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# Federal elections in October A win for the Right?

(G. Pb) The deadline is the 23rd of October, 1983. The Swiss nation will elect the main body of the members of the Federal Chambers; the entire National Council and the majority of the Council of States. Who are the likely winners? The Right Wing with the Liberals, the Radical Democrats, the Swiss People's Party, or even the National Group for People and Fatherland? Who might be the losers? The Social Democratic or Communist Left Wing, the Independent Union? The significant unknown factors: the Christian Democrats, the new parties forming the Group for the Protection of the Environment. It is still anyone's guess what the outcome will be.

These speculations are based on the results obtained in the most recent cantonal and local elections. There was a swing to the traditional and nationalist Right almost everywhere, whereas the Left and the Independents lost ground and the Christian Democrats marked time. As far as the Group for the Protection of the Environment is concerned, a great deal depends on the success of the attempt they are currently making to form a coherent union.

### The big parties in the government and the small ones outside

The election campaign leading up to the 23rd of October is all the more complicated by the fact that power is divided amongst the parties in Switzerland to an extent unequalled in the rest of the world. The big parties form the government while the small ones are excluded. This formula has functioned comprehensively



since 1959. The four most important groupings – the Social Democrats, the Radical Democrats, the Christian Democrats and the Swiss People's Party – are represented in the Federal Council more or less proportionally, as well as in a large number of cantons and municipalities. This is the magic formula.

In most other pluralistic democracies, the battle for supremacy is fought out between two big parties or coalitions, only one of which finally wields the power of government. On the other hand, in Switzerland, each large party or coalition has a share of this power, which is a startling discovery for the uninitiated observer.

Let us take a look at the Swiss parties, one after the other, and see how they are preparing themselves for this peculiar contest.

### The Social Democrats – avoiding the worst

Up to the end of 1982, the *Social Democratic Party* was predicted to be heading for the heaviest losses in the coming federal elec-

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tions in 1983. They lost ground in almost all the cantonal and local polls and the confrontations between the Left Wing and the Right Wing, which were serious enough in Zürich and even worse in Basle, indicated the worst. However, all is not yet lost. In the west of Switzerland, the party is doing well on the whole, with gains balancing losses. It is true that, since November 1982, the Social Democratic Party have shown evidence of considerable unity since the new programme was adopted, placing more emphasis on self-management. In future, the elected members will have to account to the party. However, their will, limited as it is, to have a share in the government has been strengthened. The Swiss Social Democratic Party is on the Left of the Centre, in conformity with the general trend of Social Democracy and similar to the corresponding parties in West Germany and Scandinavia.

### The CVP – impetus checked?

The *Christian Democratic Party*, another party that is going through a bad path, has also had to face disappointments in several cantons. Their popularity has fallen off slightly almost everywhere in the west of Switzerland, but in the German-speaking part they are holding their ground with very few exceptions. An unknown factor has arisen with the appearance of a Right Wing closely associated with the employers and industry. This fact could mean that the slow swing which the party of the farmers' Right Wing has been making towards the Centre, which takes the current political situation into account, will stop. In future, the CVP will be gauging its own boldness a little better. Incidentally, the proposed Swiss entry to the UNO was nearly rejected at a congress held recently. Like other Christian Democratic

parties in Europe and the rest of the world, the Swiss CVP belongs neither to the Right nor to the Left: it is in the Centre. However, unlike the Christian Democrats in Holland or Germany, the Swiss party has not been able to penetrate very far into the Protestant section of the electorate and the composition of the party has never really become oecumenical. The body of their voters and their party officials has remained deeply Catholic in spite of an obvious desire to open their ranks to other denominations.

### The Radical Democratic Party – in Olympic form

There is an entirely different atmosphere in the *Radical Democratic Party*, which is in splendid form. They have won most of their recent contests. The economic crisis, far from weakening this group, which is closely associated with the employers and with banking circles, has given it wings. Their staunch opposition to expansion of the state, and their resolute commitment to individual responsibility have hit the mark. At any rate, that was the picture up to the end of 1982, and should it continue, the Radical Democratic Party will be the big winner in the October elections. The party is on the Right of the Centre and may be somewhat more conservative than the majority of the parties in the World Union of Liberal Parties, of which it is a member, along with the small Swiss Liberal Party. It was this Radical Democratic Party that founded the Federation in 1848.

The prospects of the *Swiss People's Party (SVP in german)* are also very promising. Broadly speaking, this party, which is represented mainly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, has done well in the cantonal and local elections. Like the CVP, the SVP has slowly swung away from

farmers' Right Wing towards the Centre, in conformity with modern trends. The convergence of the two trends – that of the Democrats (on the Left of the Centre) and that of the farmers, the business circles and the middle-class (on the Right of the Centre) has provoked this tendency. However, the SVP, like the CVP, of which it is the Protestant counterpart, is moderating its advances. These are the Big Four that govern our country. Some of them may lose, the others may win. However, it would be surprising if their complete hegemony – theoretically the overwhelming majority in both chambers – were to be seriously threatened; on the other hand, it could even be further strengthened.

**Upward trend for the Liberals, Independents on the decline**

Similar tendencies can be observed among the small parties that have no say in the govern-

ment of our country: some are waxing while others are on the wane. The *Liberal Party* – with representatives in the west of Switzerland and in Basle – has the wind behind it. Its chances are improving to the same extent as those of the Radical Democrats, with whom it has much in common. Its general attitude may be slightly more federalistic. The *Independent Union*, which is at home mainly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, is sailing into the wind. Their uninterrupted decline since the triumphs of 1967 is gradually becoming a cause of anxiety. The Independents, founded by Migros and committed to open Liberalism in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, were, for a long time, brilliant representatives of protest in the political life of Switzerland. The disappearance of this party would leave a vacuum that would be difficult to fill. In the Federal Councils, the Independent Union sides

with the Evangelical Party, as further Protestant version of the Christian Democratic Party, albeit considerably smaller.

On the far Left, ground could also be gained by the *Autonomous Socialist Party* (PSA) and the *Progressive Organisation* (POCH). The former are active in the canton of Ticino and in the Bernese Jura, while the latter operate in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Basle and Zürich). Their appeal lies in their youthfulness and sensitivity to new problems, such as protection of the environment. On the other hand, the Communist parties of the classical type, the *Party of Labour* and the *Workers' and People's Party* (PDT-POP) might suffer further losses. They have already lost ground in almost all of their cantonal bastions, in particular Geneva and Vaud. Unlike the PSA and the POCH, these parties have to contend with the obsolete ideas of aged party members.

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## Distribution of the Parties

(G. PL) – This schedule shows the repartition of forces during the period of legislation 1979–83. The Independent's Union and the Evangelical Party form a parliamentary group; the Party of Labour, the Progressive Organisation and the Autonomous Socialist Party form another one.

	Federal Council	National* Council	Senate**
Radical Democratic Party	2	51	11
Social Democratic Party	2	51	9
Christian Democratic Party	2	44	18
Swiss People's Party	1	23	5
Liberal Party		8	3
Independent Union		8	
Evangelical Party		3	
Party of Labour		3	
Progressive Organisation		2	
Autonomous Socialist Party		2	
National Group for People and Fatherland		2	
Vigilance (Geneva)		1	
Independent Social Christians' Party		1	
Group for the Protection of the Environment		1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>46</b>

\* As a general rule the election for the National Council follows a proportional representation.

\*\* Every Canton delegates two (every Half-Canton one) representatives to the Senate; they are elected according to the majority principle (except in the Canton Jura).

### The return of the Nationalists

The Nationalists have one representative from the *Vigilance* in Geneva and two from the *National Group for People and Fatherland* in Berne and Zürich. These are the only survivors of the big explosion of 1971, but their parties appear on the surface again from time to time. The slight increase in the number of foreigners, the influx of refugees, the shortage of accommodation and the level of unemployment – the

interplay of all these factors is giving impetus to these parties.

The Ecological Parties could also make progress. At present they have only the *Group for the Protection of the Environment* (GPE) in the canton of Vaud. However, in preparation for the federal elections, they are attempting to form a «green» union with parties in other cantons, although two trends – a left and a right – have emerged.

The *Independent Social*

*Christians' Party* has only one representative, in the Jura, but there are smaller, related parties – half of which are of a Social Democratic nature, the other half being Christian Democratic – in the cantons of Fribourg, Valais and Lucerne.

Every one of these fourteen parties has a foothold – or at least a toe-hold – in the Federal Councils, and it seems highly unlikely that any other party will be able to shake their confidence for the time being. It is clear that with fourteen parties, there is a danger not so much of a vacuum, but rather of an excess.

Georges Plomb  
born 1938, Reporter in Berne  
for «La Suisse»

## Instruction by Correspondence for Swiss Children

In the course of last year, the Swiss Teachers' Association has been investigating a proposal whether correspondence courses could be organized for Swiss children temporarily abroad, so that, on returning to Switzerland, there would be no problems or at least smaller ones.

A first inquiry in the «Tages-Anzeiger Fernaussgabe» showed that many Swiss abroad for a contracted period had problems with their children's schooling, specially in remote places.

We should, however, like to have some more opinions and appeal to the parents concerned to answer the following questions:

1. Age and school year of the children, and if any of these school years were spent in Switzerland and in which Canton.
2. Present school situation. Kind