

ABSTRACT

The strategy of Swiss employers' associations towards trade unions : the example of employers' equalization funds between 1929 and 1940.

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Employers' associations – a category of business interest associations specialized in responding to the challenges of trade unions – were founded in Switzerland, like in other countries, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Switzerland, the leading sectors in founding these specialized associations were the construction sector – reorganization of the *Société suisse des entrepreneurs* (SSE) in 1905 -, the machine industry – foundation of the *Arbeitgeberverband schweizerischer Maschinenindustrieller* (ASM) in 1905 – and the textile industry – foundation of the *Verband der Arbeitgeber der Textilindustrie* in 1906. These sectors created together the *Union centrale des associations patronales suisses* (UCAPS) in 1908 in order to collaborate at the federal level.

Employers' associations elaborated different kind of actions in order to achieve their two main goals: assuring a collective action towards trade unions and influencing the state.

One of these actions was to create equalization funds in order to equalize contributions and payments made by firms within a sector. The aim of such schemes was to deliver a homogeneous allowance within the branch. Such funds were broadly developed in France in the interwar period in order to deliver family allowances. In Switzerland, employers' associations managed to impose the use of such funds managed by employers to organize the payment of wages to soldiers during World War II. Their success in imposing this solution against the solutions favored by unions and the state represented an important political success for employers.

This paper studies the equalization funds founded by employers' associations during the period before their generalization during World War II, i.e. between 1929 and 1940. During this period, equalization funds were discussed in several sectors. Before being generalized in 1940, the funds served three purposes. Firstly, financing family allowances enabled employers to deepen the divisions among the Christian (in favor of family allowances) and the socialist union wings (against them). Secondly, those funds were a new instrument for employers' associations to achieve control over their members, most notably in their wage policy. Thirdly, the development of funds served employers in limiting the development of the state.

This paper is based on archives from several employers' associations as well as unions and public archives of the federal state.