

The right to vote at 18 : success second time round?

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Success second time round?

Twelve years ago Switzerland's 18-year-olds were rebuffed by the voters, when a proposal to lower the voting age to 18 in Federal affairs was rejected in a referendum. On 3 March this year a second referendum was held on the subject.

February 18, 1979 was a day of disappointment for many young people in Switzerland: the voters rejected the proposal to give 18-year-olds the vote. The margin was admittedly small, but it was enough. There were 934,073 votes in favour and 964,749 against, with eight cantons and half-cantons for and 12 cantons and four half-cantons opposing

In a national referendum on 3 March 1991 the Swiss voters and cantons approved the lowering of the voting age to 18 at federal level. Voting figures were: 983 637 (72,8 per cent) in favour and 368 246 (27,2 per cent) against.

the measure. The "older generations" were unwilling to give up any of their political power to the youngsters.

On 3 March the question was again put to the vote. Are the 18-years-old now accepted as adults to be taken seriously or are they still regarded as big children?

The "Swiss Review" wanted to find out the views of those concerned – the young people – on the proposal to lower the voting age to 18. Summing up it can be said that no youngster has publicly come out against it!

The following is a small selection of the views expressed by apprentices and youngsters still at school.



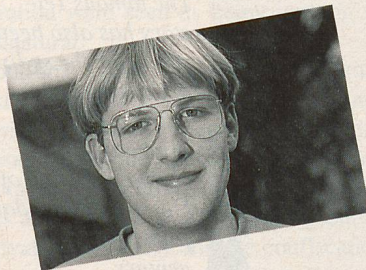
Gaby Demme (19):

"I've already voted at cantonal level. The right to vote at 18 should also be introduced at federal level."



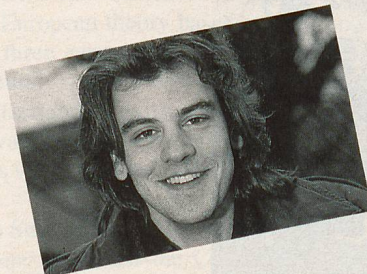
Brigitte Zulauf (18):

"I would even be in favour of having the right to vote at the age of 16. We already have responsibilities at that age. So we should also be given rights."



Emanuel von Erlach (17):

"Being able to vote at 18 would certainly arouse young people's interest in political questions by giving them the chance to share in decision making."



Ralph Balmer (20):

"We'll be living in the future, so young people should also be able to help shape it. All the same I think many young people are over-taxed by political questions."



Karin Furer (17):

"Of course I'm for lowering the voting age. Many things voted on, like environmental questions, affect our future. And there I would like to have my say and help decide."



Karin Bracher (18):

"People aged 80 and 90 are allowed to vote. So why shouldn't 18 years olds be able to?"



Stefanie Jones (18):

"I'm certainly in favour of votes at 18! Giving foreigners the right to vote would also be a good thing."

So far 14 cantons and two half-cantons have introduced the right to vote at the age of 18. Five more cantons are about to do so.

*Text/Survey: Christian Werder
Photos: Hans R. Amrein*