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Elections 1995: Portraits of the parties (IV)

Swiss People's Party (the Agrarians)

With its 29 seats in the Federal Assembly the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is the fourth biggest party in Switzerland. It is a member of the four-party coalition which has run the country since 1960. Ever since 1930 it has provided one, generally Bernese, amongst the seven members of the Federal Council. Until 1940 this seat was held by the founder and greatest figure in the party's history, Berne's Rudolf Minger. Since 1988 the SVP's seat has been occupied by Adolf Ogi, from Berne inevitably. He heads the Federal Department of Transport, Communications and Energy.

The Swiss People's Party is part of the radical tradition. It was in 1919 that radicalism received a boost from those tilling the soil. Limited at first to Canton Berne, it soon spread roots father afield and in 1936 became a national party with the name of Farmers', Artisans' and Burghers' Party (PAB). Its present name dates from 1971. The change took place because it wanted to get away from its reputation as mainly a farmers' party; but in spite of the restructuring which occurred in the 1970s it has never really succeeded in this. It hoped to become a party attracting loyalty throughout the middle classes. At present it is

very definitely on the right of the political spectrum.

In the upcoming elections the SVP – which in 1991 obtained 11.8% of votes – hopes to increase its result by 2% across the country. Its aim is to attract

SVP Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi (right) beside party chairman Hans Uhlmann. (Photos: Keystone)



voters with a programme emphasising measures for improving public safety, reducing the number of civil servants and favouring deregulation. It also has an openly hostile attitude to any integration of Switzerland in the European Union.

The SVP is not represented in all cantons. It plays hardly any role at all in Geneva, Valais, Jura, Neuchâtel, Ticino

and Appenzell Inner Rhodes. But many new sections have appeared in the last two years, particularly in central and eastern Switzerland, in the wake of the party's opposition to the European Economic Area led by the Zurich agrarian, National Councillor Christoph Blocher. The present party chairman is State Councillor Hans Uhlmann of Thurgau, who represents the "hard" wing of the party dominant in Zurich and eastern Switzerland. This now

largely determines the policy of the party.

Pierre-André Tschanz

Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Founded: 1936; Members: about 80,000; Seats: National Council 25; Council of States 4; Chairman: State Councillor Hans Uhlmann, Thurgau
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The Liberal Party (LPS)

With only 3% of votes throughout Switzerland at the last National Council elections, the Liberal Party (LPS) might have figured amongst the political "also rans". But its distribution of votes gave it 13 seats in both houses of parliament, which makes it the sixth biggest party – after the four coalition parties and the Greens. This apparent paradox is explained by the fact that the Liberal Party plays an important role in four cantons only: Vaud, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Basle City. It is a party which is well established in the French-speaking cantons but not in the German-speaking and Italian-speaking regions.

In the parliamentary elections this autumn the Liberal Party hopes either to improve or at least to maintain the result it achieved four years ago. To this end it hopes to gain votes – perhaps even a seat – in Zurich, where those disappointed with the Liberal Democrats, the



François Jeanneret, chairman of the Liberal Party.

People's Party and the Freedom Party (successor to the Auto Party) have come together to form a new section of the Liberal Party. The latter has taken the idea of federalism as its main principle. It combats centralising trends and is in favour of as much cantonal sovereignty as possible. It is four-square within the Liberal movement born of the popular initiative demanding the abolition of direct federal taxation. And the Liberal Party is the only political group on the

right which is in favour of Swiss membership of the European Union.

The present Liberal Party issues from the pre-1848 Liberals, attached as they were to defending cantonal autonomy and "recruiting their members from the old patrician and Protestant families" (E. Claret, "Les partis politiques en Suisse" [The Political Parties in Switzerland], 1975). Its chairman is former Neuchâtel National Councillor François Jeanneret. It has had one federal councillor in its history, between 1917 and 1919, in the person of Geneva's Gustav Ador. The high quality and competence of most of its members of parliament give it an audience and an influence in federal politics which is comparable to that of the other centre-right parties.

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Liberal Party (LPS)

Founded: 1913; Members: about 15,000; Seats: National Council 10; Council of State 3; Chairman: François Jeanneret, Neuchâtel
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