

SPEECH FOR HER MAJESTY'S VISIT TO RÜTLI ON  
FRIDAY 2ND MAY, 1980

I have been reflecting on the significance of this historic place where the courageous people of three Cantons joined together, nearly seven centuries ago, to begin the process of unification which has led to the stable and prosperous state of Switzerland today. This meadow at Rütli is a simple and unassuming symbol of Switzerland's pride in her independence and of her determination to remain free. That determination has been evident through the centuries and it was eloquently reaffirmed on this very spot in the darkest days of the last War. It is a determination which the people of my country have shared and admired for hundreds of years.

As I stand here, it is natural that I should be reminded of our own Rütli - Runnymede - the meadow by the River Thames close to my home at Windsor which played such an important part in the shaping of our society and democratic system.

It is remarkable that both your Covenant and Magna Carta should have originated in the same century and in a similar setting and that Switzerland and Britain should both have cherished this kind of symbol as part of their heritage and as evidence of a common will and commitment to remain free. Our ways and systems differ, of course, but we share a fundamental ideal, and I believe this leads to a natural respect and understanding for one another. We need no great monuments to remind ourselves of it. Understatement is another quality of both the British and the Swiss.

Queen Victoria, on holiday here in 1868, described this beautiful lake as "our own fine lake". I can well understand how, like countless British before and since, she drew health and strength from the mountains and from the peacefulness of the surrounding countryside. It is a measure of Swiss resourcefulness and love of country that you have managed to keep unspoiled this oasis of calm and beauty while at the same time playing a major part in European industrial and technological development.

I have been greatly touched by the warmth of the friendly welcome which I have received throughout my stay in your delightful country. In these few days I have covered more than 1000 kilometers. I have greatly enjoyed travelling on your efficient and comfortable railways which typify the precision for which Switzerland is renowned. From the air I have enjoyed breathtaking views of your mountains, and today I have sailed the length of this beautiful lake of Lucerne. I have been able to visit, if all too briefly, some of your great cities, and I have seen many examples of the richness and variety of your cultures. I regret that many Cantons could not be included in a programme of only a few days, but I have been charmed by all that I have seen. I have also been impressed by the pride of your people in the life and culture of their own Cantons, and yet at the same time by the spirit of unity which inspires you all, and which is exemplified by this meadow at Rütli, the cradle of the great Swiss Confederation.

I am grateful to the President of the Confederation, and to the other members of the Federal Council, to the cantonal and city authorities and to all who have done so much to make my stay in your country so enjoyable.