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ECONOMISTS AS POLICY ENTREPRENEURS AND THE RISE OF NEO-LIBERAL IDEAS IN SWITZERLAND DURING THE 1990S

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During the last decade, the Swiss economy underwent profound changes and had to face new socio-economic challenges unknown since the 1930s: a long period of economic stagnation characterised by the sharp increase of unemployment from below 1% in 1991 to more than 5% in 1994 and the uncertain relations with its economic international environment (the important debates over the future relations to the European Union). In this difficult economic context, several economists came to play a central role in the promotion of reforms of economic policies. From a marginalised position in economic policy advice, they largely inspired the economic revitalisation program launched by the government in the 1990s. This central role played by some economists represents an important innovation with regards to their traditional influence on economic policy making. How and why was it possible? This is the central question of this brief article. Thus, we won't systematically analyse the recent evolution of the academic field of economics (on this issue, see Baltensberger 2002); neither we will provide a detailed scrutiny of the political decision making processes which led to some economic policy reforms (see Sieber 1995 and Mach 1999).

The role of economists in economic policy advice and policy making has recently received larger attention by political scientists or sociologists (see for instance Jobert and Théret 1994; Singer 1993 on Germany, the UK and the USA; Blyth 2001 on Sweden; Dezalay and Garth 1998 on the IMF and the World Bank; on national traditions of economics, see also Lebaron 2000 and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001). These authors generally highlighted the fact that the strengthening of economists' influence over economic policy making was often related to the neo-liberal and monetarist reorientation of economic policies during the last thirty years. In Switzerland too, the affirmation of economists was closely related to the resurgence of neo-liberal economic ideas. However, as the Swiss economy remained relatively unaffected by the economic crisis in the

1970s and 80s (no unemployment increase and low inflation), it is only at the beginning of the 1990s that large public debates actually started to take place.

The major purpose of this synthetic article is to highlight the dynamics and the process by which some economists have become influential actors in the inspiration of some important economic policy reforms. In order to better understand and to illustrate this change, we shall first come back to the statement issued by some economists during the end of the 1980s on the marginalisation and the loss of influence of economists on Swiss economic policies. This then led some economists to become real “policy entrepreneurs” during the 1990s. However, this new activism could only be efficient thanks to their collaboration and alliance with important business representatives. The emergence and affirmation of these economists was thus closely linked to the “neo-liberal offensive” by some business representatives of the largest Swiss multinationals during the first half of the 1990s, in which some economists played a crucial role. This offensive also led to the creation of the first neo-liberal think tank “Stiftung Zukunft Schweiz”. In addition, the economic expertise in the Department of economic affairs was profoundly reinforced and consolidated during the second half of the 1990s. Finally, we come back in the conclusion to more general considerations relative to the contribution of economists on the rise of neo-liberal ideas and economic policies.

1. The marginalisation of Swiss economists from economic policy advice

Before we come to the changing attitude of some influential economists, some general elements about traditional economic policy making in Switzerland should be briefly exposed. Swiss politics is characterised, especially concerning economic and social policies, by the central role played by the major economic interest groups. These associations are represented in numerous “expert committees” on every specific policy, which decisively contribute to the general orientation and content of economic and social policies in the pre-parliamentary phase of the political decision-making process. The parliament does not play a significant role in the definition of these policies. These “experts committees” are generally composed of representatives of the major business associations and trade unions, of the administration and some scientific experts, the decisive actors being the representatives of economic interest associations. These neo-corporatist characteristics of the Swiss political system and the strong influence of organised interests at every stage of the policy-making process led some observers to speak of a “militia administration”, emphasising thus the weakness of the central

administration¹. Expertise, as well as the political feasibility of economic or social policy proposals, largely lies in the hands of the major economic associations, either business organisations or trade unions, whereas the role of independent expertise remained marginal.

Why did some economists become active entrepreneurs for economic policy reforms during the 1990s? Different reasons explain this changing attitude.

A first explanation was that during the end of the 1980 some economists felt they were being increasingly marginalised from public debates, from public expertise and from direct influence over the formulation of economic policies. In an article on economic policy advice and political action in 1988, Silvio Borner (1988), professor of economics at the University of Basel, complained about the disappearance of economists from the public debate and their retreat from important experts committees. Regarding this decline, he regretted that lawyers, and especially interest groups representatives, had become the most influential experts in Swiss economic policy. According to him, academic economists had largely been marginalised in the development of the welfare state, of competition policy or agricultural policy. In his conclusion, Silvio Borner clearly suggested that economists should reinvest the public debate and administrative expertise². In this collective book in honour of Francesco Kneschaurek, former professor at the University of St. Gallen and actively involved in several experts committees for the government such as the Commission for Economic Policy (*Commission pour les questions conjoncturelles*), different contributions by other economists make a similar statement about the role and influence of economists. As we will see below, this will come to change during the 1990s.

¹ Concerning macroeconomic policies, the independence of the Swiss central bank (SNB) since its creation and the federalist structure of the state have always prevented the central government to play an active role (through the coordination of monetary and fiscal policies) in the stabilisation of the economy, or to follow counter-cyclical Keynesian inspired macroeconomic policies. On the predominance of monetarist theory at the SNB since the 1970s, see Ettlin and Gaillard 2001.

² It is quite interesting to note that fifteen years later, Bernd Schips (2002) made a very similar analysis and also complained about the loss of influence of economists. As we will see below, this judgement clearly contradicts my analysis of what happened during the 1990s: “Praktisch jeden Tag trifft die Politik Entscheidungen mit - häufig sogar weitreichenden - direkten oder indirekten wirtschaftlichen Konsequenzen, ohne jedoch wissenschaftlich arbeitende Ökonomen - die man doch gemeinhin als die Speerspitze des wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Sachverständes betrachtet - in die Entscheidungsvorbereitung und -findung wirklich einzubeziehen. Entweder werden diese Ökonomen gar nicht mehr gefragt oder ihre Meinung wird nur dann noch zur Kenntnis genommen, wenn damit die bereits vorab eingenommenen Positionen der politischen Entscheidungsträger und Interessensgruppen im Prinzip bestätigt werden können. Äussern sich die Ökonomen dann und wann einmal ungefragt zu (gesamt-)wirtschaftlichen Problemen, dann werden ihre Stellungnahmen nicht selten als mehr oder weniger weltfremd etikettiert und damit für die anstehenden Entscheidungen als irrelevant betrachtet.” (Schips 2002: 1).

2. The rise of economists during the 1990s: reinvesting the public debate, political alliance and institutionalisation of economic expertise in the administration

In addition to the worsening of the economic situation that favours the recourse to new expertise, several dynamics explain the affirmation of economists during the 1990s. First, as pointed out above, there was a perception of increasing marginalisation and loss of influence of academic economists on economic policy making. Second, and this is perhaps the major element, some economists actively collaborated with several influential business representatives to promote neo-liberal economic policy reforms. This coalition was decisive to give a large audience to their proposals. Finally, in the second part of the 1990s, the economic expertise in the public administration, hitherto largely underdeveloped, was profoundly reinforced in the department of economic affairs.

2.1. Reinvesting the public debate and scientific expertise

Whereas during the end of the 1980s some influential economists made the statement that economists' expertise should be reinforced, the beginning of the 1990s were characterised by the publication of several influential reports and analyses by these economists. Their publications served as a central source of inspiration for major economic policy reforms.

In this context, two figures played an important role in the emergence of economists as central actors in the public debate and in the formulation of economic policy reforms: Silvio Borner, professor at the University of Basel and director of the Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Zentrum (WWZ), and Heinz Hauser, professor at the University of St. Gallen and co-director of the Swiss Institute for International Economics and Applied Economic Research (SIAW)³.

These two actors were at the forefront to promote economic policy reforms at the beginning of the 1990s. First, Silvio Borner, with two colleagues, Thomas Straubharr and Aymo Brunetti, both from the WWZ, published a very influential book in 1990: "Schweiz AG: Vom Sonderfall zum Sanierungsfall"⁴, in which they suggested various reforms concerning the liberalisation and deregulation of the Swiss domestic markets in order to restore the competitiveness of the Swiss

³ The Swiss scientific community is particularly fragmented and there is no national economics traditions, largely because of the multilingual character of the country (on this fragmentation, see Jost 1997). By limiting ourselves to these two economists, we clearly focus on two central figures among the scientific community. They are particularly illustrative of this changing attitude on the part of some economists. Others remained more reluctant to enter the public debate. Some were also particularly interested in analysing the impact and the role of economists in policy advice; see for example among well known economists: Kirchgässner 1998 and Frey 2000.

⁴ "Switzerland Inc.: from "special case" to its necessary restructuring". This book was reedited three times and was largely quoted in administrative reports. In 1994, the same authors published a second book, with a similar content: Borner and al. 1994.

economy⁵. Largely inspired by Mancur Olson's work on the negative impact of interests groups on economic growth, the authors sharply criticised the role of special interests groups, contributing to rigidify economic structures and prevent economic dynamism and innovation. One can see a clear coherence between Borner's article of 1988, quoted above, and the publication of these two books, destined to a large audience and which actively promoted neo-liberal economic reforms.

On behalf of the central government, Professor Heinz Hauser was responsible for a vast research project on the economic consequences of the different European scenarios (Alleingang, participation to the European Economic Area or adhesion to the European Union, see Hauser and Bradke 1992 and Hauser 1993). This report received a large audience in the media and among the official authorities. This synthetic report went in the same direction as Borner's recommendations concerning the necessity to liberalise domestic markets and privatise national public utilities. Thus, both publications emphasised the declining competitiveness of the Swiss economy and the necessity to implement liberal economic policy reforms.

These two publications had a large resonance in the media and among the public authorities, and served as a central inspiration for the formulation of several economic policy reforms. They were frequently quoted in several official administrative reports. Following these publications, Borner and Hauser were both involved in the informal commission to trace the future orientation of Swiss economic policies (see below).

Besides these publications, it is interesting to note that both institutes, the WWZ and the SIAW, share quite similar organisational features, such as close links with the business community, which finance different research projects⁶. Both are very active in public and private mandates and they both have a similar "Förderverein" (promotion society) as well as sponsoring institutions, largely composed of business representatives. They thus actively collaborate with business actors to finance their research and to define their research projects.

These publications at the beginning of the 1990s, an active presence in the public debate as well as the dynamism of these two institutes in terms of public and private expertise, are illustrative of the new entrepreneurial activism on the part of some important economists belonging to the academic field. However, the "political efficiency" of their policy proposals was only possible

⁵ Their proposals concerned the necessity to actively promote competition on the domestic markets, through the reinforcement of competition policy, the reform of the agricultural policy, the liberalisation and privatisation of former public monopolies, and so forth.

⁶ On the WWZ, see Gabathuler 1996 and the special issue of the *Basler Zeitung* 19.9.1998 for the 10 years of existence of the WWZ; on the University of St. Gallen, see E. Eckert, «L'Uni de Saint-Gall prend le pouvoir», *L'Hebdo*, 18.1.1996;

thanks to the large support that they received from very influential business actors. The strengthening of the position of these economists is thus also linked to the rise of neo-liberal demands from some important business representatives.

2.2. Convergence and alliance with some business representatives: the “neo-liberal coalition”

Parallel to these scientific publications, an informal group of business representatives of the largest Swiss companies, in collaboration with economists of the University of St. Gallen, published several documents to promote neo-liberal reforms in Switzerland at the beginning of the 1990s. These publications shaped the agenda of economic policy-making during the 1990s (see below the chronology of these publications, with their authors).

The first of these documents was a program “for a more liberal order” published by an informal group of industrialists, representatives of the financial sector and economists of the University of St. Gallen, among others H. Hauser, under the aegis of the “Max Schmidheiny Foundation” at the University of St. Gallen, dedicated to the “promotion of freedom” (Leutwiler et al. 1991). The initiative for these publications came from Fritz Leutwiler, former president of the Swiss central bank and then CEO of ABB, and from Stephan Schmidheiny, an important industrialist⁷. The authors claimed that, in order to preserve the competitiveness of the Swiss economy, some radical changes were needed, such as liberalising domestic markets, privatising the major public utilities, and reducing fiscal pressures. Illustrative of the neo-liberal orientation of this program are the quotations, at the beginning of the book, of Walter Eucken, Friedrich Von Hayek and James Buchanan, three neo-liberal economists (see also Schäppi 1992, Udry and Marquis 1996 and Burkhalter and al. 1999)⁸. This publication became known as the first “White paper”. A second followed in 1995.

This initiative was unprecedented because it did not originate with one of the traditional powerful business associations, but was instead the product of an informal group of fifteen to twenty representatives of Switzerland’s largest companies along with several economists⁹. These

⁷ On the formation of this informal group, see S. Enderlin, “Les néo-libéraux montent au front”, *L’Hebdo* 4.7.91 and S. Barmettler et K. Brandenberger, “Fritz Leutwiler und die Verschwörung der Kapitäne (Interview of F. Leutwiler)”, *Die Weltwoche*, 4.6.92.

⁸ Among the co-signatories, one also finds some members of the Mont Pèlerin Society, founded in Switzerland under the initiative of F. Von Hayek just after World War II. G. Schwarz, responsible for the economic section of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), as well as his predecessor Willy Linder, are both part of the MPS. G. Schwarz is the treasurer of the Mont-Pèlerin Society; see G. Schwarz “Jede Generation muss sich ihre Freiheit verdienen. Mont-Pèlerin – 50 Jahre danach”, in *NZZ* 3.5.1995. The economic section of the NZZ has always had close links with the Mont-Pèlerin Society.

⁹ It is also interesting to note the international connections among the co-authors, such as Helmut Maucher, former CEO of Nestlé and former president, for more than ten years, of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT),

leaders of the business community no longer felt adequately represented by the official business associations, which in their view were too inclined to negotiate and make compromises with other political actors. Also novel was the heavy criticism expressed towards several economic policies once widely accepted, such as agricultural policy, foreign workers policy, and competition policy, all of which benefited specific sectors while imposing costs on the national economy as a whole. Increasingly, export-oriented business argued Switzerland's competitiveness was endangered by regulations and non-competitive arrangements making Swiss products and services too expensive. In a rapidly internationalising economy, the cost of maintaining these arrangements was becoming unbearable.

After the publication of the first "White paper", the Swiss government appointed a special commission, only composed of business representatives and two economists (Silvio Borner and Heinz Hauser), but without any trade unions representatives. This commission was presided by David de Pury, a former high-ranking civil servant then working as co-managing director of ABB, and co-author of the second "White paper". The Commission's report (de Pury 1992) advocated the adoption of measures such as allowing female workers to work at night, prohibiting cartels, introducing a VAT to replace part of the federal direct tax, reducing the corporate income tax, and privatising the major public utilities.

Chronology of the major publications of the "neo-liberal coalition":

June 1991: Fritz Leutwiler, Stephan Schmidheiny et al. *La politique économique de la Suisse face à la concurrence internationale. Programme pour un ordre plus libéral*. Zürich: Orell Füssli.

Co-signatories:

Economists and others: Ernst Baltensperger (Prof. Bern), Paolo Bernasconi (Lecturer St. Gallen), Heinz Hauser (Prof. St. Gallen), Willy Linder (former chief editorialist of the economic part of the NZZ), Peter Moser (Prof. St. Gallen), Dietrich Schindler (Prof. Zurich); Wolfgang Schürer (Lecturer St. Gallen), Gerhard Schwarz (chief editorialist of the economic part of the NZZ), Klaus Vallender (Prof. St. Gallen).

Business representatives: Fritz Leutwiler, Stephan Schmidheiny, Nicolas Hayek, Robert Holzach, Bruno de Kalbermatten, Alex Krauer, Hans Letsch, Helmut Maucher.

This program is compelled by a scientific analysis by Peter Moser (1991). *Schweizerische Wirtschaftspolitik im internationalen Wettbewerb. Eine ordnungspolitische Analyse*. Zürich: Orell Füssli.

January 1992: David de Pury et al.: *Rapport final du Groupe de travail informel «Ordnungspolitik»*. Berne: DFEP (Département fédéral de l'économie publique).

Co-signatories:

Economists: Silvio Borner (Prof. Basel, director of the WWZ), Heinz Hauser (Prof. St. Gallen, co-director of the SIAW)

Business representatives: David de Pury, Philippe Jaccard, Angelo Pozzi, Thomas Schmidheiny, Niklaus Senn.

December 1995: David de Pury, Heinz Hauser, Beat Schmid et al.. *Ayons le courage d'un nouveau départ. Un programme pour la relance de la politique économique de la Suisse*. Zürich: Orell Füssli.

Co-signatories:

Economists and others: Heinz Hauser, Beat Schmid (Prof. St. Gallen), Arthur Dunkel (former secretary general of the GATT), Alfred Meier (Prof. St. Gallen), Jakob Nüesch (Former president of the Polytechnical School Zurich), Wolfgang Schürer (Lecturer St. Gallen), Gerhard Schwarz, Klaus Vallender

Business representatives: David de Pury, Joseph Ackermann, Georges Blum, Ulrich Bremi, Kaspar Cassani, Alex Krauer, Fritz Leutwiler, Helmut Maucher, Stephan Schmidheiny, Thomas Schmidheiny, Robert Studer.

September 1998: Proposition by Mario Corti, financial director of Nestlé¹⁰ to set up a Think Tank («marktwirtschaftliche Denkfabrik für die Schweiz»). This new think tank will be financed by the largest Swiss multinationals with an annual budget of around 6 millions Swiss francs.

Creation of the «Stiftung Zukunft Schweiz» (end 1999), with a directory committee composed by: Ulrich Bremi (Swiss de Re), Fritz Gerber (Roche), Alex Krauer (UBS) et Pierre Mirabaud (Geneva Private bankers).

¹⁰ “Die Rückbesinnung auf die eigentlichen Staatsziele. Skizze einer marktwirtschaftlichen Denkfabrik für die Schweiz”, *NZZ*, 30/31.1.1999.

Thus, several economists from St. Gallen and Silvio Borner actively contributed to the formulation of these different publications and participated in different informal groups to promote neo-liberal reforms. This constellation of representatives of Swiss multinationals, academic economists as well as some representatives of the press, especially of the economic section of the NZZ, represented a new “neo-liberal coalition” calling into question some political-economic arrangements which prevailed during the post-war period. In some ways, these actors came to challenge the traditional representatives of the business associations, considered as being inclined to find unsatisfactory compromises, and as representing special interests. Under the pressure of this “neo-liberal coalition”, the business associations sharpened their discourse during the 1990s (see for example, USCI 1992 and Letsch 1992: 165 ff.).

Even though Borner and Hauser are not representative of the whole scientific community, it should be noted that during the last decades, the academic field has come to be largely dominated by neo-liberal thinking among Swiss economists¹¹. This does not mean that debates and polemics among economists have been absent. On the contrary, divergences were quite frequent on various issues such as participation in the European Economic Area, the economic impact of direct democracy¹², the opportunity of macroeconomic stabilisation programs¹³, or in the Commission for Economic Policy, composed of different academic economists and experts from the major business associations and trade unions (see below).

In the second half of the 1990s, partially because they complained that the degree of implementation of their proposals by the political authorities was not sufficient, the same business representatives decided to support financially the creation of a new neo-liberal think tank, the first in Switzerland. As a complementary organisation to traditional business associations, the main task of this new think tank was to promote liberal ideas among Swiss

¹¹ On the predominance of neo-liberal economists in Switzerland, see S. Bertolami, “Was Wirtschaftspolitik ist, denken Professoren aus. Das Weissbuch ist das Fazit eines Trends: Während 15 Jahren haben die «Neoliberalen» fast alle Lehrstühle erobert”, *Die Weltwoche*, 4.1.1996.

¹² On the different European scenarios, S. Borner et H. Hauser had divergent positions, the former largely in favour of joining the European Economic Area Treaty (rejected in a popular referendum in 1992) and the latter much more skeptical on this issue. These divergences were largely debated in the press. On the economic impact of direct democracy, Borner et al. are much more critical, whereas economists of the SIAW, notably Gerhard Kirchgässner, come to the conclusion that the more direct democracy is developed the more general welfare is important.

¹³ At the end 1996, under the initiative of Jean-Christian Lambelet, Professor at the University of Lausanne, a certain number of economists asked in a Manifesto for a counter-cyclical governmental program to combat recession (Lambelet et al. 1997). Silvio Borner and other economists were actively opposed to these proposals; see “Institutionelle Reformen statt Nachfragehydraulik. Entwurf einer Therapie für die Schweizer Wirtschaft” *NZZ* 22.3.1997).

citizens, notably in collaboration with economists (see Advisory council of the foundation)¹⁴. Finally, this rise of neo-liberal ideas was also institutionalised in the public administration.

2.3. Institutionalisation of economic expertise in the Department of economic affairs

In the second half of the 1990s, and in a clear continuity to the changes exposed above, the economic expertise was largely reinforced in the Department of economic affairs under the auspices of some of the same major actors. A central conclusion among the “neo-liberal coalition” for the weak concretisation of their proposals in 1991 and 1995 was that it had become necessary to reinforce economic expertise in the public administration, much closer to the political decision-making process, in order to implement neo-liberal reforms more efficiently.

In 1998, with the election of a new minister of economic affairs from the free-democratic party, much closer to business interests than his predecessor, the department was profoundly reorganised with the creation of a new State Secretariat for economic affairs (SECO), resulting from the mergers of different administrative offices and the suppression of some others, such as the Office for Economic Policy (*Office des questions conjoncturelles*). Among these changes, an important innovation was the creation of a new administrative unit for “wirtschaftspolitische Analysen”, composed of around 40 employees, mainly economists. Traditionally, economic expertise in the public administration of the central state has remained largely underdeveloped, except perhaps within the Swiss central bank. With the creation of this new unit, the internal resources for economic expertise have been considerably enlarged¹⁵. The unit defines itself as a “think tank on economic policy” for the department. Numerous external expertises were also ordered outside the department in different academic institutes. These reorganisations were combined with the hiring of new economists in the leading administrative positions¹⁶.

Thus, for example, the new chief of this unit on economic expertise is Aymo Brunetti, former young professor and collaborator of Silvio Borner at the WWZ in Basel, and co-author of the book “Schweiz AG: Vom Sonderfall zum Sanierungsfall” in 1990. At the same time, the new minister hired another economist from Basel, Eric Scheidegger, as a special adviser for economic affairs. The latter did his PhD with Silvio Borner in 1992, and then became collaborator of a business association and journalist at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Both became influential actors

¹⁴ For two representative position, see Thomas Held (director of the think tank) “Das Schweizer Kernproblem” in *Tages Anzeiger* 9.12.2000 and “Es droht die anti-liberale Diktatur” in *Berner Zeitung* 8.2.2002. See also G. Schwarz “Halb Wissenschaft, halb Kommunikation. Thomas Held über die Stiftung Zukunft Schweiz”, *NZZ*, 4.12.2000.

¹⁵ In the department of finance, a similar change took place with the creation of an economists’ unit.

¹⁶ It was under the responsibility of Barbara Rigassi, PhD in economics from the University of St. Gallen in 1989, that the reorganisations took place. She was member of the free democratic party as well as the personal adviser of the previous Minister of economic affairs, and worked in the second largest Swiss bank as personal assistant to its CEO. She then came back to the public administration for the reorganisation of the Department.

in the economic department in the analysis of economic evolution and in the formulation of economic policy reforms, and gave new impulses in the department. Hence, they contributed to the drafting of a new prospective program for liberal economic policy. The preparation of this document gave rise to several divergences within the Commission for Economic Policy between, on one hand, a minority of members, these being the representatives of the trade unions and some economists as well as the representatives of the business associations, and the majority of the economists belonging to the Committee on the other¹⁷.

3. Conclusions: The contribution of economists to the rise of neo-liberalism

Despite very different national contexts, it is striking to see that, during the last thirty years, the progressive shift from a Keynesian interventionist paradigm to a neo-liberal and monetarist credo in economic policies has been characterised by the transformation of economic policy advice and the rise of new actors, from the academic field or more directly from the political or administrative spheres. The struggle for imposing new liberal economic policy took place in various spheres of society, in the academic field, the media and in the political and administrative fields. In each country, the rise of neo-liberal ideas followed different logics, depending on national political, institutional and economic characteristics (see for example: Jobert and Théret 1994 for France; Singer 1993 on the UK, US and Germany; Blyth 2001 on Sweden).

In the Swiss case, where large public debates on economic policy issues only seriously started at the beginning of the 1990s, we could observe that some economists, from a self-perceived situation of marginalisation from public debate and economic policy advice, have come to play a central role in the rise of neo-liberal ideas in the country as well as to shape the political debate around these issues. However, one can not understand the affirmation of these economists during the 1990s without taking into account the general economic context (economic stagnation, rise of unemployment) and the political and economic actors which helped to support the diffusion and the promotion of their ideas. They were clearly part of an “advocacy coalition”, composed of actors stemming from different social fields, such as the academic field, the business community, the media and also the public administration. These relations to other spheres of society show the permeability between scientific, business and political-administrative fields, and this represents

¹⁷ See Commission pour les questions conjoncturelles (1999). *Concept de politique économique libérale: une ligne directrice pour le long terme*. Berne: DFE; and Department of economic affairs (1999). *Lignes directrices pour une politique économique axée sur la croissance. Orientations fixées par le DFE pour les années 1999-2003*. Berne: DFE. On the divergences between the economists of this Commission and how some special reports have not been taken into account, see “Was nicht passt, wird zugepflastert. Im “wirtschaftspolitischen Konzept” wurden die Expertenkenntnisse verdreht und unterschlagen”, *Cash* 16.7.1999.

an enduring characteristic of the Swiss case (Jost 1997). By becoming active policy entrepreneurs, these economists played a major role in the formulation of neo-liberal reform proposals and served as a scientific background for the program of the representatives of the largest Swiss multinationals. However, the large resonance and impact of their propositions was possible only thanks to their coalition including other actors from the business sector, and subsequently through the institutionalisation of their influence in the department of economic affairs.

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