LONGER BEING WORN ON THE SHOULDER!..."

The French invasion

- Revolutionary France sought protection against the other European powers and surrounded itself with buffer States. It put Switzerland under pressure with the aim of gaining control of the mountain passes and seizing Swiss wealth. Given the divisions between its members, the Confederation began to collapse under this threat.

"...THE FRENCH INVADED SWITZERLAND..."

"...TWO HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE WORK PERMITS!..."

- In 1792, France invaded the north of the Basel bishopric and declared a Republic. However, after only a few months, France simply took over the territory (present-day Jura canton).

  Five years later, the south of the bishopric was invaded. Basel granted freedom and equality to all its subjects.

- In 1795, **Frédéric César de la Harpe**, from Vaud, called on the people of Vaud to rise against the aristocrats of Bern; his appeal fell on deaf ears and he fled to Paris, where he encouraged the French government to send troops.

- In 1797, the Confederation lost Valtellina to the new Cisalpine Republic, a French client state in northern Italy. At the end of the year, **Napoleon Bonaparte** pressed the French government to invade and "liberate" Switzerland; 10,000 men arrived near Geneva.

- At the beginning of 1798, everything speeded up. The urban elites of Vaud (if not the population, which got on quite well under the Bernese occupation) proclaimed the Lemanic Republic at Lausanne. A few days later, a French general – under the pretext that two of his soldiers had been killed at Thierrens (VD) – invaded Switzerland. Bern did not react. A month later, the towns, the cantons and their allies were in active revolt. Within a few weeks, more than forty Republics had been declared, all destined to be short-lived.

- This episode marked the end of the *Ancien Régime* in Switzerland. The Bernese had to capitulate after their defeat at Grauholz (north of Bern). Between the spring and autumn of 1798, a few regions – including central Switzerland – rose against the French but were violently suppressed. Nidwalden was sacked.
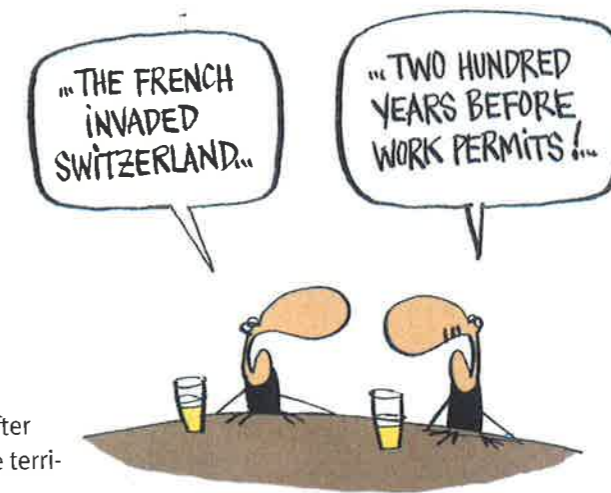
At the end of 1798, just after the violent suppression of the anti-French demonstrations in Nidwalden, the Helvetic Republic (→ p. 44) sent Henri Pestalozzi, already a famous teacher, to Stans, the main town, to collect and take care of the war orphans. At his institution in Yverdon (VD), he applied his concepts of childhood education based on teacher-pupil sympathy. He is considered as a pioneer of modern educational theory.

1798-1813
The Republic and the Act of Mediation

France occupied Switzerland and gave the country new political institutions.

In contrast to the Confederal system, the Helvetic Republic envisaged full centralisation – it was not, however, implemented. Napoleon authorised a partial return to the Ancien Régime.

A vassal of France, Switzerland enjoyed a few years of peace and the beginnings of democracy.

After the collapse of the Confederation on 5 March 1798, Switzerland was nearly split into pieces. France planned three client States: the *Rhodanic Republic* (Vaud, Fribourg, Bernese Oberland, Valais, Ticino); *Tellgovia* (*Tellgau* in German – central Switzerland and Graubünden); and the *Helvetic Republic* (the rest of the country). The plan was never put into effect.

Helvetic Republic (···⟩ map 5, p. 47)

- In March 1798, republican France imposed on Switzerland a State system based on its own: the "Helvetic Republic, one and indivisible" (the official name). It was a **unitary and centralised State**, the very opposite of the Confederal tradition.

- Peter Ochs of Basel drafted a constitution in Paris that provided for:
  – two legislative councils that were to elect an executive entity ("directoire") of five members, with headquarters in Aarau;
  – abolition of feudal rights (which took a long time to disappear);
  – introduction of certain freedoms (opinion, press, property) – not always implemented.

- The cantons became simply administrative entities under the governorship of a "Prefect." Frontiers were subject to many alterations.

  For example: the Jura and Geneva were part of France; the small cantons of central Switzerland were brought together in a single canton "Waldstätten."

An impossible arrangement

- The French liberating force became a detested occupying power. The taxes levied on Switzerland were heavy. Society was torn between "Unitarians" (favouring new ideas and a centralised power) and "Federalists" (preferring the return of the *Ancien Régime*). The coffers were empty and everything had to be set up from scratch (administration, education, etc.).

- **Instability** was rife. There were several *coups d'état*. Neutrality was forcibly replaced by a military alliance with France. In 1799-1800, the warring European powers also fought on Swiss soil.

- Napoleon became First Consul in 1799. He withdrew his troops from Switzerland in 1802, but continued to govern the country, which veered into chaos. Exiled to Lausanne, the government controlled almost nothing.

The Act of Mediation (···⟩ Map 6, p. 47)

- On 30 September 1802, **Napoleon** forcibly mediated between the Swiss and called an Assembly of 63 representatives of the "Unitarians" and the "Federalists" in Paris. The **Act of Mediation** was announced on 19 February 1803: Switzerland was given new institutions.

- The central power was vested in a single Assembly ("Diet"), to meet once a year by rotation in six "major" cantons ("cantons directeurs" – FR, BE, SO, BA*, ZH, LU). The highest officer in the host canton became the "Landammann" (Chief Magistrate) of Switzerland: he ruled the country for the subsequent period.

  The "Mediation" was the only time in Swiss history when a single person ruled the land.

- Switzerland had **nineteen cantons**, each of which had its own constitution. The rural cantons reintroduced the popular assembly ("Landsgemeinde"), a form of direct democracy with voting by show of hands, that had been practised in central Switzerland since the 13th century. The towns reverted to an aristocratic and corporative system, but more moderate than that prior to 1798. There were six new cantons (···⟩ p. 46), formerly allied territories, subjects or regions under joint rule, whose institutions were partially democratic.

- Prior to 1798, there had been customs duties between cantons – these were not reintroduced, but road tolls remained. Officially there was only one currency, the Franc, but in practice the cantons retained their monetary systems. The Federal army was made up of cantonal contingents.

- Although under French control – and sometimes threatened with annexation – Switzerland enjoyed ten years of peace (1803-1813). However, industry (especially textiles) suffered from the embargo imposed by the enemies of Napoleon, who had crowned himself emperor in 1804.

* Basel prior to the split of the canton (···⟩ p.49)

Masters of Switzerland since 1798, the French pillaged the land and enriched themselves – making possible Napoleon's campaign in Egypt. They also acquired an important pool of manpower that was forced to fight for the empire. At least 30,000 Swiss served under Napoleon between 1798 and 1815. Some gave their lives for him; in 1812, the battle of Berezina alone (at which France fought the Russians) led to more than 7000 deaths among the Swiss: however, many Swiss under French arms died from illness (cholera) without even having fought.

"..OK, WHAT ABOUT THIS SWITZERLAND "MADE IN FRANCE"?...."

"..THE INSTRUCTIONS ARE VERY COMPLICATED !..."
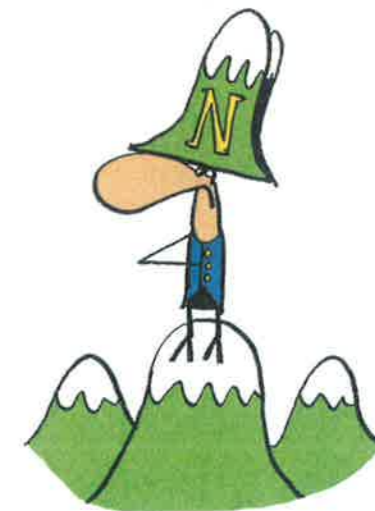
1813-1832

Restoration and Regeneration

The fall of Napoleon ended French control of Switzerland.

The Federal Pact of 1815 brought about an almost total reversion to the Ancien Régime (political system prior to the French Revolution) – known as the "Restoration." Around 1830, the cantons moved progressively towards democracy – known as the "Regeneration."

Liberals attempted to promote their ideas: centralisation of the State combined with individual liberties.

In 1815, after the battle of Waterloo (defeat of Napoleon), the 24,000-strong Federal army marched into the Franche-Comté and Gex. For a few months, it occupied these frontier regions. This was the last time that Swiss armed forces intervened abroad (until peace-making missions in the 20th century).

The Federal Pact

- In December 1813, the armies of the coalition against Napoleon (Austria, Prussia and Russia) crossed Switzerland to attack France. The Diet and army could do nothing. This was the end of French domination of Switzerland and thus of the "mediation."

  Several cantons, including Bern, took advantage of the situation to restore the Ancien Régime. A Republic was proclaimed in Biel-Bienne and Geneva (both of which had been annexed by France).

- The cantons were divided. At the beginning of 1814, there were two competing Diets: one for the conservative cantons (in favour of the *Ancien Régime*), the other for the progressive cantons (influenced by liberal ideas). The continued existence of the six new cantons from 1803 appeared to be threatened: Bern, for example, attempted to take back Aargau. However, an agreement was reached between all the cantons and a "Federal Pact" was concluded on 7 August 1815. The **"Swiss Confederation"** (today still the official name of Switzerland) was constituted, made up of independent cantons.

  The Diet (central political institution of the new Confederation) only had power in foreign policy. It met by rotation in one of the main cantons (ZH, BE, LU). The cantons were responsible for manning and equipping a Federal army.

Switzerland at the Congress of Vienna

- After the defeat of Napoleon, a Congress was held in Vienna from 1814 to 1815 to reorganise Europe. The victorious powers sought to protect themselves by surrounding France with buffer States, including Switzerland.

- The Treaty of Paris was signed at the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna in 1815. In it, the allies gave formal recognition of the **"inviolability of Switzerland"** and its **"perpetual neutrality."** Switzerland acquired its present frontiers.

  Three new cantons joined the Confederation (---> p. 46). Bern was granted the former bishopric of Basel (Jura, Bernese Jura and Laufen) in compensation for the cession of territory that went to the new canton of Aargau.

Return to the *Ancien Régime*

- In France, the **Restoration** marked the return to monarchy in 1814-1815. Switzerland experienced a similar return to pre-Revolutionary ways and the *Ancien Régime*: limited personal freedoms, power held by the aristocracy and the corporations.

- The new cantons, like Vaud, were relatively progressive (supportive of liberal ideas promoting democracy and defending individual liberties). However, they were called to order by the old cantons.

  For example, in Vaud only the richest citizens had the right to vote.

- Switzerland gave refuge to foreign dissidents. The conservative European powers kept careful watch on the country.

- At this time, economic development moved ahead, but was slowed by cantonal trade barriers. There were customs posts between the cantons, only twelve had a standardised system of weights and measures and the single currency introduced at the time of the Act of Mediation disappeared.
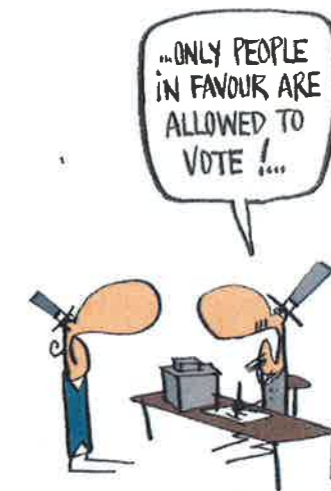
A touch of democracy

- In Switzerland, the **Regeneration** is the period during which, following the 1830 revolution in France, liberal ideas moved forward. Equality of rights and the vote for all were demanded.

- Influenced by these ideas, half the cantons (including BE, ZH, VD and FR) gradually liberalised their constitutions. Liberals came to power.

  In 1832, the liberals put forward a proposal in the Diet for revising the Federal Pact to guarantee more individual freedom, but it was refused.

- Elsewhere (especially in Neuchâtel and central Switzerland), the Regeneration failed. In **1832**, after a civil war, the town of **Basel** (conservative) and the surrounding countryside (more progressive) split into two separate half-cantons: Basel Town (BS) and Basel Country (BL).

In 1832, after the failure in the Diet of the attempt to revise the Federal Pact, the only reform implemented was to fix the date of the Federal day of fasting on the third Sunday of September. This idea had been put forward in 1794 by the canton of Bern with the aim of strengthening the Confederation against revolutionary movements. This celebration brought together Catholics and Protestants in the medieval tradition of days of penitence. Only Geneva did not follow suit and kept its own day of fasting, the "Jeûne Genevois."

1815-1847

The Sonderbund *war*

Excessive decentralisation hampered the development of the Confederation and there was no consensus on the way ahead.

Religious tensions set fire to the powder keg. Seven cantons seceded. A civil war broke out but it was short and caused few casualties.

The radicals – who promoted democracy and the centralisation of the country – came out of the conflict as the victors.

A divided Switzerland

- From 1815, there were two Switzerlands. The conservative one insisted on the independence of the cantons. The liberal one claimed a more centralised State and more democracy. On top of this, there were also other forms of opposition: Catholics against Protestants, countryside against town, elites against the people.

Contemporary observers wrote of "anarchy" or "chaos." They feared the dissolution of the Confederation. Despite these tensions, the idea of Switzerland as a common fatherland gained ground in people's minds during the first half of the 19th century.

- There was not much industrialisation and peasants were in the majority. Poor harvests and rising prices caused poverty and insecurity. From 1845 to 1847, potato blight caused the last famine in Switzerland.

One fifth of the 200,000 population of Vaud lived in poverty.

- Further left than the liberals, the radicals wanted to change the system by introducing democracy and centralising power. For their opponents they were revolutionaries.

Monasteries, convents and the Jesuits

Two crises led to civil war in Switzerland.

- Following a Catholic peasant revolt, the canton of Aargau – governed by a radical – decided in 1841 to close the monasteries and convents, in contravention of the Federal Pact. The Diet negotiated a compromise, allowing the convents to be reopened (but not the monasteries).

- The conservative Catholic cantons tried to limit the influence of the liberals. In 1845, Lucerne entrusted the education of priests to the Jesuits. The radicals, convinced that the brotherhood was in league with the conservatives, were scandalised. In the Diet, liberals and radicals narrowly came short of a majority for expulsing the Jesuits.

Towards war

- In September 1843, six conservative Catholic cantons (UR, SZ, NW/OW, LU, ZG, FR) concluded a **secret defensive military alliance** (revealed in 1846). Later, their opponents would call this the "Sonderbund," meaning "special alliance." Valais joined the Catholic allies in 1844; Neuchâtel and Appenzell/Innerrhoden, despite their conservative leanings, remained neutral.

The Federal Pact authorised agreements between cantons, but not with foreign entities. Nevertheless, the seven cantons of the Sonderbund negotiated the support of several countries; France and Prussia even sent troops to the Swiss frontier.

- The radicals, after taking power by force in Vaud and Geneva and winning the elections in St. Gallen, held a majority in the Diet, which voted the dissolution of the *Sonderbund* on 20 July 1847. There was no way to avoid **civil war**.

Three weeks of war

- In November 1847, the Federal army (comprising 100,000 men commanded by **General Guillaume-Henri Dufour**) clashed with the 80,000 soldiers of the *Sonderbund*, under the command of General Johann Ulrich von Salis-Soglio.

It was paradoxical that the radical and progressive camp was led by a conservative (Dufour) and that the Catholic separatists were led by a Protestant (von Salis-Soglio).

- In large part thanks to the skill and pragmatism of General Dufour, the Federal army emerged victorious from the *Sonderbund* war after only three weeks. Fribourg was first to fall. Uri tried in vain to attack Ticino. Zug capitulated without fighting.

- The main attack was directed against the canton of Lucerne at Gislikon (LU) on 23 November 1847, when the Federal army obtained a decisive victory. In the following days the remaining separatist cantons laid down their arms and their leaders fled to Italy. The human cost of the *Sonderbund* war was about a hundred dead and three hundred wounded.

If they had been victorious, some leaders of the *Sonderbund* intended to alter the map of Switzerland to the benefit of the Catholics. Constantin Siegwart-Müller of Lucerne planned the creation of a canton of the Jura. All of northern Vaud would have gone to Fribourg and the eastern part, from Vevey onwards, to Valais. Fribourg would have also gained part of the Bernese Oberland and the Simmental; Valais and Obwalden would have shared what was left of the Oberland. The whole of Catholic Aargau, together with Zofingen and Aarburg would have gone to Lucerne. Glarus would have been divided between Schwyz and Uri. Zug would have expanded northwards at Zurich's expense.

1848
The first Federal Constitution

After the Sonderbund *war, Switzerland acquired new institutions.*

It became a Federal State, comprising sovereign cantons. The country was governed by a seven-member Council and a two-tier parliament. The Confederation acquired new centralised powers.

The political system put in place in 1848 is still in force today.

For the drafting of the Federal Constitution, the Diet called on the radical members of cantonal governments. The freshly constituted Federal parliament elected most of the original members of the first Federal Council on 16 November 1848. The first President of the Confederation was Jonas Furrer of Zurich.

SIRE, SWITZERLAND IS SUFFERING FROM DEMOCRATIC FEVER!...
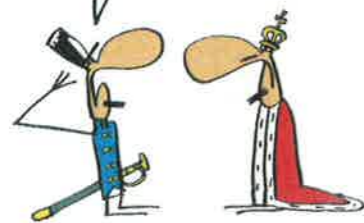
Post-war

- In the aftermath of the *Sonderbund* war, the Federal army occupied the seven Catholic cantons that had been at the origin of the conflict – their conservative governments were overthrown. The costs of the war were onerous. The costs were imposed on the Catholic and the neutral cantons.

- The victory of the progressive camp was so rapid that the conservative powers (France, Austria and Prussia) had no time to intervene. They attempted to check the democratic aims of the radicals – but, beginning in Paris in February 1848, revolutions broke out in Europe and kept them fully occupied.

Switzerland was a pioneer, initiating (and successfully achieving) a transition to democracy ahead of the rest of Europe.

The revision of the Federal Pact

- The Diet (in which the radicals held the majority) set out to remodel the institutions of State. It approved a draft Constitution and then submitted it for ratification to the cantons, where it passed with a majority of fifteen and a half against six and a half. The **Constitution** was proclaimed on 12 September 1848.

The six and a half cantons that rejected the Constitution were: UR, SZ, ZG, VS, TI, NW/OW, AI.

- Switzerland became a **centralised Federal State,** but continued to call itself a "Confederation." The cantons were no longer independent but "sovereign" (i.e. autonomous). They handed over some of their powers to the Confederation.

A Confederation is an alliance between independent States. A Federation has a central government to which the most important functions have been delegated.

- A democratic system was put in place. Citizens acquired rights and freedoms and were considered equal before the law. However, women did not have the vote.

The Constitution of 1848 guaranteed: the right to choose their place of residence for citizens professing the Christian faith; freedom to practice Christian rites (however, the Jesuits were banned); freedom of the press; freedom of association, meetings and petitions; freedom to engage in trade and industry.

The new institutions

- The **Federal Council** (government) was set up, with seven members and a rotating one-year Presidency (President of the Confederation). It is the executive power.

- The **Federal Parliament** is the legislative power. It comprises two Houses, one representing the people (National Council), the other representing the cantons (Council of States). The former separatist (Catholic) cantons, thinly populated, have little weight in the National Council; but in the Council of States they have the same number of representatives as the other cantons.

The National Council was originally elected for three years, with one seat per 20,000 inhabitants, making a total of 111. The Council of States was also elected for three years and comprised two seats per canton (one per half-canton), making a total of 44.

A centralised State

- Until 1848, the Confederation was concerned only with foreign affairs. The new Constitution gave it new centralised powers:
  – elimination of customs barriers between the cantons and establishment of common external tariffs;

  Customs revenues were the main financial resource of the Confederation; taxes were levied by the cantons for their own benefit.

  – single postal system with identical stamps and rates;
  – centralised army;
  – **single currency**: the French denomination, Franc, was chosen over the Central European Florin;
  – standardised weights and measures: the foot, the pound and the pot.

  The present decimal system (metres and grams) was the choice of the French-speaking cantons, but was not adopted until 1868 and came into force in 1874.

- These various measures promoted general **prosperity**, one of the objectives of the Constitution. Common institutions and administration simplified economic development.

- The cantons retained their autonomy in education, health, roads, public works, judiciary and religion. Each had its own Constitution, government (State Council/Conseil d'Etat/Regierungs- or Staatsrat), Parliament (Grand Council/Grand Conseil/Kantons- or Grosser Rat), laws, administration, police and finances (taxes were levied by the cantons).

At its first session in November 1848, Parliament had to decide where to locate the central institutions. Bern, Zurich and Lucerne were the candidates; Aarau (AG) and Zofingen (AG) had also been considered. Some people wanted to build a new Federal city, following the example of Washington D.C. Finally, Bern was chosen (with the support of the French-speaking cantons). The first administrative and legislative headquarters (the Federal "Palace") was completed in 1857 – the west wing of the present building dates from 1902. In compensation, Zurich received the Technical University (ETH) in 1854.

...MID-19th CENTURY: STANDARDISED CURRENCY...

...END-20th CENTURY: STANDARDISED THINKING!