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Permanent price supervision approved

SWISS voters have approved a controversial "initiative" by consumer protection groups urging introduction of permanent price supervision.

In the same ballot voters rejected a government counter-proposal for price controls only in times of high inflation.

The vote was 56.5 per cent in favour of permanent controls, and 43.5 per cent in support of the government's counter proposal. But only one in three of the electorate turned out to vote.

It was the first popular "initiative" to be accepted by the Swiss electorate in 33 years, and only the eighth to win approval in more than 70 plebiscites since the "initiative" system was introduced in 1891.

Under the system organisers of an "initiative" have to collect at least 100,000 supporting signatures to force a nationwide vote.

The Swiss government's counter-proposal, which had been supported by parliament, argued that permanent price controls would interfere with free competition.

Retiring Economics Minister Fritz Honegger said he believed that the current inflation rate of six per cent – a relatively high figure by Swiss standards – had swayed voters to back permanent controls.

He also claimed that women voters in particular had been too easily influenced by the consumer protectionists' campaign.

Approval of the initiative means an amendment to the Swiss Federal Constitution.

Vaterland

It is to be hoped that this "yes" does not prove to be a "yes" of illusion. The Swiss man in the street cannot have both the highest salaries and the lowest prices.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

The new price supervision must limit itself – in the words of the constitutional article – to the

prevention of abuse. It will not be effective as a general Wailing Wall for anything and anybody. Where competition rules (and that is the case in many fields of daily consumption) it may not interfere with price-setting.

Basler Zeitung

It has been shown that price controls in Switzerland meet a definite need.



As he retires from political life, Mr Fritz Honegger has suffered a terrible defeat. And it's the same defeat for all those economic circles who have tried to convince the people that the price surveillance initiative will lead the country to catastrophe.

	Permanent-price supervision		Government counter-proposal		Turnout
	For	Against	For	Against	
Zurich	156,703	104,769	56,277	176,668	38.2
Berne	105,334	81,160	48,043	121,794	32.0
Lucerne	31,803	27,135	16,224	35,990	32.0
Uri	4,767	3,559	1,643	5,736	39.7
Schwyz	8,878	9,766	3,902	13,005	31.5
Obwalden	1,814	2,227	910	2,849	25.0
Nidwalden	2,708	3,260	1,639	3,837	31.4
Glarus	4,075	2,963	1,575	4,780	32.0
Zug	9,874	7,878	3,815	11,592	39.6
Fribourg	16,081	12,070	6,652	19,938	24.1
Solothurn	32,388	18,110	11,535	33,186	37.2
Basel City	26,404	11,460	8,786	22,442	29.3
Basel Land	25,015	15,901	10,563	22,676	30.8
Schaffhausen	15,459	12,297	4,236	19,530	68.5
Appenzell AR	4,519	6,426	2,453	7,664	37.5
Appenzell IR	852	1,571	702	1,645	29.0
St. Gall	37,379	32,840	18,911	43,909	31.5
Grisons	16,623	14,427	9,096	18,175	32.0
Aargau	43,948	35,776	19,171	51,880	29.7
Thurgau	20,882	22,581	13,166	25,690	41.9
Ticino	34,018	11,948	5,790	40,176	30.0
Vaud	69,540	50,661	24,612	85,420	38.0
Valais	12,211	15,549	3,973	22,048	18.7
Neuchâtel	18,256	11,104	4,329	23,298	31.1
Geneva	24,490	13,550	4,928	30,669	21.3
Jura	6,913	1,894	1,008	7,325	21.6
Total	730,934	530,882	283,939	851,922	32.3