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be a numerically prescribed female representation in all councils, committees and so on?

JS: I would like to be a bit cautious for the moment about this idea. For the immediate future I consider that we should try to bring about an increase in the proportion of women in such bodies on a voluntary basis. But if in the next five to ten years progress is still going on at the same foot-dragging rhythm as today, some sort of legislatively compulsory quota procedure will have to be considered.

SR: One particularly conspicuous and objectionable form of discrimination is – as you have already mentioned – the still widely persisting inequality of remuneration of men and women for work of the same value and standard. Is it not time for Parliament to put its foot down?

JS: Today it is my view that the principle of equal pay laid down in the Constitution should be complemented by an implementing ordinance. The lawcourts are obviously incapable of interpreting the provision in the constitution which is in itself directly applicable, although it is not so simple in practice. That is why it is necessary for Parliament to deal with this question by means of legislation, and at the same time to define what is meant by work of equal value. There must be a provision for associations and trade unions to have a right to sue, as the individual woman worker would often not dare to bring her employer before the court.

SR: Mrs. Stamm, I should like to express our gratitude to you for your willingness to take part in this conversation.

Interviewer: Jürg Müller

Career and Reflections of a Swiss Woman Politician

From Geneva to Berne



It is a somewhat daunting task to sum up in a few lines fourteen years of parliamentary life – starting with my “surprise” election to the Geneva Upper Council in 1973, then two years later to the National Council followed by two terms of office in the Council of States in which for eight years I have represented the Republic and Canton of Geneva. I can say that my political career began late, progressed rapidly, was fascinatingly exciting and at the same time rather disappointing, characterised by periods of gloom and sunshine – like every human undertaking.

I was fifty years old when for the first time I agreed to put my name down as a candidate of the Liberal party – the same party which several of my ancestors had represented on the Municipal Council of Onex. My three daughters, by then already grown up, had hardly any need of help or advice from me, and my husband, as a doctor entirely wrapped up in his profession, encouraged me in my endeavour. As a woman in a privileged position I thought it fully justifiable to place my experience and time at the disposal of the broadest public community. Public affairs interested me, I was ready to take on new responsibilities, and I was already a member of several official committees.

Immediately after my election, I committed myself with enthusiasm to causes that interested me. I had nothing to lose and nothing to gain by engaging in politics. Being convinced about this, and desiring to keep my politics in complete accord with my ethical standards – thus obeying the dictates of my conscience rather than the party watchwords and slogans – I have retained my total independence of thought and action. On account of this attitude, I have made a few enemies but have received innumerable expressions of encouragement. I was in a minority in every respect. As a woman – there were only 17 female members of the 244-seat Parliament in 1975. As a French-speaking Swiss – we hardly amount to a fifth of the total population of the Confederation. As a representative of a small party, not a member of the governmental coalition. And finally, as somebody with controversial ideas. Apart from speaking in support of equal rights for men and women, of fair treatment for foreign workers and refugees, of conscientious objectors to military service, I have devoted most of my speeches to protection of the environment, to the East-West conflict, to massive stockpiling of means of destruction, and to the “ditch”, that widening gulf which separates North from South.

Ever since the beginning of the 1970's I had become very conscious of the major threats to humanity developing in the last decades of the twentieth century, and have committed myself, both in private associations and in politics, to support for the saving of energy and for resort to renewable sources of energy, to opposition against Creys-Malville (a nuclear power station in France, near Geneva) and nuclear power – either civilian or military, they cannot be disassociated from one another – and have pleaded for Switzerland to adopt a more active and dynamic policy of “good offices”, in favour of peace and of a more equitable sharing of this planet's resources between the industrialised countries and those still underdeveloped. Confronted by a political milieu that is – with very few exceptions – more concerned with everyday questions than with anxiety about the future, a milieu that gives priority to short-term economic criteria, a milieu closely allied to the business circles which can be so generous in distributing seats on company boards of directors, those idealists who care first and foremost for the common good, and for the state of the world that we are bequeathing to our children, often get the feeling that they are “talking to a brick wall”. For my part, I am convinced that the situation is not as discouraging as it may seem at first, if one considers the commitment of these men and women, of these increasingly numerous youngsters, of these scientists, even of the churches themselves who at the recent European Ecumenical Assembly in Basle decided to add their efforts to the cause of conservation and preservation of human life in spite of all threats – but not much time is left! So on a more optimistic note, let us recognise that there are some encouraging and hopeful signs.

Monique Bauer-Lagier

The President

Judith Stamm, who at the beginning of this year became President of the Federal Commission for Women's Equal Status, has since 1983 been a member of Parliament (National Council) for Lucerne. She is a member of the Christian-Democratic People's Party (the “CVP”). From 1971 to 1984 she had been a member of the Great Council of the Canton of Lucerne. She was born in 1934 and grew up in Zurich, where she completed her legal studies, obtaining her doctor's degree. For many years she was active in the Cantonal Police of Lucerne, and was in fact the first woman in Switzerland to become a police officer. She practises today as a lawyer acting on behalf of juveniles.