

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 14 (1987)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Refusal to do military service : civilian service soon?
Autor: Stranner, Henri
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907676>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 14.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>



Have the haters of strangers miscalculated?

And the refugee question? And the foreign population? Here, too, the parties specializing on this subject matter, first of all the *Vigilants* and the National Action, could be in for a nasty surprise on October 18th should the traditional bourgeois parties which hold the majority in the Federal parliament, as in the Federal Council, get pleasure in taking the wind out of their sails. Today, the law on political asylum is being applied far more rigorously than ever before and the number of applications for asylum granted under it has declined considerably. Insofar as its present asylum policy is concerned, Switzerland is hardly distinguishable from most of the other countries of Europe.

In short, it is not certain that the nationalists will achieve the breakthrough their adherents are hoping for but, with luck, they will at least succeed in strengthening their position in parliament.

Will the women have better luck?

Last but not least – the women. They represent the great unknown in the coming federal elections. Four years ago – for the first time since the introduction of women's suffrage at federal level in 1971 – they gained no ground. On the eve of the new elections, 24 out of 246 parliamentarians of 6 parties are women: just 10 per cent.

The other parties in the two chambers number no women in their ranks, yet everyone is anxious not to appear hostile to women. The Swiss People's Party, prodded by its chairman Adolf Ogi, from Berne, tries very hard to shed its markedly masculine image.

The Liberals who, every once in a while, exemplified the same inglorious reputation, succeeded, with the help of the left, in bring-

ing about the election of the first woman Federal Councillor in history, namely Elisabeth Kopp, from Zurich. Not to be beaten, the CVP (Christian-Democratic Party) elected Eva Segmüller, from St. Gallen, as President – the first woman ever to become a party chairwoman.

Women are being listened to more and more within the left-wing and opposition parties.

The Social-Democrats, for example, are determined to go even a step further: at least a third of the places on the electoral list are to be reserved for women. The POCH set the corresponding limit even higher.

Will the representation of women on the topmost political committees again go up? Let us wait and see.

Georges Plomb

Make-up of Parliament and Federal Council on the eve of the elections:

	Federal Council	National Council	Council of States	Combined Chambers
Liberal Party (FDP)	2	54	14	68
Christian-Democratic Party (CVP)	2	42	18	60
Social-Democratic Party (SP)	2	47	6	53
Swiss People's Party (SVP)	1	23	5	28
Liberal-Democratic Party (LPS)		8	3	11
Landesring (LdU)		10		10
Evangelical People's Party (EVP)		3		3
Progressive Organizations (POCH)		3		3
Worker's Party (PdA)		1		1
Partito Socialista Autonomo (PSA)		1		1
National Action (NA)		3		3
Vigilants		1		1
Ecological-Liberal Party (OeFP), Oehen		1		1
Environmentalists		3		3
Total	7	200	46	246

Refusal to do military service

Civilian service soon?

Despite much effort, we have not yet succeeded in finding a satisfactory solution for the objector to military service in Switzerland. This year, however, a new proposal which seems to have better chances of success than earlier initiatives is to be laid before parliament.

Advance of the Greens in Zurich and Geneva

The elections to the Zurich cantonal parliament brought the Greens a landslide victory on 5th April. The «ecologists» won 18 seats and are now, with their total of 22 seats, the fourth-strongest party in the 180-member cantonal great council. The National Action also made gains, improving its representation from 2 to 6 seats. Losses were mostly for the account of the bourgeois parties: CVP, FDP, SVP and EVP.

Election success of the Greens also a week later in the Geneva municipal elections: at the first go they won 11 of the 80 seats in the city parliament, thereby becoming the third-strongest party.

Switzerland, with its militia army, expects its citizens to do military service. Whoever refuses to do military service, without cogent reason, is punished and as a rule sentenced to six months imprisonment. But, besides quite a few malingerers, there are also young men who oppose military service from genuine inner, moral stress. Punishment of such conscientious objectors today appears unjust to by no means a few fellow-citizens.

Council of Europe calls for civilian service

Incidentally, the problem arises not only in

Switzerland but also in all democratic states. A number of Western democratic countries have accordingly been seeking fairer solutions to the question of conscientious objection: some have introduced alternative, civilian service which allows military service objectors to serve their fatherland in another way.

The problem has also been debated in the Council of Europe which comprises 21 W. European democratic states. In 1967, 1977 and in January last the Council of Europe Assembly called upon the governments of its member-countries to create a civilian, al-

ternative service for conscientious objectors.

In Switzerland, however, the voters have twice clearly rejected civilian-service models. In 1977 the *Münchenstein Initiative* was turned down – by 885,868 to 533,733 votes – and the 1984 «popular initiative for a real civilian service based on genuine proof» also found no favour: indeed it was sent packing with 1,361,462 to 771,412 votes.

«Decriminalization» as the objective

Yet even before the second referendum a motion (Eva Segmüller CVP/SG) had been proposed and accepted within the councils of the Federation, which called upon the Federal Council to endeavour, at least, to decriminalize objection (and the objector) to service in the armed forces for genuine reasons of conscience. Then, in August 1985, the Federal Council presented a first draft of a new regulation for a revision of the military penal law and for statutory regulations governing «unarmed» service, i. e. for objectors who refuse to bear arms.

According to the Federal Council's proposals, only conscientious objectors who are able to vindicate their ethical or religious reasons (or both) can gain anything from «decriminalization»; for «political» objectors were not to be recognized. All the same, even young men with genuine reasons of

conscience would still have to be punished for their conscientious objections to military service, for there is no will to change the Constitution. Such punishment would no longer have to be served in prison, however; it would be replaced by alternative service, i. e. work conscription, the duration of which should be half as long again as the refused military service but should not exceed two years.

Again, according to the proposals, refusal to do military service would no longer be entered in the criminal record, but should a young man also refuse to undertake alternative, i. e. work service, he would be punished, as previously, by imprisonment. The Federal Council's proposals provide that the «ethical objector» should be called up to tidy-up woods, lake shores and river banks; to blaze and maintain foot-paths and hiking trails; to tackle clearing-up work after disasters; to help mountain farmers and to assist in hospitals and homes.

Unarmed service since 1982

Since there are people who are willing to do service but who refuse to bear arms, the Federal Council is now prepared to embody unarmed service, introduced provisionally in 1982, in the law. But so as not to make it too attractive, it is proposed that «unarmed» conscripts must do longer service,

The voting of 5th April

Satisfaction for the Federal Council

On April 5th the Swiss voters gave clear approval to the proposed revision of the law on the right to asylum, against which a referendum had been forced. In doing so, they gave some spine to the Federal Council in the much-vexed issue of asylum policy. With the no to the armaments referendum as well as the assent to the double-yes in the votations on Popular Initiatives and Counterproposals, the people and cantons likewise accepted the recommendations of Federal Council and Parliament, in the case of these two other presentations.

With a voting participation of 41.7 per cent, the results were the following:

■ Revision of law of asylum: 1,179,779 yes (67.4%) against 571,874 no.

■ Amendment of law on aliens: 1,121,238 yes (65.7%) against 585,068 no.

■ Armaments referendum: 1,045,995 no (59.4%) against 713,900 yes.

■ Double-yes: 1,080,293 yes (63.3%) against 627,250 no.

that is to say one to three weeks more, than the other militiamen. This extended period of service is justified on the basis that unarmed soldiers are not put on guard duty and do not have to put in the usual obligatory, off-duty firing practice.

These bills largely met with approval in public hearings, although certain individual provisions were criticised. The Federal Council will accordingly modify its presentation before the summer. Will it gain a



Conscripts' first day (photo: M. Füre).

Conscientious objectors: 0.12 per cent

Last year, the number of objectors to military service continued to decline. In 1984, 788 convictions were registered and, in the following year, 686. This figure sank to 542 in 1986, corresponding to 0.12 per cent of the more than 430,000 members of the armed forces who did service in that year.

majority in parliament? It is to be hoped that both in the interests of those directly affected and also of our constitutionally-governed country, that in Switzerland, too, conscientious objectors shall no longer be «criminalized» but will be enabled to undertake some other form of service commensurate with their convictions.

Henri Stranner

Editor «Basler Zeitung»