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The parties discover women

“Women join in”

Women in the home, men in public life: this age-old tradition is finally being brushed aside. Nowadays no firm and practically no party can afford to do without successful women in high places.

Nous avons perdu, mais la prochaine fois nous gagnerons, soit la majorité, soit la totalité!” (We have lost, but the next time we shall win, either the majority or the whole). This pugnacious statement by Christiane Brunner in

Alice Baumann

March 1993 made to an outraged crowd in Berne's Federal Square went down in history. So did the tumult surrounding the non-election of the 47-year old trade union leader, Social Democrat National Councillor and candidate for the Federal Council, followed by the surprising election of Ruth Dreifuss as Switzerland's second woman cabinet minister ever. Both events shook Switzerland and strengthened the cause of women right across the political board. And it affected men too. All the male parliamentarians who on that day voted against Christiane Brunner and for Francis Matthey had to come to terms with the women in their own parties as a result of the uproar.

As a result of the so-called “Brunner effect” – which was symbolised by a gold-coloured metal brooch in the form of a sun – various women's projects were launched with much panache and great gusto, but a good many of them ran into trouble or even failed completely. One of the latter was the “shadow cabinet”, a sort of women's alternative government. It was intended that this would be a women's voice of dissent at the national level above party politics. “Would have”, because the shadow cabinet never saw the light of day in spite of support from 34 woman national and state councillors (out of 39 women and 207 men in both houses). The initiative “For fair representation of women in the federal government” only just collected enough signatures, and the discussion about quotas in any constitutional modification has been slow-moving.

Take your seats, Mesdames

Among the positive results of Christiane Brunner's non-election were the bro-

chure “Women in parliament!” published by the Federal Commission for Women's Issues and the creation of many new positions for women in business, politics and the media. In addition, courses for women in politics – aimed at teaching them to speak persuasively, to put forward points of view clearly and to reach specific objectives – gained ground. The political parties began to put forward special women's lists. This process started with the Social Democrats which had as many woman national councillors as the centre-right FDP, CVP and SVP put together, so that the latter had to follow suit by setting up women's sections. Their motivation to seek public positions was boosted by their first electoral successes. In many bodies the proportion of women doubled or even trebled. An example is Canton Lucerne which has an above-average women's representation of four members in the Federal Assembly. The recipe for this success was a non-party committee by the name of “More women in the government” supported by 25 organisations.

Creating their own lobby

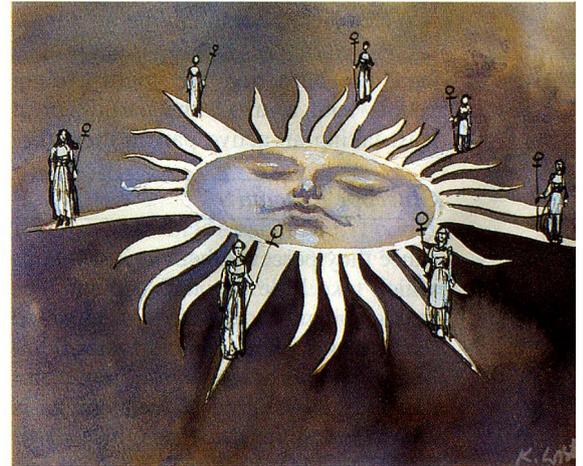
For the moment there is no way of telling if this trend will also mark the 1995 federal elections and future cantonal and municipal elections. In women's circles it is assumed that the spirit of March 3, 1993, is still abroad and that the famous “woman power” still works. At any rate some of the courses and committees are now coming up with presumptuous-sounding catch-phrases such as “Women join in”. Women have now compensated for their absence from men's business and military associations by setting up closely interwoven networks and lobby-like groups.

“Also the job of men”

At their first women's conference in Berne Christian Democrat women called on their male party colleagues to back them up with the slogan “Promo-

ting women is also the job of men”. Anton Cottier, the CVP chairman and the only man around, assured them that the party needed women, and not only as voters. “Promoting women means making way for women in the legislative and the executive”, he said. CVP women are well armed for the elections with the brochure “We build on women” and a handbook for woman candidates.

“Women make up more than half! Vote for women”. This is the slogan of the non-party and non-denominational



Women's Bureau of Canton Berne, an umbrella organisation of women's associations representing their civic, social and economic interests at the regional, cantonal and federal levels. “Women vote women”: this motto has already been tried out by woman candidates for the Canton Berne legislative and executive bodies. And “Be tough – Still be a woman” is the slogan of the women's organisations of the centre-right parties represented in the Federal Council with their present strategy of overstepping party lines. The intention is to profit from the decades-long progress made by their many forbears in the battle for equality and equal rights. But they do maintain the distinction between themselves and women to the left of centre.

Harvest time for women?

Even if women have become more prominent and have made a good showing, it remains true that although there is far more talk about woman candidates men are still in the majority. What the latter are afraid of is not so much the elections themselves as the time following them: “The one after you on the list is a woman; wouldn't you like to step down?” A number of men elected to office have already been asked this question. ■