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NEW ANTI-FOREIGN INITIATIVE REJECTED

For the third time in seven years, the Swiss people forcefully showed that they were against the idea of expatriating a great number of foreigners.

Called to the polls to state their position on this issue on 13th March, they made it clear that prosperity meant more to them than the preservation of an ethnically pure Switzerland free from all alien invasions. The first so-called anti-foreign initiative led to an important referendum on 7th June, 1970.

In view of the importance of the issue and the fact that, for once, the voters actually had the impression that by accomplishing their democratic duties, they were influencing the destiny of their country, the turnout for this vital referendum was nearly 80 per cent. Mr. James Schwarzenbach's proposals to send a few hundred thousand foreign resident workers back home were narrowly defeated.

A similar vote took place on 20th October, 1974, but by then the Swiss were far less involved in the foreign worker problem. The Government had taken some effective measures, the boom years were coming to an end, and the sense of urgency shared by the electorate in June 1970 couldn't be repeated anyway.

Proposals to repatriate hundreds of thousands of workers were turned down by a vast majority of those who took the trouble to vote. Last March, the Swiss

people were faced with essentially similar suggestions, also tabled by Mr. Schwarzenbach, leader of the Republican Party.

They were to reduce the proportion of foreign residents in Switzerland to 12.5 per cent of the population. The implementation of these measures would have meant the forced repatriation of 25,000 foreigners every year for ten years.

Voters came out two-to-one against the idea. They were also offered the possibility of reducing the number of naturalisations by more than half to a maximum of 4,000 a year. This was the suggestion of Mr. Valentin Owen's National Action Movement.

Although this proposal was not as harsh as Mr. Schwarzenbach's it, too, was turned down by about two voters out of three. In both cases, the electorate preferred the less radical counter-proposals put forward by the Government.

Thus the 4th and 5th anti-foreign initiatives met with the same fate as virtually all initiatives: it was rejected in favour of similar but less risky proposals submitted by the Federal Council.

On the weekend of 13th March, the Swiss were also asked to choose between proposals by the National Action and the Government on whether they should be

more involved in decisions regarding foreign treaties. The National Action wanted to give the people the right to veto treaties concluded with foreign states but the Swiss thought that they had enough political responsibility as it was. Participation over the weekend was 44.6 per cent on average.

The Swiss hotel industry has particularly welcomed the rejection by the nation's voters of a controversial move to expel a quarter of a million resident foreigners, writes Colin Farmer from Berne.

The Swiss Hotel Association had warned that acceptance of the proposals would have had "catastrophic consequences" for the industry by depriving the already understaffed hotel sector of many of its workers.

The Swiss government, parliament, other political parties and trade unions had all called on voters to reject the proposal – and so had the Swiss Hotel Association. The industry claims it is already short of about 12,000 personnel.

Said SHA director Mr. Franz Dietrich: "How would it be possible for us to promote Switzerland on the international travel market as a friendly, hospitable nation, if we throw out a quarter of a million foreign residents.

"Many of these foreign workers have contributed in no small way to the fine reputation now enjoyed by the Swiss hotel industry."

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