

7th February 2021: 50 Years of Federal Voting Rights for Swiss Women

Manifesto CH2021: "Full Steam Ahead!"

Dampf machen! – A toute vapeur! – Avanti Tutta!

Until 1971 Swiss women were denied the right to vote, and deprived of their human rights. They were deliberately prevented from exercising their democratic rights to help shape their legal system and their society. This anniversary offers an opportunity to recognize this injustice. An apology from the Federal Council is under discussion.

The women board members of CH2021 are less interested in an apology than in something more fundamental and future oriented.

*We call on the Federal Council to schedule a day in the next session to recognize and acknowledge this injustice and the consequences of denying women the right to vote. The aim is to use the deficit identified to formulate **a binding action plan** to realize **true equality**. The knowledge and understanding gained should make the Federal Assembly, the government, the public and most of all the voters aware of their collective responsibility to shape social conditions **to overcome all forms of discrimination**.*

Manifesto CH2021

1. The need for insight and public debate

Firstly, we require **recognition of the fact** that denying Swiss women **the right to vote was unjust**. From the 19th century onwards, women and women's groups and some men repeatedly demanded women's right to vote. In 1957, the Federal Council in its message on the introduction of women's suffrage¹, finally stated that the new refusal was a **violation of the “commandments of justice” and of “democracy”** and was therefore unjust. From this point in time everyone would know that the human dignity of women was violated by the denial of their right to vote and that they were denied the recognition of being human beings with equal value to men. Accordingly, they could not participate as equals in shaping society and democracy. In short: they were denied **the right to have and to claim rights**.

Secondly, we are interested in a **public debate** and **joint reflection** on how this injustice could and will continue to occur, and whether the consequences and effects which have stemmed from it will continue to grow. This is why we want to reflect upon the need to overcome **all forms of discrimination** – going beyond the question of women's suffrage.

¹ Bundesblatt Nr. 10. Bern. 7.3.1957: 729. Die Botschaft des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Einführung des Frauenstimm- und Wahlrechts in eidgenössischen Angelegenheiten vom 22.2.1957 ist eine ausführliche Stellungnahme des Bundesrates anlässlich zweier Postulate von Ständerat Picot und Grendelmeier zur dieser Thematik. Botschaft 1957

2. Looking back: How did this injustice come about? What are the consequences?

- For decades there was a dispute as to whether women were included in Article 4 of the 1874 Federal Constitution which stated that : "All Swiss are equal before the law". Time and time again the fact that Switzerland was a "man's country" and that "only Swiss citizens of the male sex were included", was insisted upon.² **Women were not equal to men** and therefore could not be equal, or claim the same rights as men. As a result, they were excluded from political participation and for a long time had no **influence on the legal system** and the structure of society. This was not only a violation of legal equality as an **essential element of democracy**, but also a violation of human dignity.
- In society, men and women were assigned with **different characteristics**: men were seen as being rational, active, meaningful, valuable and superior, while women were seen as being emotional, passive, insignificant and inferior. Because of this, a **different place in society** is attributed to women: work and politics versus family, public versus private. The consequence of this classification **still exists today** as not only are women still viewed as being **inferior** to men but, in addition, their activities in the family are not classified as work and are unpaid. This work is also not reflected in the Gross Domestic Product, (GDP), the calculation of the value of the total output of our economy. In addition, their work in the professional area is both paid less and is less respected. The constant reminder of this inferior status led to the **ultimate denial of their right** to demand political rights.
- Some men were not and are still not ready to give up the **privileges, advantages and comforts** that are associated with this division and evaluation of the sexes and their roles. Women's opportunities to defend themselves against their disadvantages were and still are narrowly limited - politically (men's committees), economically (including wage inequality), socially (care work, scarce time resources). This is what makes overcoming gender equality deficits so hard.
- One of the most **profound consequences** that women experienced, because of the denial of their right to vote, may be that many of them have **internalized the belief of their own inferiority**. The constant call to become 'like men' in order to be allowed to experience justice, is a repeated and constant attack on their dignity.
- All of this does not only concern the past; Women continue to experience discrimination, injustice and humiliation, including domestic and public violence. **With the introduction of women's suffrage in 1971 - despite all the achievements - the disadvantages have not been overcome**. Women are still treated as if they do not deserve equality.

3. Looking ahead: Call for Action! "Full Steam ahead"

We call on the Federal Council to schedule a day in the next session to recognize and acknowledge this injustice and the consequences of denying women the right to vote. The aim is to use the deficit identified to formulate a **binding action plan to realize true equality**. The knowledge and understanding gained should make the Federal Assembly, the government, the public and most of all the voters aware of their collective responsibility to shape social conditions **to overcome all forms of discrimination**.

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² Botschaft 1957, S. 782