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# Civics and Politics

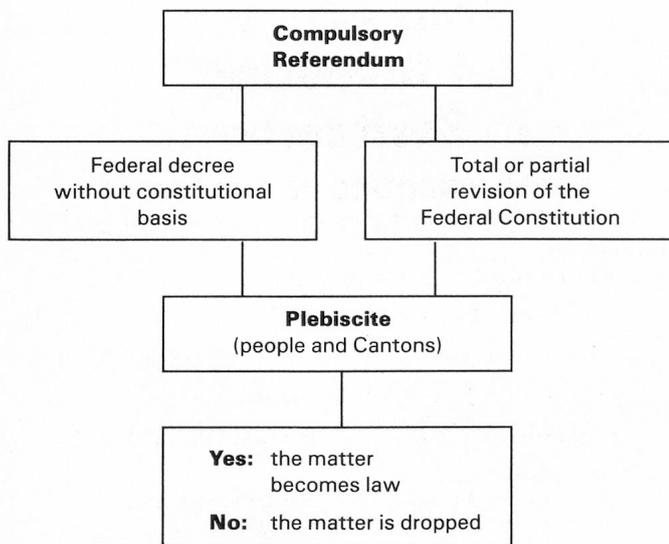
In a previous issue, we explained the procedure from the Initiative to the time a new law comes into force. We pointed out that the Initiative has the same function as a gas pedal in a car.

Conversely, the Referendum corresponds to the brake with which one can stop the legislative machinery abruptly. The semi-direct democracy can thus be likened to a car in which there is not only a gas and brake pedal for the driver (Government and Parliament), but also for the passengers (voters).

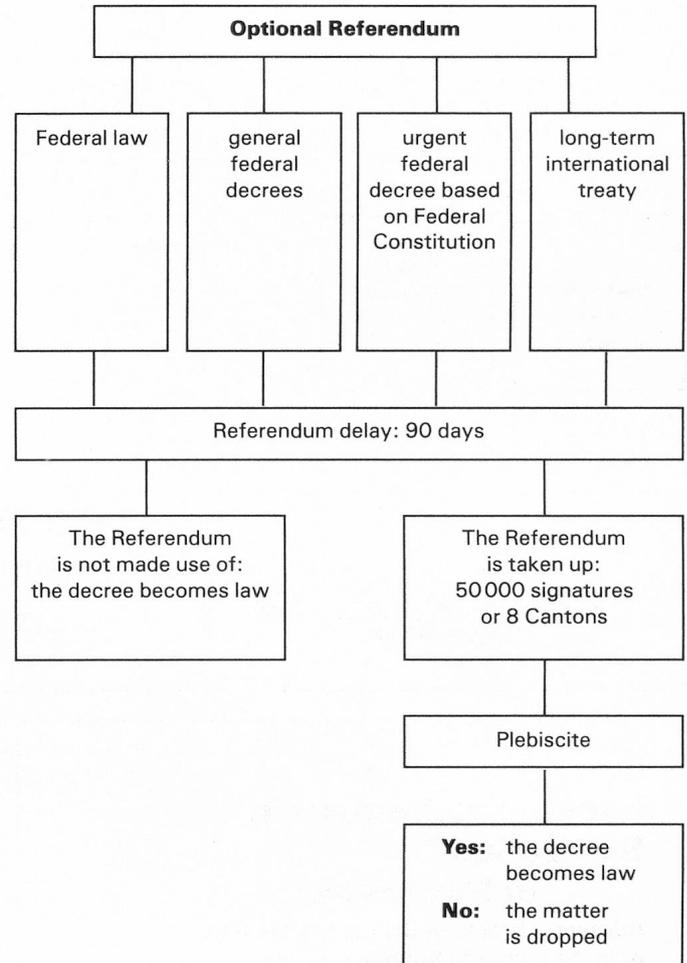
Experience has shown that the Popular Initiative has but little chance of being accepted in a plebiscite. In the State that is Switzerland, the brake, i.e. the Referendum, is much stronger than the motor. This right of the people is so important that one often speaks of a Referendum Democracy when referring to Swiss democracy.

With the Referendum, the people have a possibility of influencing the legislative work of the authorities at federal level.

Procedure: The most important laws (e.g. changes in the Constitution), must be submitted to a plebiscite. This is known as the **Compulsory Referendum**.



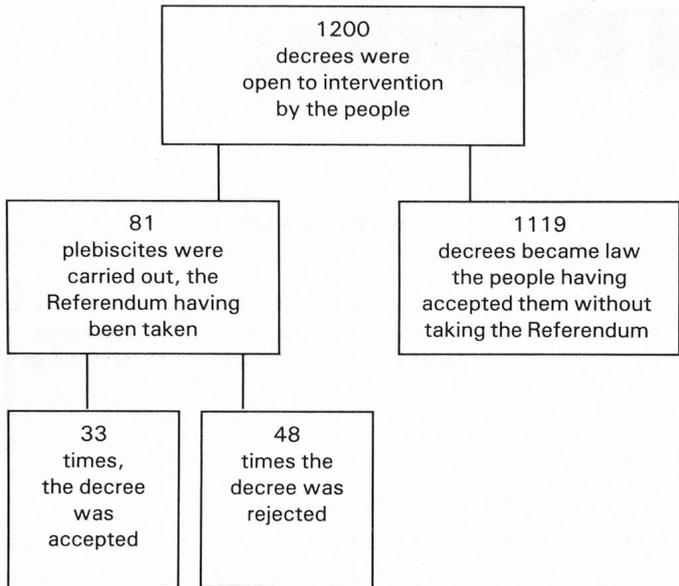
Further laws accepted by Parliament, come into force after a waiting period of 90 days, which is called Referendum delay. During this interval, a plebiscite can be demanded provided 50 000 voters or eight Cantons wish it. This is called **Optional Referendum**.



We have to mention the variant with two possibilities of Referendum: In an **urgent** matter, Parliament can act speedily and put the decree into force without using the Referendum delay. With this, the electorate cannot have a say in the matter. When, however, the federal decrees are of general import, they remain under the Optional Referendum and may lose their validity after one year from when Parliament accepted them, provided they have been rejected by the electorate in the meantime. The same applies to the federal decrees put into force on account of their urgency, if they go against the Constitution. They lose their validity after one year if they have not been approved by people and Cantons.

## Referendum results

From 1848 to 1978, no fewer than 1318 decrees were accepted by Parliament. 118 of these came



under the category of «Compulsory Referendum» and were submitted to people and Cantons. 1200 were subject to the «Optional Referendum».

At the moment, the fear of the Referendum influences our legislation. Because of the risk that a submitted decree may be rejected, the legislators often compromise when working our new decrees. This is the reason why the Referendum as presented above, is taken so rarely.

*Lucien Paillard*

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