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Autor:	Ballanti, Dario
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lenges, either by putting up essential new buildings or by putting existing buildings to new uses, for instance to change over to hydroponic farming, to pursue other activities such as tourism, or to use their buildings for non-agricultural purposes.

In the view of the government and the parliament this reform consists of "controlled" relaxation of the regulations on agricultural areas. For their part the sponsors of the referendum fear that the reform may lead to an explosion of new construction outside areas where building is authorised. Berne rejects this interpretation: the limits of relaxation are strictly defined and there is no change in the principle requiring a distinction to be drawn between building zones, and zones where building is not allowed, and proper account to be given to the protection of the countryside. Supporters of the referendum on the other hand consider that the countryside is at risk, farmers will find themselves confronted with competition from breeding sheds and hydroponic production and traditional craft-workers find competition unfairly distorted.

Home-ownership

The popular initiative "Home-ownership for All" is sponsored by the Swiss Society of Property Owners. It advocates fiscal provisions designed to encourage access to home-ownership for personal use, and to make it easier to retain it. It was handed in at the Federal Chancellery in 1994 with some 155,000 valid signatures.

Both a majority in parliament and the government recommend rejecting this popular initiative. The fiscal measures proposed would benefit above all the highest income earners and have the least impact for tax payers with modest income, frustrating the initiative's objective. The state would lose a large part of its tax income, a part moreover that comes from people who already have the resources to own their own home.

Furthermore, the initiative would probably lead to higher property prices because of the increase in demand. That again would benefit owners who do not live in their own property. All in all the initiative would mean a loss of tax receipts of the order of 500 million francs for the federal authorities and more than a billion francs for the cantons. ■

Federal referendums of November 29th, 1998

A referendum without surprises

Three ayes and a no: the result of the referendum of November 29th came as no surprise. The turn-out was not exceptional, hovering around 37%.

The people and cantons approved with 63.5% of the vote the financing of the four great rail projects (transalpine lines at the Lötschberg and St Gotthard, the Rail 2000 programme, measures to reduce noise, and links to the European high-speed network), a package that involves expenditure of 30.5 billion francs over the next 20 years. Only Thurgau, Appenzell (both Rhodes), and Upper Unterwalden rejected these great projects, which were approved by more than 75% in Basle (City), Geneva, Ticino and Valais.

Droleg, the popular initiative calling for the consumption of all drugs to be

depenalised, was rejected decisively: the project was turned down with 73.9% of the vote and by all the cantons, with the most substantial percentages generally in French-speaking Switzerland.

The other two issues were approved. Two years after rejecting an earlier version, the people accepted the revision of the labour law, with 63.4% in favour at the second attempt. Only Neuchâtel, Jura and Fribourg failed to join the rest. The liberalisation of the cereals market turned out to be little more than a formality, with the new cereals article approved by all cantons and 79.4% of the votes cast. ■

DB

Press Review

Most commentaries on the voting focused on the transport initiative and the Federal Council's success in all this year's referendums.

Tages-Anzeiger

Switzerland showed courage – courage to stake a great deal on its transport policy. The overwhelming yes to the railway proposal is an impressive sign of a new self-confidence among the Swiss. The clear message is this: we want modern railways, and we want to splash out in building them.

Basler Zeitung

Politically the Federal Council and Parliament's calculation – ensuring that there will be a transport system adapted to the future – has proved right, for the moment at least. Neither the opposition of the road transport industry to the future performance-linked heavy transport tax, nor the much more difficult campaign of the motor-car and road-traffic associations and Swiss People's

Federal referendums

February 7th, 1999

- Federal decree on amendment of the conditions for eligibility to the Federal Council
- Federal decree on a constitutional provision on transplant medicine
- Federal decree on the popular initiative "Home-ownership for All"
- Federal law on town and country planning (RPG), amendment of March 20th, 1998

April 18th, 1999

The subjects have not yet been decided

June 13th, 1999

The subjects have not yet been decided

November 28th, 1999

The subjects have not yet been decided

Party (SVP), above all against the use of these resources for the transalpine network, could unbalance the overall concept which had been brought to maturity with so much trouble.

Commentary

1998 will be remembered as a magic year for direct democracy: all three popular votes finished in the best possible way for the Federal Council, whose recommendations were followed across the board. The appointment in the voting booths on 29th November was no exception: a referendum without surprises which approved the policies of the Federal Council in respect of transport, drugs, agriculture and labour law.

All four issues submitted to the judgement of the people amounted in fact more or less to a continuation of previous referendums. Let us begin with the yes to the financing of the great rail projects which constitute the third element in a transport policy geared to respect for the environment and intended to lead to transit goods traffic being transferred from the roads to the railways. The people and cantons had already approved both the transalpine initiative and the performance-linked heavy transport tax which is to be the principle source of finance for the rail projects.

Much the same is true of the Federal Council's drugs policy which is to tackle the problem via the four pillars prevention, therapy, repression and help in survival. With the clear rejection of the "Droleg" initiative coming not long after the no to the initiative "Youth without Drugs" whose thrust was in the opposite direction, the people and cantons have given their assent to the pragmatic strategy which Berne has been following to put an end to the plague of drug-dependency.

The yes to the revision of the labour law comes after a first draft law was rebuffed in the referendum two years ago because it was considered to penalise workers unduly. Following the no to the small farmers' initiative of September 27th last, approval of the article on cereals marks the continuation of the Agriculture 2002 reform project which is intended to update legislation on agricultural questions, and make the sector more competitive.

Dario Ballanti

LE TEMPS

No-one was overly anxious about the government's prospects, but at the end of the day the Federal Council has something to boast about after this weekend's quadruple vote. The two issues that have at last been settled, rail policy and drug policy, have dominated federal discussion for years, sometimes ad nauseam.

LA LIBERTÉ

The double success of the heavy vehicle tax and rail proposals has had an unexpected victim: Christoph Blocher. This politician was indeed less committed in his opposition to the second than he was to the first. But this double defeat has come at the worst moment for him. Everywhere in Switzerland people have been amazed to see this leading anti-European lending a hand with the sale of Alusuisse, swallowed up by the German company Viag. Might his electors not make him pay for this?

CORRIERE DEL TICINO

For the third time this year, the Federal Council could meet the parliamentary press corps and express its satisfaction with the referendum results. So it was in June, and so it was again in September, when the people approved both the performance-linked heavy transport tax and the raising of the pensionable age for women. The positive result of the November vote was however both easier to foresee and easier to achieve.

Der Bund

Propaganda generously financed by industry contributed to almost everyone's voting for "rail for all". (...) This double decision shows that the Swiss quite clearly support the transport agreement negotiated at Kloten between Federal Councillor Leuenberger and EU Commissioner Kinnock.

DB

Results of the federal referendums

Canton	Financing of public transport		«Droleg» Initiative		Labour law		New Grain Article		Voters Particip. in %
	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	
ZH	65.6	34.4	32.3	67.7	74.2	25.8	82.7	17.3	41.4
BE	65.8	34.2	27.2	72.8	65.4	34.6	81.1	18.9	37.0
LU	63.2	36.8	24.0	76.0	63.7	36.3	78.8	21.2	40.6
UR	69.1	30.9	27.5	72.5	62.5	37.5	72.7	27.3	38.1
SZ	50.2	49.8	26.5	73.5	60.2	39.8	67.9	32.1	34.4
OW	49.0	51.0	25.0	75.0	62.2	37.8	71.7	28.3	49.5
NW	55.4	44.6	25.1	74.9	59.0	41.0	71.7	28.3	43.6
GL	54.0	46.0	25.1	74.9	66.2	33.8	76.6	23.4	31.7
ZG	66.9	33.1	27.6	72.4	69.4	30.6	83.0	17.0	39.3
FR	57.1	42.9	18.3	81.7	50.0	50.0	76.6	23.4	35.2
SO	59.7	40.3	28.3	71.7	62.3	37.7	77.0	23.0	39.7
BS	75.2	24.8	33.9	66.1	65.6	34.5	86.3	13.7	45.0
BL	68.7	31.3	30.4	69.6	67.4	32.6	84.5	15.5	36.3
SH	57.3	42.7	33.4	66.6	72.0	28.0	76.6	23.4	62.8
AR	50.0	50.0	24.9	75.1	64.1	35.9	75.9	24.1	42.0
AI	38.4	61.6	18.2	81.8	63.5	36.5	74.5	25.5	34.4
SG	56.7	43.3	26.3	73.7	63.3	36.7	77.7	22.3	37.1
GR	66.5	33.5	28.8	71.2	69.1	30.9	79.8	20.2	33.5
AG	53.8	46.2	26.1	73.9	64.6	35.4	75.8	24.2	39.7
TG	49.0	51.0	24.9	75.1	58.8	41.2	67.3	32.7	40.7
TI	73.7	26.3	19.8	80.2	60.3	39.7	83.7	16.3	34.5
VD	63.6	36.4	16.5	83.5	52.3	47.7	77.6	22.4	34.5
VS	73.5	26.5	17.2	82.8	55.9	44.1	71.4	28.6	31.4
NE	58.5	41.5	15.0	85.0	48.4	51.6	74.1	25.9	30.4
GE	78.3	21.7	25.3	74.7	54.6	45.4	91.2	8.8	41.3
JU	61.0	39.0	17.4	82.6	35.3	64.7	72.0	28.0	41.0
Total	63.6	36.4	26.1	73.9	63.4	36.6	79.5	20.5	37.7