

Columnist's view : the SPS - 100 years on

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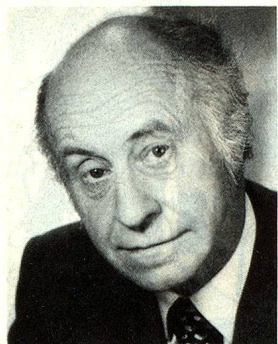
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The SPS – 100 years on



In 1888, a hundred years ago, the Bernese, Albert Steck, founded the SPS, the Social-Democratic Party of Switzerland. This left-wing, nuclear formation of the Federal State became an integral part of federal politics and today the national parallelogram of forces could not be imagined without it. It played a decisive part in the evolution of the Swiss welfare state. That is the historical feather in its cap.

In the early days of social democracy, it did not look as if the SPS could ever become such a power factor. It emerged from the workers' and employees' wing of the then still dominant Liberals, and the likelihood of a split became apparent quite early on. It seemed as if the Party would break up hopelessly on the

rocks of disagreement over the question whether a reform course could be steered within the existing framework of the federal state, or whether a radically different path would have to be followed.

Today, such an alternative seems patently absurd. The anarchistic collectivists in the Neuchâtel and Bernese Jura who had founded their «libertarian socialism» under the influence of Bakunin, the Russian revolutionary, and who were dreaming of a new life, had long become extinct. The process of federal renewal seemed predestined.

However, at an early age, the social democrats conceived themselves as a class party. This situation arose from the fact that already in the 19th century the labour force held an ever-growing number of foreign industrial workers, which tended to accelerate radicalism. The trade union movement, which today is regarded as decidedly conservative, was then markedly progressive. But that does not mean that the class struggle was simply imported; it can only be proved that the foreign worker quota accentuated it.

If things ever came to a real revolutionary process in Switzerland (that would not alter possessional relationships, but, indeed change the relations between the political parties) this was in 1919, with the replacement of majority suffrage by the proportional representation system for elections to the National Council. As it happened, this broke the liberal predominance, and the Social-Democrats, already growing stronger, had a significant share in this historic event. Although the SPS remained in the opposition, it attained a political weight as never before.

Even so, this strongest left-wing grouping also remained dedicated to the class struggle right up to the 1920s, and it was not until 1935, when Hitler was already in power and the democratic part of Europe stood on the defensive, that, at a memorable national meeting, the Party stood up for the military defence of Switzerland. Thus a new chapter was opened.

Already during the second world war the Social Democrats concerned themselves more intensively than any other party with the future of our country, to which they devoted their entire attention. The «New Switzerland» was, however, a futuristic perspective which was never able to win much from the Helvetian Everyman.

During the early post-war years, the Social Democrats had to hold their ground against the short but fierce onslaught of the communist Workers Party before they could devote all their strength to the building up of a social welfare system. Then, with the completion of the welfare state, the Social-Democratic Party of Switzerland attained its political heyday. In 1943 it acquired its first Federal Councillor, and the «magic formula» of 1959 created two seats for it in the government. Now, equal footing with the Liberal Party and the Christian-Democratic Party was achieved, and, if one were to view things from a first glance only, one would assume that national political integration had also been consummated.

Yet, since then, changes in the social order and the working world began to turn – against traditional social democracy. Party politics has long since become unloved drudgery and many jobs in industry have been rationalised away altogether or in part, or have developed into office occupations. The Party lost large sections of its following, and the intellectuals who flow towards it anew think along other lines, especially ecological.

This is a process of reorientation and not of unavoidable decline. The Party is changing its face and its substance. But it remains an element without which a Switzerland of tomorrow would be quite inconceivable.

Oskar Reck

Swiss shopping centre in Moscow

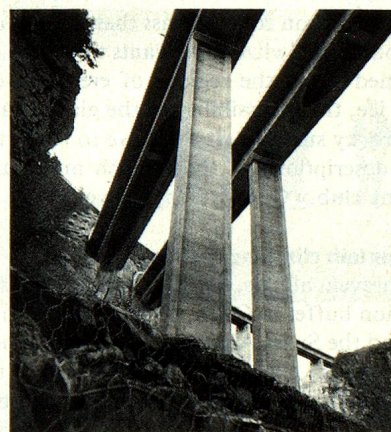
Swiss entrepreneurs have been able to conclude a SFr.100-million joint-venture contract for the construction and operation of a shopping mall in Moscow. The future hard-currency shoppers' paradise, with 248,000 sq. ft of sales area, is intended for the Moscow foreign colony and tourists from the west.

Colonel Doris

For the first time in Switzerland, a woman presides over an army officers' society. Doris Portmann-Gilomen has been elected by the Berne Officers' Society as its new President. She is a colonel in the Women's Auxiliary Service of the Army.

Spoiling the scenery

The «Area Observation Switzerland» programme of the Federal Office for Comprehensive Spatial Planning records that the creeping destruction of close-to-nature landscapes in Switzerland continues un-



abated. Every year from 1973 to 1982, over 1,865 miles of roads were built, more than 3,200 acres were built over with new buildings and, at the same time, about 2,220 acres of fruit-tree and vineyard areas were uprooted and marshes drained. (In the picture: N2, the Gotthard northern slope; Peter Studer.)

Expatriate Swiss honoured

President Cossiga of Italy has honoured Dr. Fredy A. Legler-Borel, Chairman of the textile concern of Legler Industria Tessile which has been going for more than 100 years in Ponte San Pietro, near Bergamo, with the title «Cavaliere del Lavoro». This is the highest civil honour that can be awarded by our southern neighbour.