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**Strong Ties between Independant Organizations**

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**Abstract:**

Although Swiss unions are notionally independent from political parties, scholars have distinguished three currents within the Swiss labour movement: a left-wing current around the Swiss Trade Union Confederation (SGB-USS), related to Social Democrats (PS-PS); a Catholic current around Travail.Suisse, related to Christian Democrats (CVP-PDC); and a non-aligned, politically moderate current, which consists of autonomous white-collar employee associations (e.g the KV). Whereas the relations between Travail.Suisse and the CVP-PDC deteriorated during the past decade, all Swiss unions consolidated or even strengthened their ties with the Social Democrats, despite a declining working class vote for the SP-PS. This suggests that changes in Swiss party–union relations do not so much reflect changing social cleavages, but rather the contingent political opportunity structures built into Switzerland’s direct democratic political system that strengthens to the role of interest association vis-à-vis political parties.

**Keywords:**

Switzerland, trade unions, employer’s organization, direct democracy, social cleavages, political opportunity structures, interest politics, corporatism, catholic labour movement, socialist labour movement

## Chapter 12

# Strong ties between independent organizations. Unions and political parties in Switzerland

*Roland Erne and Sebastian Schief*

### Introduction

Relationships between Swiss unions and Swiss political parties are rather informal but not necessarily weak. According to their rulebooks, all unions are politically independent and none is affiliated to a political party. Yet the biggest union confederation retains very strong individual ties with the social democrats and the party of the new left, the Greens. Every third social democratic or Green MP is, or has been, a union official.

The liberal and Protestant founders of the Swiss federation in 1848 were heavily influenced by the socio-economic and political tradition of the USA. Accordingly, the federal Swiss system of interest politics initially developed along the pluralist lines described by Tocqueville, rather than according to the unitarist thoughts of Rousseau (Hutson 1991; Erne 2014). Early industrialization and Switzerland's liberal political system led also to an early rise of workers' associations from the 1860s onwards. These associations not only assumed union and mutual insurance functions, but also stood candidates in elections and conducted referendum campaigns. In 1880, however, the first *Swiss Workers' Federation* dissolved itself, leading to the creation of two formally independent successor organizations, i.e. the SGB (*Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund/Union Syndicale Suisse*) and the SP (*Sozialdemokratische Partei/Parti Socialiste*) (Degen 2012).

In Switzerland, then, the major party of the left was not founded by the unions (as in Britain) but nor was the major union confederation founded by political parties (as in Italy). Rather, the SP and SGB are both formally independent offspring of the same socialist political family. At the same time, linguistic, regional, and religious differences militated against the political mobilization of the Swiss population along the class cleavage (Bartolini 2007). The early politicization of Catholic minorities provided the SGB and the SP with a powerful competitor for working class support. Although Catholic unions never surpassed the SGB, Catholic social teaching and the union movement played a significant role in the Catholic cantons governed by the CVP (*Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei/Parti démocrate-chrétien*). Following the secularization of Swiss society, the relationship between the Christian union confederation, *Travail.Suisse*, and the CVP lost a lot of its intensity. Autonomous employee associations also play a significant role in Swiss industrial relations and interest politics. Of these, the KV (*Kaufmännischer Verband/Société des employés de commerce*) is the biggest and most important. Although initially founded in 1873 to manage a vocational training system for administrative employees, the politically non-aligned KV has also taken up union functions in the area of collective bargaining (König 2009).

## **Background and Context**

The world economic crisis of the 1930s shattered liberal economic beliefs in Switzerland. Even so, in 1935, 57% of Swiss voters rejected a popular initiative by the labour movement which called for the inclusion of an anti-cyclical, anti-crisis article in the Swiss Constitution. Nonetheless, a majority of the country's liberal leaders subsequently agreed to integrate organized labour into the policymaking process. In 1937, employers and unions in the engineering sector signed a peace accord, which started Switzerland's ongoing commitment to social partnership (Fluder and Hotz-Hart 1998; Crouch 1993). At the beginning of the Second World War, the federal government appointed leading socialists

to reorganize the economy by way of a compromise between market and plan (Wenger 2010). And in 1943, liberal and Catholic members of parliament (MPs) elected a social democrat government minister for the first time.

Although the inclusion of organized labour was also a product of the promotion of Swiss ‘values’ – such as social partnership – in response to the threat from Nazi Germany, labour continued to be seen as a social interest that must be integrated in the policymaking process even after the war—not least given the rise of the Soviet Union. In 1947, the Swiss people accepted a constitutional amendment which not only provided the basis for the legal extension of collective agreements, but also obliged the government to organize a consultation process with all socially relevant interests before submitting legislative proposals to the two chambers of parliament. In addition, in 1959, the unwritten ‘magic formula’, which aims to ensure the proportional representation of all major parties in the government, became part of Switzerland’s governance regime.

Comparative research usually classifies the Swiss system of industrial relations as neo-corporatist (Katzenstein 1985; 1987; Crouch 1993). Yet, the categorization of this global hub of capitalism as a democratic corporatist country has also met with vociferous disapproval from scholars with social democratic leanings for whom Scandinavia provides a better model. The Swiss balance of class power has certainly been less favourable for labour than the Scandinavian one, although unions and left-wing parties have at times also been successful in using the country’s particular direct democratic institutions to their advantage: for example, by making their support for Swiss affiliation to the EU’s Single Market conditional upon labour-friendly accompanying measures (Wyler 2012; Afonso 2010). Hence, corporatist politics is said to remain strong in Switzerland - at least formally - (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008; Oesch 2007; Mach 2006; Armingeon 1997), even though the nature of corporatist arrangements differs substantially across policy areas and economic sectors. Whereas equal pay by nationality—i.e. the fight against social dumping—is, for

instance, enforced by a strong corporatist regime, equal pay by gender is governed by a much weaker, liberal policy regime (Erne and Imboden 2015).

The core of the problem in classifying Switzerland in terms of corporatism lies in the following interconnected aspects: the centralization and monopolization of interest groups; the balance of class power between them; their incorporation in policy formation and implementation; and the interaction between political parties in Switzerland's consociational democracy (Lijphart 1969). Switzerland's classification depends on the weighting of these dimensions. Those analyses that emphasize the limited power of the union movement or the decentralized system of wage bargaining (Fluder and Hotz-Hart 1998) emphasize the weakness of Swiss corporatism. Conversely, studies that emphasize the incorporation of organized interest groups in Switzerland's concordance democracy (Nollert 1995) conclude that Switzerland is a corporatist country, even if Swiss corporatism differs from Schmitter's ideal type (Erne 2008: 55). Any analysis of the relationship between unions and political parties has to take this into account since the specific framework of Swiss corporatism leads to different implementations and interpretations of this relationship.

In contrast to its (labour) policymaking regime however, other aspects of Swiss interest politics very much follow Tocqueville's classical pluralist philosophy (Erne 2014). Political campaigns and their funding, for example, are not regulated by law. There are no limits on corporate or individual donations or payments for consultancy activities to parties or individual politicians. Swiss law does not even include a provision that would oblige politicians to disclose the origins of the financial payments they receive. The parliament only publishes an annual list of MPs' self-declared, permanent, extra-parliamentary professional and consulting activities (Nationalrat 2015a; Ständerat 2015a) and a register of external persons who obtained one of the two additional passes ('access keys') allocated to each MP (Nationalrat 2015b; Ständerat 2015b). The access key register contains the

names of the representatives of leading Swiss interests, namely, those representing individual corporations, specialized lobbying firms, organized capital, and organized labour, and the names of the parliamentarian who acted as the gate-opener in each case. As corporations and interest groups can employ Switzerland's semi-professional, part-time MPs directly without having to declare what they pay them, they do not depend on paid lobbyists as much as their counterparts elsewhere. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO) has repeatedly urged Switzerland to introduce appropriate legislation to guarantee transparency in the funding of parties and individual MPs by private donors. So far, however, the Swiss government and the centre-right parliamentary majority have ignored its recommendations (GRECO 2013).

Neither is there public funding for political parties in Switzerland, in contrast to most other modern democracies. This explains why centre-left Swiss parties have far fewer financial resources at their disposal than their sister parties in almost all other Western democracies. The corruption of liberal political and economic elites, however, has nevertheless been an issue. In the late nineteenth century, the progressive democratic movement successfully challenged the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of the urban upper bourgeoisie. However, instead of introducing public funding for political parties or limits on campaign contributions, the democratic movement fought for the introduction of extensive direct democratic citizens' rights, free public education, progressive taxation, and active social policies (Bürgi 2014; Erne 2003). Consequently, two new direct democratic instruments were introduced into the Swiss constitution: the referendum, which entitles 50,000 citizens (1% of the population) to call for a popular vote on recently adopted laws; and the popular initiative, which entitles 100,000 citizens to propose a new constitutional amendment and to demand a binding popular vote on it. In addition, Swiss voters not only determine the number of seats a party will get in parliament,

but also choose the individual candidates. The two seats per canton in the Senate (*Ständerat*) are distributed according to a majoritarian, ‘first-two-past-the-two-posts’ system. In contrast, the seats in the House (*Nationalrat*) are distributed according to a proportional electoral system, in which voters can radically alter party lists through double preference votes for candidates on the same list (*Kumulieren*) but also for candidates of another party (*Panaschieren*).

Whereas these direct democratic rights have given citizens direct access to the political decision-making process, they have also further weakened the relative power of parties in comparison to interest groups. Swiss parties, indeed, are much more dependent on active citizens than are parties in other countries. This resonates well with classic democratic theory; it may also be more difficult to corrupt an entire people in a direct democracy than to corrupt an individual official in a representative democracy. Yet Swiss political parties are also much less independent of interest groups, notably organised capital but also organised labour, especially given the latter’s ability to access the political process directly through people’s initiatives and referendums as well as targeted electoral campaigns for individual candidates using the personal preference voting system. Given the lack of public funding, Swiss politics also heavily depends on private campaign contributions. As a result, financial contributions from business interests to their political allies far exceeds the political campaign spending of unions (Hermann 2013). The lack of public funding for political parties, however, also makes centre-left parties that do not attract a lot of business support even more dependent on trade union resources.

Swiss democracy, then, strengthens the power of interest groups and social movements in relation to political parties: hence the relative stability of corporatist arrangements and interest group-party relations across time (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Trade union density has also been declining in Switzerland – from 31% in 1960 to 16.2%<sup>1</sup> in 2013. Nevertheless, Swiss trade unions continue to be important political players, mainly

due to their capacity to derail or deter unwelcome laws through the use of direct democratic instruments.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, ‘as long as there is no broad agreement on reform’ (Armingeon 1997: 176), there is no policy change.

### **Which parties and trade unions?**

Since we are concerned with the relationship between trade unions and the *traditional* parties of the centre-left, ties with the new-left Greens (*Grüne Partei/Les Verts*, GP) are not examined, notwithstanding the very high proportion of current and former union officials in the Green parliamentary party (Ackermann 2011). We have also excluded the former communists (*Partei der Arbeit/Parti suisse du Travail, PdA*) because they do not have enduring representation in parliament. Given the relative importance of the Catholic labour movement in some parts of Switzerland however, we also look at unions’ ties with the CVP. In 2011, the SP obtained 18.7% of the popular vote and two of the seven seats in Switzerland’s power-sharing executive, whereas the CVP obtained 12.3% and one seat in the government. Given its strong position in the Catholic cantons however, the CVP has more deputies in the Swiss Senate (*Ständerat/Conseil des États*) than the SP.

On the other side of the equation, we focus on Switzerland’s two trade union confederations, the SGB and Travail.Suisse, as well as the biggest autonomous union, the KV. The SGB is Switzerland’s biggest trade union confederation. It is composed of sixteen affiliated unions, which organize around 370,000 members, i.e. roughly 50% of all unionized employees in Switzerland (SGB 2014). The SGB is denominationally neutral and notionally independent from partisan politics (SGB 2010: Article 3), even though, as explained above, it is an offspring of the socialist political family. Travail.Suisse is Switzerland’s second union confederation. It is composed of eleven affiliates representing 150,000 workers (Travail.Suisse 2013a; 2013b) and was formed in 2002 by the merger of the Christian confederation (*Christlichnationaler Gewerkschaftsbund/Confédération des syndicats chrétiens*) and the non-denominational Federation of Swiss Employee Associations

(*Vereinigung Schweizerischer Angestelltenverbände/Fédération des sociétés suisses d'employés, VSA*). This merger was not a merger between equals since VSA's biggest affiliate, the office workers' employee association KV, had already left the VSA in 2000 (König 2009). In 2012, another former VSA affiliate, *Angestellte Schweiz*, also left Travail.Suisse, as it wanted to be seen as an agent of the *Mittelstand* (the upper middle-class) rather than as a labour union (Angestellte Schweiz 2013). Travail.Suisse's constitution still refers to Christian social ethics. At the same time, it stipulates that the confederation shall act independently from religious denominations and political parties (Travail.Suisse 2009: Article 2). Most of its affiliates also explicitly refer to Christian social ethics, including the *Hotel and Gastro Union* (22,000 members), which is now Travail.Suisse's biggest former VSA-affiliate (Hotel and Gastro Union 2012).

As 30% of Switzerland's unionized workforce is not affiliated to any national overarching organization (SGB 2014), we also decided to include the most relevant autonomous union in our study. With 55,000 members, the KV is Switzerland's biggest non-affiliated employee association. The organization is denominationally neutral and independent from partisan politics (KV 2013a). Although the KV avoids calling itself a *Gewerkschaft* (trade union) – probably because of the workerist and left-wing connotation of this term in Switzerland – and defines itself as an organization of the employees and apprentices of all professions in commerce and related sectors, the organization acts as a union in the area of collective bargaining. The KV also runs one of Switzerland's most popular vocational education programmes, namely the *KV-Lehre* (KV-Apprenticeship) for administrative employees. The KV-owned business schools are also Switzerland's biggest operator in the field of commercial vocational and further (college-level) education.

## **Relationships Today: Mapping the Links**

The following sections discuss the current relationship of the SP and the CVP, which historically were linked to the socialist and the Catholic labour movement respectively, with three union organizations – the Red trade union confederation, SGB, the Christian union confederation, Travail.Suisse, and the white-collar employees’ association, KV.

The responses to our survey confirm that Swiss union organizations get opportunities to exercise considerable political influence. At the same time, the respondents from the SGB, Travail.Suisse, and the KV declare unanimously that they are non-partisan. Accordingly, there are no overlapping organizational structures between the political parties and the trade unions. Unions are not collectively affiliated to a particular party, nor are there any provisions in party or union rulebooks that would guarantee one-sided or mutual representation in national decision-making bodies (see Table 1).

[Table 12.1 about here]

Conversely however, the responses of party and union officials with regard to the very same party–union relationship repeatedly contradict each other. As shown by the recurrent appearance of contradictory data (c.d.) in Table 2 and even more in Table 3, the party and union respondents often disagree on whether there is durable (Table 2) or occasional (Table 3) party–union cooperation.

[Table 12.2 about here]

[Table 12.3 about here]

Fortunately, however, we were able to cut through this confusion and provide our own judgements (CJ in the tables) by consulting alternative written sources, namely, party and union documents, by conducting informal conversations with leading SP and SGB, and by

falling back on our long-term engagement with the Swiss trade union movement from a comparative European perspective.

**SP: organized labour's political party**

Both the *SP* and the *SGB* are heirs of the socialist labour movement. Although the *SP* no longer sees itself as a party that represents a particular social group, the replies of its federal secretariat and parliamentary party to our questionnaire confirm close and ongoing cooperation with the *SGB*. In addition, the *SP* secretariat acknowledges material campaign contributions (including office space) from the *SGB* and its affiliates. The *SGB* secretariat, in turn, confirms durable links with the *SP* too, although it judges that the *SP*–*SGB* connections at organizational level are less intense.

There are no overlapping organizational structures between the *SP* and the *SGB*. Nevertheless, both organizations report well-organized interaction involving, for example, joint referendum campaigns, and a tacit norm of mutual representation in national decision-making bodies. *SGB* delegates also have the statutory right to attend the *SP* congress, however without voting rights. Interestingly, the *SP* again sees stronger and more durable links on an organizational level with the *SGB* than vice versa (see Table 2). Nevertheless, the two organizations do not differ in the assessment of their mutual occasional links (see Table 3).

There is also tacit agreement about mutual representation in national decision-making bodies and about regular meetings of the party and the union organization. It is, however, difficult to distinguish leading *SGB* from *SP* officials analytically since many of them have leadership roles in both organizations. *SP* president and *SP* senator, Christian Levrat, for example, was, like four of nine *SP* leaders since 1919 before him, a union leader. He also continues to play an important role in the *SGB*, for example, as regular discussion partner and gate-opener—in the very literal sense—for his successor as leader of the *SGB*'s communications sector union *Syndicom*, as well as for the *SGB*'s central secretary in charge

of legal affairs (Ständerat 2015b).<sup>3</sup> In turn, SGB president and SP senator, Paul Rechsteiner, like all his predecessors (with one exception) since 1919, is a leading figure in the SP's parliamentary party. The SP and the SGB also organize joint conferences and campaigns on a regular basis. These are usually of a temporary nature, for example in relation to a referendum campaign on a particular topic. These committees often also include other organizations, namely, other parties, interest groups, and social movements that share the campaign's objectives. As there are nationwide votes almost every three months, such joint campaign committees assume very significant functions in the Swiss system of direct democracy.

Both the federal SP secretariat and the SP parliamentary party also regularly invite the SGB to participate in parliamentary party events; this confirms that strong *inter-organizational links* exist between the two organizations. The SGB also cooperates fairly closely with the Green Party (GP). This cooperation, however, is less intensive than the SP–SGB relationship. Although the proportion of SGB union officials in the GP parliamentary party is actually higher than it is in the SP (Ackermann 2011), former and current officials of SGB unions also play a leading role in the SP's parliamentary party. Fifteen of the forty-six members of the SP parliamentary party in the lower chamber are, or have been, union officials at national or regional level.<sup>4</sup> In the Senate, the proportion amounts to three out of eleven, as indicated in Figure 12.1a and 12.1b.

[Figure 12.1a and 12.1b about here]

The traditional bonds between the SP and the SGB unions remain very strong; but the federal SP secretariat and its parliamentary party also confirm improving cooperation with the Christian union confederation *Travail.Suisse*. Even though there are no overlapping organizational structures, *Travail.Suisse* reports a remarkable improvement in its relations

with the *SP* following the election of *SP* MP Josiane Aubert as Travail.Suisse deputy president in 2009 and her replacement with another *SP* MP, Jacques-André Maire, when she resigned from both posts in 2014. In contrast to the *SGB–SP* relationship, however, Travail.Suisse seems to be more interested in getting access to the *SP* than vice-versa. In its answers regarding organizational links with the *SP*, the *SGB* indicates that the *SP* proactively seeks cooperation with it, whereas Travail.Suisse states that it initiates cooperation with the *SP*. Even so, the *SP*'s answers do not indicate any difference in treatment regarding any particular trade union organizations. At the same time, the *SP* acknowledges material campaign contributions from Travail.Suisse.

In its response to our questionnaire, the biggest autonomous trade union *KV* portrays itself as a non-partisan organization that represents the interests of middle and higher-ranking employees. In contrast to the *SGB* and Travail.Suisse, it describes its relationship to all parties as distant. This, however, does not mean that the *KV* is apolitical. On the contrary, the *KV* publishes the political affiliations of all members of its executive. Of the nine members on its central committee, three are members of the right-wing Liberal Party (FDP), two of the left-wing *SP* (including *KV* president Jositsch), and one of the centrist *CVP* (*KV* 2014). Likewise, the *KV* actively supports candidates across the political spectrum. As mentioned above, the specificities of the Swiss electoral system, and in particular people's ability to influence the composition of parties' parliamentary groups through the use of individual preference votes, allows non-aligned organizations to exercise significant political influence. The *KV*'s targeted support for *KV*-friendly candidates across the entire political spectrum may be as effective as the *SGB*'s traditional alliance with the *SP*, as indicated by the contradictory answers of the *SP* and *KV* to our questions.

In their responses on durable and occasional organizational links, the *SP* reports close (but informal) cooperation between the two organizations, whereas the *KV* denies

any cooperation. What we find instead are a few one-way and occasional inter-organizational links. The SP invites the KV on a regular basis to its national congress and consults KV leaders in other situations. Moreover, the SP's parliamentary group invites the KV to ordinary meetings or seminars. Those inter-organizational links appear to be initiated by the party. At the same time, the formal distinction between the SP and the KV should not be overstated, considering, for example, that the KV's president, Daniel Jositsch, is also a leading figure within its parliamentary party, as is another local KV official (see Figure 12.1b). In addition, the SP also acknowledges receipt of material campaign contributions from the KV, despite the KV's statement to the contrary in the questionnaire. However, neither the SP secretariat nor its parliamentary group is aware of any contributions to individual SP politicians, which the KV mentioned in its response on that topic. In addition to personal campaign contributions, KV-related MPs may also be in receipt of a considerable extra income if appointed to any KV-related position. Since the SP MPs, Daniel Jositsch, became KV president and board member of several KV companies for example, he is entitled to receive an additional remuneration in excess of 100,000 CHF per year (KV 2013b), on top of his remuneration as member of parliament and his salary as law professor at the University of Zürich<sup>5</sup>. In sum, the SP–KV relation is primarily based on personal relationships and mutual interests rather than a broader attachment to shared principles and larger policy frameworks. The KV's relationships with political parties in fact rather mirror patterns of liberal interest politics than corporatist interest intermediation (Erne 2014).

### **CVP: a Catholic party that is losing its traditional trade union links**

In their responses<sup>6</sup>, both organizations confirm that there are no joint *SGB–CVP* structures (Table 1) and that reciprocal, durable inter-organizational links between the SGB and the CVP are largely non-existent (Table 2). Nor are any former or current SGB officials members of the CVP parliamentary party (Figure 12.1a and 12.1b). These results are hardly

surprising, if one considers the distinct ideological legacies of the two organizations. Incidentally, the CVP respondent still believes that her party and its parliamentary group represent a particular social group in the Swiss political system, which arguably is Switzerland's Catholic population rather than its working class.

The picture changes somewhat when we compare the answers of the CVP and the SGB in relation to the questions as captured by Table 3 and Figure 12.3. Whereas the SGB denies any significant cooperation with the CVP or its parliamentary group, the CVP mentions several one-way and occasional inter-organizational links, such as an invitation by the SGB to its national congress. These differences, however, seem to be a result of different understandings of what cooperation might mean rather than of strategic answers by the two organizations. If cooperation means more than an occasional invitation to events however, there are indeed only loose connections between the CVP and the SGB.

Despite the continuing importance of Christian social values however, *Travail.Suisse's* response to our questionnaire indicates a notable loosening of its ties with its traditional political allies within the CVP. No member of the CVP parliamentary party replaced the former CVP MP from Canton Tessin and cantonal union official Meinrado Robbiani as deputy president of Travail.Suisse, after he decided not to seek a new parliamentary mandate in 2011. As a result, Robbiani also had to hold on to his mandate as Travail.Suisse deputy president during the legislative period (2011–2015). As Figure 12.1b shows, only one member of the CVP's parliamentary party is, or has been, an official of a Travail.Suisse union, namely, the Nationalrat member Stefan Müller-Altermatt, who became deputy president of *Transfair*, the Christian public service union in 2014. However, it should also be noted that the Christian union movement always played an inferior role within the CVP. In contrast to the SP, none of the twenty Christian democrat party leaders since 1919 has been a union official (Altermatt 2010).

In contrast to Travail.Suisse however, the CVP respondent nevertheless did not believe that the relationship between Travail.Suisse and the CVP has become more distant over time. On the contrary, she not only continues to consider Travail.Suisse as a member of the Catholic political family, but also argues that relations towards the confederation have improved over the last ten years. Moreover, the party considers the links to the overarching organization stronger than vice versa (see Figure 12.3). Finally, the CVP does not report receiving campaign contributions from Travail.Suisse.

There are no overlapping organizational structures between the CVP and Travail.Suisse, but we find several durable and reciprocal inter-organizational links, such as joint conferences and campaigns, occurring on a regular basis. The party and the Christian trade union confederation also indicate instances of occasional cooperation on a regular basis. The party is invited to the national congress of Travail.Suisse, and to ordinary meetings, seminars, and conferences, and vice versa. Moreover, the two organizations invite each other on an ad-hoc basis to discuss public policy.

As in the case of the SP, the CVP reports durable as well as occasional connections with the KV, whereas the KV denies any cooperation between the two organizations, such as collaboration in joint committees or the presence of informal but implicit cooperation agreements.

There are neither overlapping organizational structures between the CVP and the KV nor durable and reciprocal inter-organizational links between the two, with the exception of occasional cooperation on joint referendum campaign committees. Nevertheless, one CVP senator, Konrad Graber, is according to his official website also working as a KV executive (*Beirat*) in Lucerne (Figure 12.1b); this is certainly helpful as Swiss federal elections are either won, or lost at the cantonal level. Even so, the CVP does not seem to be the party with the closest connections to the KV, possibly given the white-collar union's geographical strongholds in the urban and Protestant rather than the rural

and Catholic parts of Switzerland. As stated above, the KV's federal executive is dominated by FDP and SP members.

### **The overall picture**

The SP and the SGB share enduring strong bonds of the sort shared by siblings of the same political family. The links between the organisations are of remarkable stability. The SP–Travail.Suisse dyad, on the other hand, developed more recently. There are new ties across traditional political family boundaries. The SP–KV relation is primarily based on personal relationships and mutual interests rather than a broader attachment to shared principles and larger policy frameworks. The KV's relationships with political parties in fact rather mirror patterns of liberal interest politics than corporatist interest intermediation (Erne 2014).

The traditional weakness of the link between CVP and SGB is affirmed by our data: the link hardly exists. In contrast, the traditionally stronger relationship between the CVP and Travail.Suisse has weakened over time and may even be in crisis. The CVP-KV dyad is marked by personnel links, as was the case with the SP. The links between the traditional allies, Travail.Suisse and the CVP, are definitely still stronger than those between SGB and the CVP. At the same time, however, Travail.Suisse now seems to be better connected to the SP than to the CVP.

The organizations were asked to rate the overall degree of closeness and distance between the party and the union confederation during the last five years (see Figure 12.3). The results are broadly in line with our own expectations. The SP and the SGB describe their relationship as fairly close, even though neither see themselves as parts of an integrated organizational structure. In addition, both organizations state that there have been no changes in their relationship during the past ten years.

[Figure 12.2a and 12.2b about here]

More surprisingly, the SP and Travail.Suisse also describe their relationship as fairly close. We would have expected the SGB–SP link to be seen as closer than the SP–Travail.Suisse link, given the different ideological background of the two trade union confederations. Yet, both the SP and Travail.Suisse state that their relationship has changed over the last ten years for the following reasons: firstly, the election of the first SP MP as vice president of Travail.Suisse, which is seen by both organizations as a fundamental change in their relationship; secondly, Travail.Suisse also mentioned the growing secularization of its membership base.

[Figure 12.3 about here]

Furthermore, the SP describes its links to KV as fairly close, in contrast to the KV. The SP respondent even stated that the SP–KV relationship was as close as the one the party enjoyed with Travail.Suisse and SGB. The KV, however, qualifies the SP–KV relationship as distanced, which seems to be closer to the truth, if one considers the answers captured in earlier tables. Be that as it may, there is consensus between the SP and the KV insofar as both agree that their relationship has not changed over time.

As expected, the relationship between the CVP and the SGB is interpreted as rather distant or ad-hoc by both organizations. This is consistent with our earlier findings. Both organizations acknowledge that the fact they come from different political traditions limits the possible range for collaboration. The CVP and the SGB also confirm that there has been no change in their relationship over the last ten years.

The results from Travail.Suisse are even more surprising, as the CVP and the Christian union confederation portray their relationship very differently. Whereas the CVP sees a fairly close relationship, Travail.Suisse understands it as an ad-hoc relationship.

Likewise, relations between the two organizations, according to the CVP, are closer than they were ten years ago, whereas Travail.Suisse sees, in contrast, a more distant relationship. The reasons given by Travail.Suisse for the changing relationship appear to be more convincing, however. Firstly, the social-Christian wing has indeed lost a lot of ground within the CVP. Secondly, the political standpoints of the two organizations are increasingly moving apart. Thirdly, even though Travail.Suisse continues to reserve one of its two deputy president positions for a member of the CVP parliamentary party, nobody was appointed to this position during the 2011-2015 legislative period.

In turn, both the CVP and the KV confirm a rather distant relationship between each other, which is very much in line with the findings reported earlier tables. And neither organization sees any change in the relationship over time. Finally, it is also noteworthy that the SGB acknowledges good relations with the GP – mainly because of good interpersonal links with GP leaders and MPs but also because of shared political standpoints. Travail.Suisse, in turn, named the Protestant People's Party (EVP), the GP, and Green Liberal Party (GLP) as regular dialogue partners, whereas the KV claims to keep an equal distance from all major parties.

### **Explaining stability and change across time**

This chapter first and foremost demonstrates that Swiss unions' influence on the major party of the left, the SP, did not decline over the past decade, despite the ongoing decline in the working class vote for the SP that began in 1971 (Rennwald 2014).

Swiss voters still use their preferential votes for individual candidates in a way that leads to a very high proportion of union officials in the SP parliamentary party. This pattern may be explained by a higher proportion of employees from higher social classes within the Swiss union movement (Oesch 2006: 168), especially in the public sector. In addition, it is likely that the SP share is higher among SGB unionized working class voters, although

corresponding survey data are not available. Be that as it may, the bonds between the traditional socialist sister organizations, the SP and the SGB, continue to be strong and enduring, even though the class composition of the SP vote has changed over time. At the same time, both the SP and the SGB have made new alliances that go beyond their traditional partners. Whereas the SGB is now almost as well connected with the GP, the SP has significantly strengthened its ties with Christian and non-aligned white-collar unions.

Furthermore, the ongoing secularization of Swiss society and the decreasing cohesion among the Catholic community, as well as the increasing role of corporate donations in party politics, have led to a declining influence of the Christian union movement within the CVP. Even though the CVP continues to enjoy broad cross-class support (Rennwald 2014), it is facing increasing difficulties in safeguarding its ties with the Catholic union movement. In 1995 for example, the then Christian-social MP and Travail.Suisse president, Hugo Fasel, caused upheaval when he refused to join the CVP parliamentary party and opted for the Green group instead. The relations between the SP and Travail.Suisse improved significantly in turn, and this also suggests that the role of the SP in relation to Switzerland's union movement is changing significantly. Instead of just being the traditional partner of the socialist SGB, the SP also became a party of reference for the Catholic labour movement. The SP has even consolidated its relations with the non-aligned white-collar unions, although the KV is keen to reiterate its political independence.

## **Conclusion**

Although Swiss unions are notionally independent from political parties, political scientists and industrial relations scholars have distinguished three currents within the Swiss labour movement: a left-wing current around the SGB, related to the social democratic tradition

(SP); a Christian current around Travail.Suisse, related to the Christian democratic tradition (CVP); and a non-aligned, politically moderate current, which consists of autonomous white-collar employee associations, such as the KV. At the same time, analysts of social and political change in Western Europe (Crouch 1999; 2004) have suggested that the social relations and political cleavages that shaped the formation of the labour movement, and the corresponding party–union relationships, have been subject to profound changes. Our research confirms an ongoing strong link between the SGB, but moreover a growing relationship between the formerly distant Travail.Suisse and the SP. The link between the CVP and Travail.Suisse, on the other hand, seems to have weakened over time.

The consolidation of unions' influence within the SP during the last two decades has not only foiled regressive social and labour market policies, such as pension age increases and labour market deregulations, but unions have also played an important role in putting equal pay by gender and by nationality on the political agenda (Erne and Imboden 2015). The continuing political influence of unions, however, is as much a result of their own efforts as it is an outcome of Switzerland's particular political system. As elsewhere in Western Europe, the parliament is now playing a more important role in social policy making by comparison to the 1960s and 1970s when "the major decisions had usually already been made in preceding negotiations in corporatist and administrative realms" (Häusermann 2010: 192). Nevertheless, the representatives of capital and labour still exercise considerable influence, due not only to their ability to use Switzerland's direct democratic institutions to their advantage but also to the lack of public funding for political parties. This chapter has confirmed intensive ties between the SP and the unions. We claim with Armingeon (1997) that mutual support between parties and interest groups, a necessity in corporatist systems, is still strongest between the SP and the SGB in Switzerland. If one is considering the history of business interests in Swiss policy making (Leimgruber 2008), however, a similar project on the impact of moneyed corporate

interests on centre-right parties would almost certainly detect an even bigger interest-group influence on Swiss party politics.

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## Appendix

### Tables and figures to be inserted in chapter

Table 12.1 *Overlapping organizational structures between party central organization and union confederation as of 2013-14<sup>1</sup>*

<i>Party-confederation dyad – CPO</i>	SP-SGB		SP-TS		SP-KV		CVP-SGB		CVP-TS		CVP-KV	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
National/local collective affiliation (membership) of a union	n.a.	No	n.a.	No	n.a.	No	n.a.	No	n.a.	No	n.a.	No
The party enjoys representation rights in at least one of the union's national decision-making bodies <sup>2</sup>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
The union enjoys representation rights in at least one of the party's national decision-making bodies <sup>2,3</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

<sup>1</sup>There are no LPG cells in this table as we assumed the questions (link types) do not apply to the legislative party group and they were thus not asked. 'P/U' indicates responses from party/trade union questionnaires and 'CJ' signifies the authors 'coded judgment' based on alternative sources in cases of diverging or missing P/U answers. 'c.d.' means contradictory data (diverging P/U answers), 'n.d.' means no data (informant didn't know/missing/unclear) and 'n.a.' means not applicable in this case.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 2 for a description of the specific rights/bodies that have been mapped.

<sup>3</sup> SGB delegates have the statutory right to attend the SP congress, however without voting rights.

Table 12.2 Reciprocal, durable inter-organizational links between party central organization/ legislative group and union confederation last five years<sup>1</sup>

<i>Party-confederation dyad – CPO</i>	SP-SGB		SP-TS		SP-KV		CVP-SGB		CVP-TS		CVP-KV	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agreements about one-sided/mutual representation in national decision-making bodies	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	No
Permanent joint committee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Temporary joint committee(s)	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes
Formal agreements about regular meetings between party and organization	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tacit agreements about regular meetings between party and organization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No
Joint conferences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Joint campaigns	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Official social media connections	n.d.	n.d.	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<i>Party-confederation dyad – LPG</i>	SP-SGB		SP-TS		SP-KV		CVP-SGB		CVP-TS		CVP-KV	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Tacit agreements about one-sided/mutual representation in national decision-making bodies	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	c.d.	No
Permanent joint committee(s)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Temporary joint committee(s)	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes
Formal agreements about regular meetings between party and organization	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tacit agreements about regular meetings between party and organization	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No
Joint conferences	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Joint campaigns	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	No	No	No	No
Official social media connections	n.d.	n.d.	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

<sup>1</sup> 'P/U' indicates responses from party/trade union questionnaires, 'CJ' signifies the authors 'coded judgment' based on alternative sources in cases of diverging or missing P/U answers. 'c.d.' means contradictory data (diverging P/U answers), 'n.d.' means no data (informant didn't know/missing/unclear) and 'n.a.' means not applicable in this case.

Table 12.3 One-way, occasional links at the organizational level between party central organization/legislative group and union confederation last five years<sup>1</sup>

<i>Party-confederation dyad – CPO</i>	SP-SGB		SP-TS		SP-KV		CVP-SGB		CVP-TS		CVP-KV	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invitation to party to participate in the organization's national congress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Invitation to organization to participate in the party's national congress/conference	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No
Invitations to organization to participate in the party's ordinary meetings, seminars, and conferences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to party to participate in ordinary organization meetings, seminars, and conferences	Yes	Yes	No	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to organization to special consultative arrangements initiated by the party	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to party to special consultative arrangements initiated by the organization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	No	No
<i>Party-confederation dyad – LPG</i>	SP-SGB		SP-TS		SP-KV		CVP-SGB		CVP-TS		CVP-KV	
	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ	P/U	CJ
Invitation to party to participate in the organization's national congress	c.d.	n.a.	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Invitation to organization to participate in the party's national congress/conference	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No
Invitations to organization to participate in the party's ordinary meetings, seminars, and conferences	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to party to participate in ordinary organization meetings, seminars, and conferences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to organization to special consultative arrangements initiated by the party	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No
Invitations to party to special consultative arrangements initiated by the organization	Yes	Yes	c.d.	Yes	c.d.	No	c.d.	No	Yes	Yes	c.d.	No

<sup>1</sup> 'P/U' indicates responses from party/trade union questionnaires, 'CJ' signifies the authors 'coded judgment' based on alternative sources in cases of diverging or missing P/U answers. 'c.d.' means contradictory data (diverging P/U answers), 'n.d.' means no data (informant didn't know/missing/unclear) and 'n.a.' means not applicable in this case.

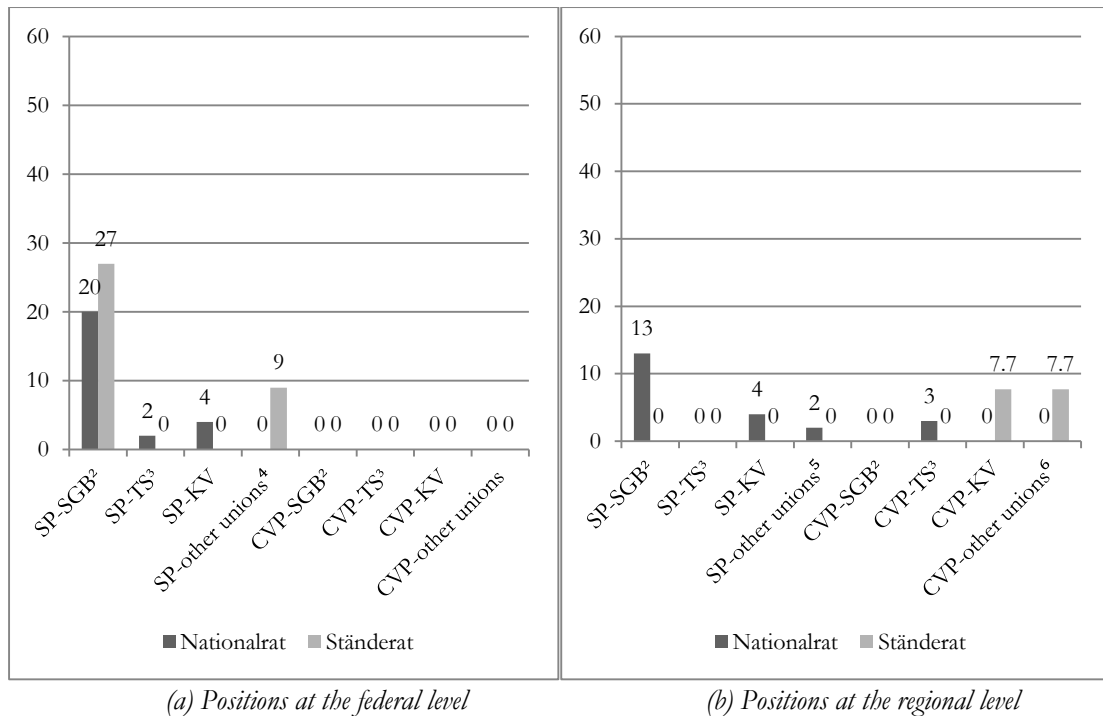


Figure 12.1a and 12.1b Share of SP and CVP MPs in 2013/14 that hold or have held positions as officials or staff in unions at the federal or regional level.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Only permanent representatives and deputy representatives who attend the entire term are included. ‘n.d.’ means no data (missing). N of MPs is 46 for SP and 29 for CVP in the Nationalrat, 11 for SP and 13 for CVP in the Ständerat.

<sup>2</sup> SGB unions; <sup>3</sup> Travail.Suisse unions; <sup>4</sup> Midwives’ Association (SHV/FSSF); <sup>5</sup> Teachers’ Association (LCH); <sup>6</sup> Solothurn State Employees’ Association (SSV).

Sources: Nationalrat (2015a); Ständerat (2015a); Ackermann (2011); MPs’ personal web sites; communication with A. Pelizzari (president, *Communauté genevoise d’action syndicale*), 17 April 2015, and R. Zimmermann (former general secretary, SGB), 18 April 2015.

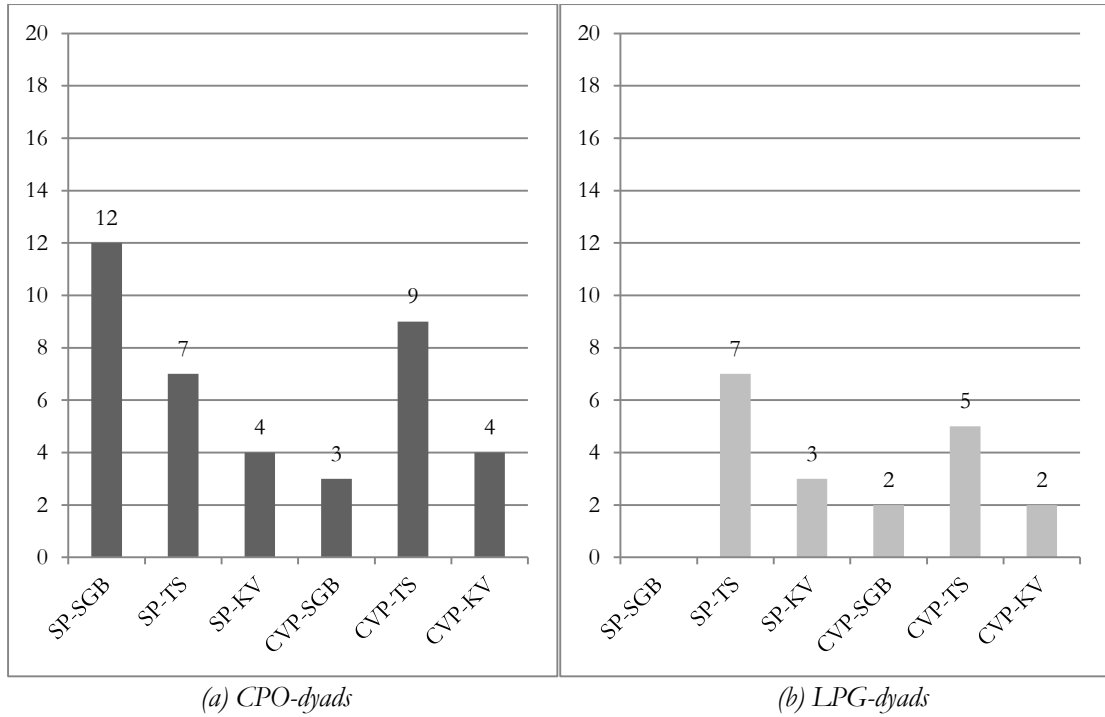


Figure 12.2a and 12.2b Total link scores of central party organization-trade union relationships and legislative party-trade union relationships (0-20/0-12).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The theoretical maximum link score is 20 for the CPO-dyads and 12 for LPG-dyads since some link items are unlikely to apply to the legislative party group and were thus not included in this part of the survey. However, when comparing dyads involving CPOs with those involving LPGs, one should still keep in mind that the latter's maximum involves fewer links than the former's top scores.

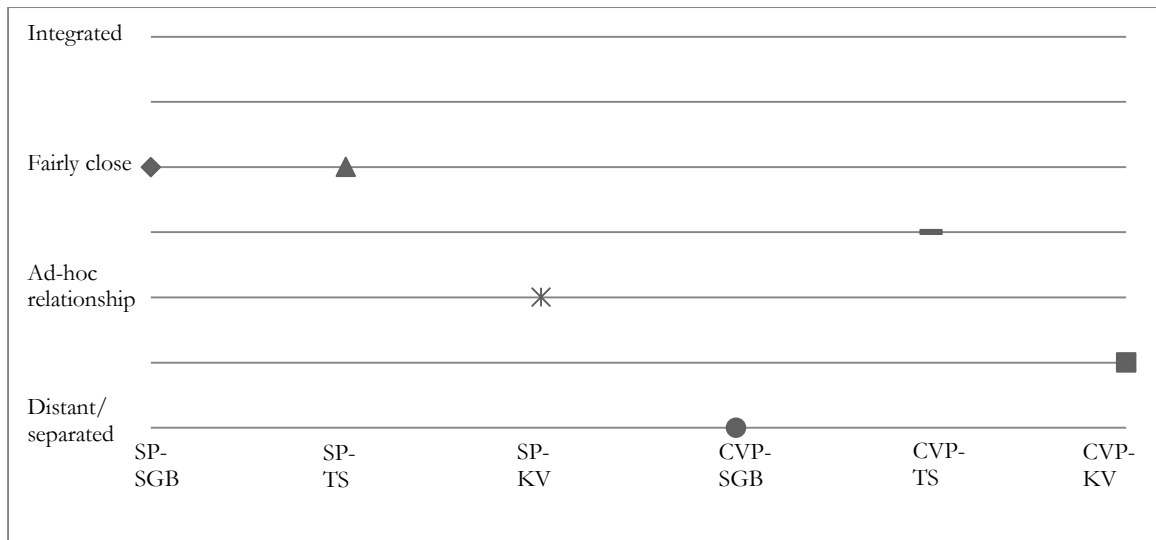


Figure 12.3 Rating of overall degree of closeness/distance (average score) between the party and union confederation last five years.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ratings in-between two categories reflect that the party and union responses to the survey question differed. None of the ratings differed with more than one category, except for SP-KV (fairly close vs. distant/separated).

<sup>1</sup> ICTWSS database

<sup>2</sup> In 2004, for example, a left-wing coalition coordinated by the SGB triggered and won a referendum campaign against a pension reform proposed by the centre-right majority of the Parliament (Häusermann 2010: 166–195). Usually, however, the threat to use direct democratic instruments is more important than its actual use, for example in the case of the ‘accompanying measures’ against social dumping that the Parliament accepted in order to secure union support for the bilateral EU-Switzerland agreements on the free movement of persons (Afonso 2010: Wyler 2012: Erne and Imboden 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Until 1990, many SP leaders even continued to be employed as union officials during their tenure at the helm of the SP: Ernst Reinhard (union official 1918–20; SP president 1919–36), Hans Oprecht (union official 1925–63; SP president 1936–52); Helmut Hubacher (union official 1953–63, 1979–91; SP president 1975–90) Christiane Brunner (union official 1982–9, 1992–2000; SP president 2000–4), Christian Levrat (union official 2001–8; SP president 2008–to date) (Degen 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The candidates for national elections are designated by autonomous party organizations at cantonal level. The regional level is therefore as important as the national level in Swiss party politics.

<sup>5</sup> Swiss members of parliament are not considered to be fulltime employees and are therefore entitled to be employed by other organisations. This possibility is also used extensively by centre-right members of the parliament who work for corporations or other interest groups.

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the questionnaires for the federal CVP party headquarters and its parliamentary group were filled out by the same person. This is hardly surprising given that the same relatively small CVP secretariat is in charge of both the federal party organization and its parliamentary group.