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Decisions on the country's future

THREE IMPORTANT PROPOSALS were the subject of referenda in Switzerland on 3 March. One of the three sent out a clear signal: the vast majority of Swiss people have had enough of the excessive demands and greed – often accompanied by arrogance – shown by an increasing number of CEOs and senior executives in recent years. Almost 68% of the electorate voted in favour of the initiative against fat-cat pay: the third-best result for any initiative in the history of the Swiss Confederation.

Judging by the reaction abroad, the Swiss are not alone in their outrage. Reputable newspapers throughout the world reported extensively and approvingly on the vote. Thomas Minder, the mastermind behind the initiative, is even said to have received a request for the text of his initiative from the UK's Department for Business.

Now it is up to the Federal Council and Parliament to implement the initiative. This will be done “with no ifs or buts”, promised Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga after the vote. Whether this will really happen remains to be seen.

Whatever the outcome of the tug-of-war to implement the fat-cat initiative, the question of who should have a share of Switzerland's prosperity and affluence, and just how much this share should be, will continue to occupy people and politicians here. Several



popular initiatives on this subject have already been submitted: an initiative for a minimum wage, a proposal to abolish the flat-rate tax for wealthy foreigners, the “1:12 – For fair pay” initiative, which would impose a maximum salary bandwidth of 1:12 for companies, and the initiative for an inheritance tax on endowments and legacies in excess of 2 million Swiss francs.

We have chosen to focus in this edition on migration, in particular immigration to our country and its consequences. A good eight million people now live in Switzerland, of whom more than 1.8 million are migrants. Immigration – in effect, the result of Switzerland's economic success – is linked to a wide range of problems, such as traffic congestion and rocketing rents. Switzerland is suffering from “density stress”, wavering between anxiety and hostility: a state which has given rise to a growing number of demands for tough measures that in the longer term may prove counterproductive. In the article on page 8 onwards, Jürg Müller describes the social and political challenges surrounding this topic. It is interesting to look back and perhaps draw some encouragement. Switzerland was suffering from “density stress” as long ago as the early 1960s, even if the phrase had not yet been coined. Back then, Professor Francesco Kneschaurek of the University of St. Gallen was predicting that the influx of foreign labour would trigger a population explosion, resulting in a population of 10 million in Switzerland by 2000. Today experts are forecasting the same figure for 2040.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Echo

Cover image:

Claude Nobs made an enormous contribution to Swiss culture as the founder of the Montreux Jazz Festival. He died on January 10, 2013 at age 77.

Photo: Lionel Flusin – FFJM