

The situation of women in Switzerland : equality in practice

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domestic science went to court to demand the same pay as their male colleagues who were working as teachers in primary schools. The High Court pronounced judgment in favour of the female teachers. In April of this year, some needlework teachers in Berne followed suit. Two women teachers refused to understand why *they* should earn 30% less than their male colleagues. No definitive judgment has as yet been pronounced.

Bureaux for Equal Status

“On paper women have equal rights – but in practice there are serious snags” says Claudia Kaufmann, head of the Federal Bureau for Equal Status for Women. Outsiders may well wonder, what on earth is such a bureau for? Mrs. Kaufmann, often called “Madame Egalité”, says: “Our function is to ensure that the rights that we have on paper can be implemented in practice”. The Swiss Federal Bureau for Equal Status was opened in January 1989. Examples of its functions include the drafting of plans for the advancement of women, and the formulating of recommendations to businesses and public authorities. The Bureau will also inform regularly about blatant cases of discrimination against women.

The Cantonal governments are also beginning to set up their own bureaux for ensuring women’s equal status. By the spring of 1989, four such Cantonal bureaux were functioning (for the Jura, Geneva, St. Gall and Basle-Country cantons). Preparations are well under way for the setting up of bureaux in the Cantons of Berne, Lucerne, Basle-City, Zurich, Ticino, Aargau, Solothurn, Vaud and Zug.

Women and the “Landsgemeinde”

The theme of “Female Suffrage in Appenzell” is not one of the most edifying chapters in the history of our democracy, but it has made the headlines of late. Appenzell comprises two half-cantons, Appenzell-Outer-Rhoden and Appenzell-Inner-Rhoden respectively. Appenzell-Outer-Rhoden recently decided – as the last-but-one half-canton in Switzerland and probably the penultimate body-politic in the whole wide world! – to grant women the right to vote on cantonal issues. (They had for years already been entitled to vote on matters concerning Switzerland as a whole.) The Government of the half-canton had recommended such a decision back in the summer of 1988, but after four rejections of this recommendation, the all-male Landsgemeinde of April ’89, in Hundwil, finally gave its consent. This left the other half-canton as the very



On their own for the very last time: the men of Outer-Rhoden at their all-male “Landsgemeinde” – with weapons as their credentials! (Photo: Willy Spiller)

last male bastion. One of its female citizens lost her patience in May 1989 and lodged a formal complaint under constitutional law, so that the Federal Court will now have to decide whether the ban on women’s right to vote in Appenzell-Inner-Rhoden is not in fact unconstitutional!

Women have a firm grasp on Zurich!

One consoling development is the fact that since the spring of 1989, women are in control of the Canton of Zurich! The annually elected President of the Govern-

ment has since April been Hedi Lang, who heads the Zurich Department of Justice – this was a “première” for Switzerland, being the first time ever a woman had been chosen as President of a Cantonal government. And as if that were not enough, on May 8 of this year, the Zurich Cantonal Council (the Legislative) re-elected a woman as President, Ursula Leemann, so that at present a two-woman team is occupying the two highest political posts in the Canton of Zurich.

Elisabeth Hörler

The situation of women in Switzerland

Equality in practice

In everyday life, Swiss women are still a long way away from the equality of rights that they should have, even if some progress has been made at the levels of our constitution and legislation. Four Swiss women who for years have been observing the status of women from different standpoints, and have taken an active part in the securing of equal rights, now express their views on recent changes that have been taking place.

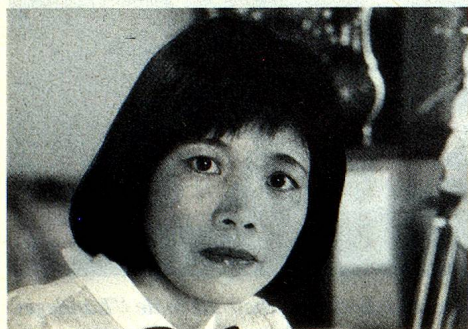
Than-Huyen Ballmer-Cao (38) holds a doctor’s degree in political science and is habilitated at the University of Zurich, where she is engaged on research projects. She comes originally from Vietnam, is married, has three children. Dr. Ballmer-Cao has effected several investigations and publications into the political situation of women in Switzerland, and their political attitudes. When she arrived in Switzerland in

1969, the introduction of female suffrage was soon to take place. “I had the privilege of observing this historical happening from a ‘ringside seat’. I wondered of course why in such an enlightened country as Switzerland this elementary right for women did not exist”, says Dr. Ballmer-Cao. She therefore made a detailed analysis of the then current Parliamentary debates and found something quite astounding: “Even the



arguments expressed in favour of female suffrage were deeply rooted in a traditional division of roles. Instead of talking about the axiomatic fundamental equality of the sexes, many supporters of the reform made speeches about 'a new dimension' having emerged in politics. There were tendencies to shroud the whole question of women's status in mystery."

There has not been much change in this attitude even by the time of the 1981 refer-



Than-Huyen Ballmer-Cao
(Photo: Tanja Niemann)

endum. "The most important outcome was that the principle of equality of status was then anchored in our constitution."

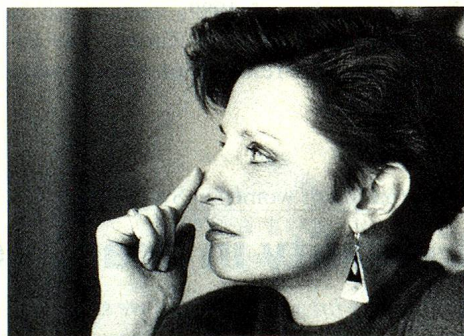
It must be borne in mind that even progressive legislation, such as the new matrimonial law can only bring about changes very slowly. Why? According to Dr. Ballmer-Cao, the difficulty is how to transfer and transmit ideas and concepts developed at a high level to the rank-and-file. Could not female politicians do more to facilitate and speed up such transfers? "The longer I try to deal with such matters, the more I become convinced that every woman who fights for women's rights is important." Dr. Ballmer-Cao agrees that attitudes towards the question of women's rights have undergone some improvement over the past twenty years or so, but: "Progress is not as rapid as one could hope ..." Nevertheless, she has great hopes of the progressively-minded women passing on their ideas and their cultural outlook. "Women put the emphasis on peace, on the ability to communicate, on solidarity. These values are not the outcome of biological or natural differences between men and women, but are culturally conditioned. And the specifically female culture, which has developed in parallel with that of the males can be regarded as an alternative."

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Anita Fetz (35) is from Basle, unmarried, and as a representative of the POCH (Progressive Organizations of Switzerland) has

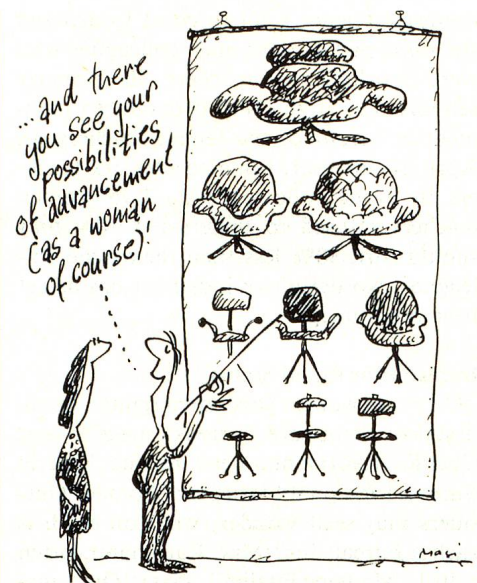
been a member of the Federal Parliament since 1985. She is a graduate of Basle University, where she studied history, worked for OFRA (Organization for Women's Rights), and together with her colleague Ruth Marx, of the "femmedia" office, runs an organization for providing training and further education facilities for women. "In the last few years, I have been in touch with hundreds of women in my seminars" says Anita Fetz. "And I have become conscious of the existence of a potential that should not be wasted. A potential of self-assurance on the part of fairly well-educated women with ambitions to make the most of their abilities in their professional activity. These women take it as a gross injustice when they see men given preference over them, in spite of their devotion to duty and their efficiency. Or when they have to learn that the question 'Children or not?' is a matter for them to solve privately as best they can. Nothing is done to provide support for women who wish to work. There are no facilities for child-care, apart from kindergartens and schools. The legislation for providing protection for mothers and mothers-to-be is of minimal benefit, and no provisions exist for parents of new-born offspring to have leave of absence from their jobs. In these respects, Switzerland is at the very bottom of the table listing all of the industrialised European countries."

Moreover, Switzerland has one of the lowest quotas for the gainful employment of



Anita Fetz (Photo: Claude Giger)

women, coming fourth from last in a listing of twelve European countries. Anita Fetz: "There is at present an acute shortage of qualified personnel. This is becoming more and more evident to industrial and commercial managers and they realise that something must be done to rectify the situation." Some see the solution as taking the form of special programmes for the advancement of women. Anita Fetz appreciates such initiatives in principle, but has some reservations. "These programmes are usually aimed at



middle-class women with good qualifications, who are ambitious to succeed. But nothing is done for the vast army of women doing unattractive and badly paid jobs."

Anita Fetz sees the implementation of true equality of possibilities for men and women on the labour market as follows: "Women must be given a chance of advancement in the field of their gainful employment - but men too must play a more important role in the life of the family. You cannot have one without the other. Women have in recent years come to need to do what they wish and are able to do in their jobs. But with men the reverse is the case, and it is seldom that they voluntarily take part to a greater extent in the chores of looking after family and household."

Isolde Schaad (45) is a journalist and author. She lives in Zurich as a writer. She became well-known thanks to her book "Know-how on Kilimanjaro" in which she describes the way of life of Swiss development aid volunteers in black Africa as seen from the standpoint of a female ethno-sociologist. This autumn her newest novel "Küsschen-Tschüss" will be published in which she deals with the behaviour of post-modern society. Isolde Schaad was a militant member of the Zurich "FBB" group which after 1968 operated as a women's liberation movement, in a manner very different from that adopted by the "bourgeois" women's movement. Today, two decades later, she appreciates the impulses that the new women's movement has imparted to the cause of women's rights, but feels some anxiety about the possibility of dissidence developing. "Many women who in the past were dedicated feminists are nowadays



swimming on a wave of esotericism and irrationalism which will continue to give rise to new ghettos.”

For Isolde Schaad, Article 4 of the constitution has up to now failed to bring about any genuine progress for women. Why? “I believe that one important factor is the women’s own state of consciousness” she says. “They still give priority to emotional considerations. As soon as a woman is living with a man, she becomes more compliant and docile and tends to take her profession less seriously. But of late there seems to have been a trend towards greater emphasis on domesticity, especially in advertising for instance.” So perhaps there has not been such a big change in consciousness after all, even though Isolde Schaad herself claims to have observed some slight changes – among the men! “Young men act nowadays in a man-



Isolde Schaad (Photo: Marlen Perez)

ner different from that adopted by men of my own generation”, she says. “They no longer believe implicitly in authority as a sort of divine right. Their values are no longer exclusively oriented towards the characteristics of the ‘he-man’, the athletic muscle-man bursting with health.” This has however not yet exerted any influence of importance on the traditional and still existing scale of basic values.

*

Christiane Langenberger-Jaeger (48) hails from the Vaud region, is married and mother of two grown-up children. For seven years she was President of the Swiss Association for Female Rights (SVF). She is a member of the Swiss FDP party (a right-of-centre, liberal political party), and is Municipal Councillor of the community in which she lives (Romanel-sur-Morges). She recently became Vice-President of the Swiss Federation for Civil Protection, is a member of the Federal Commission for Women’s equal status, is a director of an insurance company and heads the Western Swiss branch of the organization called

“Deeds not Words”. This last-named body, which aims at the advancement of women in commerce and industry involves an enormous effort and expenditure of time, first and foremost because the managements of the firms concerned have to be convinced. “To begin with, it was uphill work” says Christiane Langenberger-Jaeger: “But there has been some progress over the last year, and today we can count on the cooperation of sixteen firms and of one public authority.” The “Deeds not Words” organization aims primarily at promoting equality of status for women in their occupations, seeing that as the area where the reforms have not got very far as yet. There is a clear reason for this: “Between the ages of 25 and 35 the women are kept busy raising families while the men are building up their careers. And when they want to take up gainful employment again, it is difficult for them to find suitable openings – we women have to attempt to board a train in which all the seats are already taken!”

Christiane Langenberger-Jaeger is by no means gloomy about the outlook. She sees, in these times of prospering economy, good possibilities for better vocational training, new types of work, even part-time employment in posts calling for well-qualified personnel – and such chances could also help their male colleagues, who are tending to complain more and more frequently that they need more time for being with their families and pursuing their own interests. Christiane Langenberger-Jaeger agrees that the “fringe” conditions for women are far from ideal. There are not enough facilities for day-care of small children, nor adequate

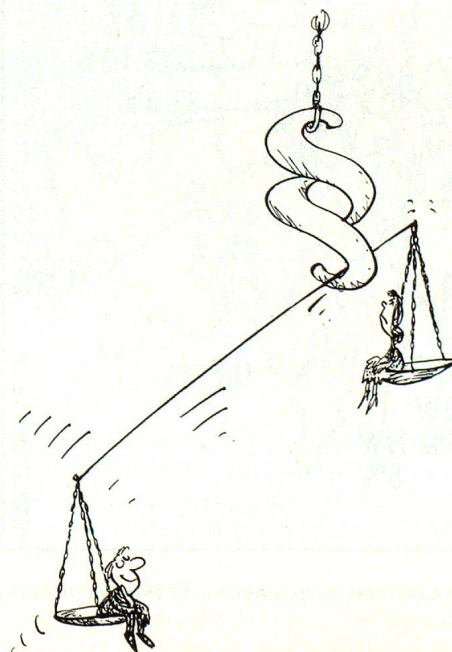


Christiane Langenberger-Jaeger

coordination of “timetables” for school and work. Some progress, a few steps in the right direction, have admittedly been made, but our mentality and outlook cannot be changed except very slowly. “All the same”, she says, “the electorate have given their approval to equality of status for women and to the new matrimonial legislation – is there any other country in the world in which such measures could have been adopted?” But now, when it is necessary to implement in practice the power-sharing that is involved, some hurdles will have to be tackled. The men will often be reluctant to make way voluntarily for the reforms that are needed. “It is clear that women must devote themselves in politics far more intensively for their cause than hitherto. Or do you believe that men will help enthusiastically in the setting up of more day-nurseries?” she asks, and goes on to claim that more active women, indeed *many* more, are needed, as there is still so much to be done. “Women must make every effort to attain the goal, by showing solidarity and by fighting along with the rest of the lobby. For we could have the power if we want it!”

Silvia Hofmann

Cartoons: Magi Wechsler, Zurich



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in Switzerland:

Inventory

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Consulting



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