

# Swiss Abroad for the National Council?

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mation about swings in the mood of the electorate and how the political parties are doing is supplied by the results of the various parliamentary elections in the cantons. Over the last four years the slow erosion of the traditional parties has continued, while opposition movements on both the left and the right of the political chessboard have achieved successes which have sometimes been spectacular, like that of the Swiss People's Party (SVP). This obtained 11 seats in Lucerne last April in the first election in which it had participated there. (The Lucerne branch of the SVP is part of the populist wing of the party which agrees with the views of the chairman of the Zurich branch, National Councillor Christoph Blocher).

The biggest party in the country, the Liberal Democrats (FDP), was on the ascendant until the end of last year, but during the first four months of 1995 it lost more than it had gained in the previous three years in cantonal legislative elections. It seems to be suffering from a slight loss of ground in terms of both seats and votes. But this is less pronounced than with the Christian Democrats (CVP), who in the course of four years have lost more than 51 seats in cantonal parliaments and 1.6% of voter support. They were also the main losers in the last federal parliamentary elections (down 5 seats or 1.4%). But this accumulation of unfavourable auguries is not preventing the new Christian Democrat chairman, Fribourg State Councillor Anton Cottier, to aspire to three extra seats in October. Such optimism would have provoked no more than a wry smile had it not been for the fact that the Berne daily, *Der Bund* – which cannot be accused of complicity with the Christian Democrats – had detected a change of trend at the beginning of the summer with predicted gains in seats by the four

coalition parties (FDP: up 2; CVP: up 1; SP: up 4; SVP: up 1).

Looking at cantonal legislative elections the performance of the various parties would suggest a high degree of stability for the Liberal Democrats and the Social Democrats (SP), a marked drop for the Christian Democrats and a considerable advance for the Swiss People's Party (up 21). As for the parties outside the coalition, the Greens are clearly in decline, while the right, the Liberal Party and the Freedom Party are likely to move ahead (the Liberals being up by 12 seats in recent cantonal elections and the Freedom Party up by 26). In the French-speaking cantons there has also been a marked advance for the Labour Party (up 15).

### Recovery by the coalition parties?

Basing themselves on the results of cantonal legislative elections and the last National Council elections, as well as discussions with politicians, political scientists and journalists, the forecasters of *Der Bund* are suggesting that for the first time in 20 years the government parties could increase their representation in the lower house by 8 seats. The Freedom Party (up 2) and the Labour Party (up 1) would also be amongst the winners, while the Greens (down 5), the Independents (down 3), the Liberals,

the Swiss Democrats and the Evangelicals (down 1 each) would be the losers.

In any case it must be emphasised that the Swiss political system does not allow for tidal waves. Fluctuations exceeding 5 seats have to be considered substantial. We should not forget that the four parties which have shared the responsibility of government since 1960 obtained 69.7% of votes four years ago, giving them 149 of the 200 seats in the National Council. And they also hold 41 out of the 46 seats in the Council of States.

Keeping all this in mind it is obvious that we are unlikely to see swings big enough to result in a change in the present distribution of seats in the Federal Council (2 FDP, 2 CVP, 2 SP and 1 SVP). One of the first acts of the new parliament will indeed be to elect the seven members of the executive. This will be done by the Federal Assembly – the two houses of parliament meeting in joint session – at the first meeting of the new legislature in December. Some on the right of the political spectrum dream of throwing the Socialists out of the government, others to the left think the same about the Swiss People's Party, which differs from the other coalition parties particularly on European policy. But an upset is most unlikely. The Swiss system of consensus is based on integrating the main political forces of the country into the government. ■

## Swiss Abroad for the National Council?

The political rights of the Swiss Abroad include eligibility for parliament. Wherever they live they may be elected. But like candidates from inside Switzerland, their names must appear on a party list (see also page 8). As we go to press, three parties have made use of this opportunity. In Fribourg the Swiss People's Party has Pierre Jonneret, from Paris, on its list; in St. Gall the Christian Democratic Party has included Elisabeth Hall-Zeller, from London; and in Zurich-Meilen the Liberal Democrats have Hans Ulrich Pestalozzi, of Rio de Janeiro, Zurich and Glion.

A member of parliament is expected not only to be interested in Swiss politics but also to possess sound knowledge of the Swiss political landscape.

Candidates from abroad must also measure up to this standard. Mr. Jonneret (70) is the publisher of a monthly magazine for Swiss residents in France and a member of the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA), so he has no problems in this regard. Nor does Mr. Pestalozzi (54), who is also a member of the CSA and has been partly living in Switzerland again since 1991. Mrs. Hall-Zeller (53) lived in Switzerland from 1989 to 1994 and was very much involved in politics during that period. All three take an active part in the Swiss associations of the countries where they live and are putting themselves forward as representatives of the Fifth Switzerland. This means that if elected they will concentrate particularly on the con-

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Portraits of the parties (postscript)

## Stop press parties

Following our survey of parties taking part in the federal parliamentary elections on October 22, here are brief portraits of four groups which are also putting forward candidates in some cantons.

**L**adies first. To begin with, a women's group. This already has one member of parliament who has joined the Social Democratic parliamentary group.

### Women in Politics (FraP)

Women in Politics (Frauen machen Politik) is a group of feminists in some regions of German-speaking Switzerland. There is no equivalent in the French or Italian language areas. Women in Politics won a Zurich seat in the National Council four years ago. The group, which does not want to be called a party but rather a feminist political agenda, was born in Zurich in 1986. It will put forward lists in five cantons in the coming elections and hopes to get the five seats it needs to

form a parliamentary group of its own. It does not have an executive but works on the principle of self-management.

### Democratic Social Party

At the national level this party first saw the light of day as recently as June 1994. However, it has been in existence in Basle-City since 1981 and in Fribourg since 1989. It is made up of Social Democratic dissidents. The party is run by a triumvirate. Its members want to create a society which will enable all sections of the population – particularly the disadvantaged and those on low incomes – to live in dignity. They are in favour of a social market economy and national defence. They consider themselves not as competition but as an

alternative to the mainstream Social Democrats.

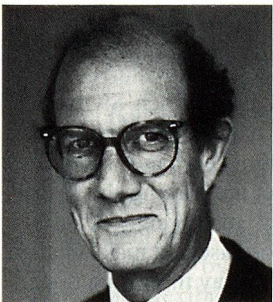
### Christian Conservative Party

The name was originally going to be the Catholic Conservative Party but they finally opted for Christian Conservative. They aim to attract all those wishing to defend Christian social ethics, the family, small industry and farmers and to work against the loss of traditional Christian values and the lack of direction felt by so many people. The Christian Conservative Party was founded at the end of last year by Flüeli Ranft in the half canton of Upper Unterwalden, where Nicolas de Flüe had his famous hermitage. It may put forward lists in Aargau and Thurgau.

### Renaissance Switzerland Europe

Created almost two years ago, Renaissance Switzerland Europe aims – quoting its electoral slogan – “to reinvent Switzerland”. The party is made up of young people of different political hues who believe that the traditional parties are in no position to bring about the reforms needed in Switzerland. It intends to present lists for the October elections in five cantons at least. Renaissance Switzerland Europe is in favour of a dynamic, European and social Switzerland. It is one of the five movements which launched a popular initiative last February in favour of Switzerland joining the European Union.

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National Council candidates (from left): Hans Ulrich Pestalozzi, Elisabeth Hall-Zeller and Pierre Jonneret. (Photos: zvg)

cerns of their compatriots living all over the world.

Even before the introduction of the vote by correspondence eligibility for the National Council did not depend on residing in Switzerland. But in connection with these three candidates the practical question arises for the first time: Is it possible to travel from abroad to the parliamentary sessions? “To come from Paris to Berne by train I need five

hours, exactly the same as a national councillor from St. Moritz”, Pierre Jonneret could answer. “With daily direct flights from London to Berne I can get there even more quickly”, would rejoin Elisabeth Hall. With Brazil it is a bit more difficult admittedly, but Hans Ulrich Pestalozzi already lives part of the year in Switzerland.

*René Lenzin*

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