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FERNAUSSGABE

# Civics and Politics

Last autumn, the first article appeared under this heading, about how to fill in the voting paper in an election. In a further article we should like to explain the procedure for achieving a partial revision of the Federal Constitution, as for instance in our citizenship campaign which would make it possible for a Swiss mother married to a foreigner and living abroad to pass on her nationality to her children.

The State has a deeper significance only if it has been created for mankind. It is not sufficient if it concerns itself with law and order so that the people can enjoy a pleasant life. No, the citizen must have rights as well as duties. In this article, we shall discuss the right of Initiative and in a future issue the right of Referendum, commonly known as the «twin rights» of the Swiss citizen.

The right of Initiative has the same function as the gas pedal in a motor car. In this analogy, the motor equals the Federal Constitution which is amended once the people and the Cantons, as the highest power in the land have agreed to such a proposed change. It allows 100000 and more voters the right to demand an amendment to or total change of the Federal Constitution.

In order to draw a parallel, one could say that the submission of an Initiative resembles an obstacle race in which every hurdle could bring final defeat. In order to be valid, an Initiative has to adhere to one subject only; it may be presented in the shape of a general suggestion or of a well-prepared proposal.

## Who may launch an Initiative?

An individual citizen or a group may launch an Initiative, provided it is supported by at least 100000 signatures on the prescribed forms. The authorities, too, have the right of Initiative. A proposal may be put forward by one of the following bodies: Federal Council, National Council, Council of States or a Canton. In these cases, no collection of signatures is needed. Regarding the citizenship campaign, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad launched such a parliamentary Initiative through the good offices of its President on 23rd March 1979, one year after the campaign had been introduced in this periodical (December 1977) and following extensive enquiries amongst the Swiss abroad.

Thus, this particular Initiative has been in the hands of the parliamentarians since the first quarter of 1979. They have examined it and expressed agreement in principle. It remains to eliminate some divergencies which are no doubt well known to you from various articles published from time to time.

The next step will be the plebiscite whose date has not yet been fixed. We shall inform you in due course. It is essential, however, that you register without delay at your Embassy or Consulate your wish to participate in federal plebiscites, so that you, too, will be able to vote when the time comes.

*Lucien Paillard*

# Initiative

