

Referendum of September 26 : from health insurance... to bank holiday on August 1

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Referendum of September 26

From health insurance... to bank holiday on August 1

On September 26, 1993, the Swiss people may have to vote on five subjects. As we go to print, the Federal Council has not made its final decision.

On January 1, 1993, a set of new measures to slow the rise in health costs came into force. These were contained in an emergency federal decree, and they should be formalised within two years by a total revision of the Law on Health Insurance.

A ten-franc hospital fee

One of these measures – the ten-franc per day hospital fee – has been described as "feudal and anti-social" by the

Pierre-André Tschanz

Swiss Party of Labour, which collected 74,000 signatures in support of a referendum contesting the emergency decree.

Those in favour of the referendum do not dispute the other two measures introduced on January 1; a ceiling on the price of health services on the one hand and on health fund premiums on the other. Their intention is to prevent the hospital fee being considered a foregone conclusion in the total revision of health insurance.

Children, the chronically sick and maternity patients are in any case exempt from the hospital tax. In addition, the maximum charge per year which may be paid by those insured has been reduced from Sfr. 750.– to Sfr. 500.–.

The hospital fee should reduce health fund costs by about Sfr. 100 million.

If voters say No on September 26 (or later) the emergency federal decree as a whole will be suspended.

Transfer of Laufen District

The Swiss people and cantons will be requested to ratify the transfer of the hitherto Bernese district of Laufen to the half-canton of Basle Rural. The inhabitants of this German-speaking district have already elected to leave Berne and become part of Basle Rural. This decision was made under the plebiscite procedure set up in 1970 leading up to the creation of Canton Jura, which was ratified by the people and the cantons in 1978.

Unemployment: the left fights lower indemnities

Trades unions, the left in general and jobless committees have launched a referendum against the lower unemployment insurance benefits contained in the emergency federal decree which came into force on April 1, 1993.

Those in favour of the referendum are against the drop in daily allowances paid to childless unemployed persons with a salary exceeding Sfr. 130.–, who make up a quarter of the 160,000 jobless

as of the end of May. They are also against the obligation laid on unemployed persons to accept a job at a pay rate lower than the unemployment benefit (the difference being made up by the insurance scheme).

The aim of the referendum is to ensure that these two measures do not find a permanent place in the revised Law on Unemployment Insurance, the present scheme having encountered financial difficulties due to the increase in joblessness to about 5%. The increased indemnity period (from the present 300 to 400 days in case of 100% unemployment), the abolition of the waiting period in case of illness, the obligation laid on the partially unemployed to have their books stamped and the possibility of temporary work programmes being financed by the insurance scheme to the extent of 85% (previously 50%) are not contested.

Arms trade: preventing abuse

The Federal Assembly proposes that the following Article 40bis should be added to the Federal Constitution: "The federal government shall decree measures to prevent the abusive use of arms, arms accessories and munitions". This provision is intended to transfer to the federal government the duty to prevent arms trade abuses from the cantonal authorities. The fact is that Switzerland became known as a self-service arms store when hostilities first broke out in ex-Yugoslavia, and in December 1991 the Federal Council had to take urgent measures to prevent the sale of arms to citizens of that region.

If the proposed constitutional article is approved by the people and the cantons, it will have to be the subject of a subsequent federal law.

Bank holiday on August 1?

The people and the cantons may also have to vote on a popular initiative requiring that August 1 (Switzerland's National Day) should be made a bank holiday. Both the government and the Federal Assembly are in favour of this initiative. ■



Will August 1 after all soon be a free day for the Swiss? Our picture: Flag swingers on the Rütli Meadow. (Photo: Keystone)

Press Review

The Swiss press devoted much space to the two initiatives against military expenditure during the referendum campaign and on hearing the results. Amongst the many commentaries on the latter, the following seem to us to be the most significant.

JOURNAL de GENÈVE ET GAZETTE DE LAUSANNE

Amongst the main French-speaking newspapers, the "Journal de Genève" was against the two initiatives. After the result, National Councillor Jacques-Simon Eggly wrote on the front page as follows: "Six months ago (the December 6 EEA referendum) commentaries on the voting result were marked by sorrow

and anxiety. The Swiss were not going to play their proper part in European harmonisation. Would they now continue by refusing to take up their military share at the heart of Europe, where they have a political and strategic responsibility? Well, the answer is No". Eggly also points out that "on this point there is no division between the language areas, which is very important".

LE NOUVEAU QUOTIDIEN

A breath of fresh air cannot be denied Editor-in-Chief Jacques Pilet of "Le Nouveau Quotidien". Under the heading "Drop the F/A-18s", Pilet wrote the day after the result: "Buying them can wait. Other aircraft models should be examined which may be more suitable – technically, economically and political-

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Subjects not yet finally decided!
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Subjects not yet decided.

ly. This would also be a way of limiting the overweening arrogance of the military apparatchiks with their narrow-minded logic".

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

The Radical "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" had spoken out against the two initiatives before the referendum.

Those in favour had wanted all military building projects to come under civilian environmental legislation. The Zurich paper stated: "It would be wrong to consider the clear result as a rejection of environmental protection for the army. Nor does the Defence Department intend to take the result in this way... It will continue to bring evidence that in spite of its special function it does not ignore the needs of the environment".

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Commentary

The following points may be made about the voting results announced on June 6:

First. On November 26, 1989, the Group for Switzerland without an Army (GSoA) won a psychological victory, even though its initiative to abolish the army was clearly rejected in numeric terms with only 35.6% of Yes votes. But at that time no one had expected that every third Swiss voter would be in favour of pacifism. On June 6, 1993, however, the GSoA was clearly beaten, and this time it had no reason to celebrate. But "Why not?" must be the question when we consider that this time round as many as 42.9% of voters accepted the initiative against the new fighter aircraft.

The fact is that the No expectations were much greater on June 6, and the GSoA thought they would get at least a majority of total voters if not of the cantons. These hopes had been nourished by the highly successful collection of signatures in May 1992 and by the generally favourable attitude of the mass media. The fact that the number of Yes

votes for the initiative remained well below the 50% mark was, as GSoA's Andreas Gross put it, a "disappointing surprise".

Second. Nor were the army opponents able to gain much ground on the April 5, 1987, referendum on military expenditure (which was rejected). At that time the Socialist initiative obtained 40.6% of voters. Now the figure has risen to just 42.9%. This is on the whole disappointing to the latter, considering that the Cold War ended in 1989 with the destruction of the Berlin wall and the economic situation has worsened over the last few years. These were both elements which might well have persuaded more voters to support the pacifists.

Third. The main winner on June 6 was Defence Minister Kaspar Villiger. With his judicious and transparent information policy, he succeeded in mobilising those in favour of the army and persuading the majority of voters to reject the initiative. Kaspar Villiger's authority has been strengthened by this result, and he can now devote his full attention to Army Reform 95. He would be right in considering the referendum of June 6 as a big vote of confidence.

Giuseppe Rusconi

Referendum result of June 6, 1993

Initiative "For a Switzerland without New Fighter Aircraft"

Yes: 1,074,875 (42.9%) – 5 cantons (Basle-City, Basle-Rural, Geneva, Jura, Ticino).

No: 1,435,146 (57.1%) – 21 cantons.

Initiative "40 Military Depots are Enough – Environmental protection for the Army too"

Yes: 1,124,144 (44.7%) – 8 cantons (as above plus Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Vaud)

No: 1,391,026 (55.3%) – 18 cantons

Voter participation: 55.2%

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