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Elections 1995: Portraits of the parties (VI)

The populist right

We end our series of portraits of the parties represented in the federal parliament by describing the four populist right-wing groups.

In the federal elections of 1991 the most spectacular gain was made by the Auto Party, which doubled its score (going from 2.6% to 5.1% of the vote) giving it eight seats (up six).

The Freedom Party

This party was born in the mid-1980s out of irritation about the increasingly strict regulations on private cars and the

Pierre-André Tschanz

“passivity” shown by the centre-right parties. Since the last elections it has changed its name, becoming the Freedom Party, and its present aim is to gain at least 12 seats in October. Its chairman is Soleure National Councillor Roland Borer.

Although it started out on a single issue, the Freedom Party widened its programme in 1991. Alongside transport it had slogans like “less government, more freedom”. Its economic policy is based on deregulation and pro-



**Roland Borer,
chairman of the
Freedom Party.
(Photos:
Keystone)**

moting investment. But the question of transport and defending car owners is still the common denominator of party members, many of whom come from the automobile branch (transporters, garage owners, driving school instructors, etc.). The Freedom Party is strongest along the main transport routes of German-speaking Switzerland. But it has not succeeded in making inroads in the French-speaking and Italian-speaking parts of the country. Amongst French speakers its natural place is occupied by

the Liberal Party and amongst Italian speakers by the Ticino League.

The Swiss Democrats

National Action dates right back to 1961, but five years ago it changed its name to the Swiss Democrats. This makes it by far the oldest of the right-wing populist parties. Its cause has always been and still remains the defence of Swiss identity and values against what it considers to be too many



**Rudolf Keller,
chairman of the
Swiss
Democrats.**

foreign immigrants. Problems linked to immigration thrust National Action on to the political stage at the end of the 1960s, and in 1971 the “nationalists” obtained 11 seats in the National Council. The year previously their initiative against foreign ascendancy, commonly known as the Schwarzenbach initiative (after Zurich’s James Schwarzenbach, National Action’s most prominent figure), obtained 46% of votes across the country.

During the last decade refugees have supplanted immigrants as the main target of the Swiss Democrats, who are in favour of a forceful expulsion policy. Under the chairmanship of Basle Rural National Councillor Rudolf Keller, the party has now taken on an ecological tinge. It was also at the origin of the proposal to make August 1 – National Day – a public holiday.

At the last National Council elections the party obtained 3.4% of votes, giving it five seats (up two).

The Ticino League

Like the Swiss Democrats the Ticino League is against any project for Switzerland to join the European Union. These two parties together, which form a single group in the federal parliament,

have put forward a popular initiative which would require the government to abandon all suggestion of opening negotiations with Brussels on this subject. The Ticino League also led the opposition to creating a Swiss blue helmet contingent, which was rejected by voters in 1994. In 1991 it won two seats in the National Council and one in the Council of States. In the National Council elections it obtained 1.4% of votes. But it exists only in Canton Ticino, where it obtained 18% of votes in the cantonal legislative elections last April. It was founded in 1991, and its chairman is Giuliano Bignasco, a Lugano businessman, who recently replaced in the National Council a party colleague elected to the cantonal executive. A party of protesters, the Ticino League brandishes slogans such as “fewer taxes” and “less bureaucracy”.

The Federal Democratic Union

This party was set up in 1975 at the federal level. With 1% of votes in the National Council elections in 1991 it not only made its best score so far but also succeeded in getting its former chairman, Werner Scherrer of Thun, Canton Berne, elected. Although its main centre is Canton Berne, it also has supporters in the cantons of Zurich, Aargau, Basle City and Appenzel Outer Rhodes, as well as in Vaud. It has its roots in the puritan protestant tradition and combats for the safeguard of the values which inspired this movement. ■

Freedom Party (FP)

Founded: 1985; Members: about 12,500
Seats: National Council 8
Chairman: National Councillor Roland Borer, Soleure
Address: FP, P.O. Box, CH-4622 Egerkingen, Tel: 41 62 61 23 43

Swiss Democrats (SD)

Founded: 1961; Members: about 6,000
Seats: National Council 5
Chairman: National Councillor Rudolf Keller, Basle-Rural
Address: SD, P.O. Box 8116
CH-3001 Berne, Tel: 41 31 311 27 74

Federal-Democratic Union (EDU)

Founded: 1975
Seats: National Council 1
Chairman: Christian Waber, Berne
Address: EDU, P.O. Box, CH-3607 Thun
Tel: 41 33 22 36 37

Ticino League (Lega)

Founded: 1991
Seats: National Council 2; Council of States 1
Chairman: National Councillor Giuliano Bignasca, Ticino
Address: Lega, Casella postale 2311,
CH-6900 Lugano, Tel: 41 91 52 80 47