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Current Concerns

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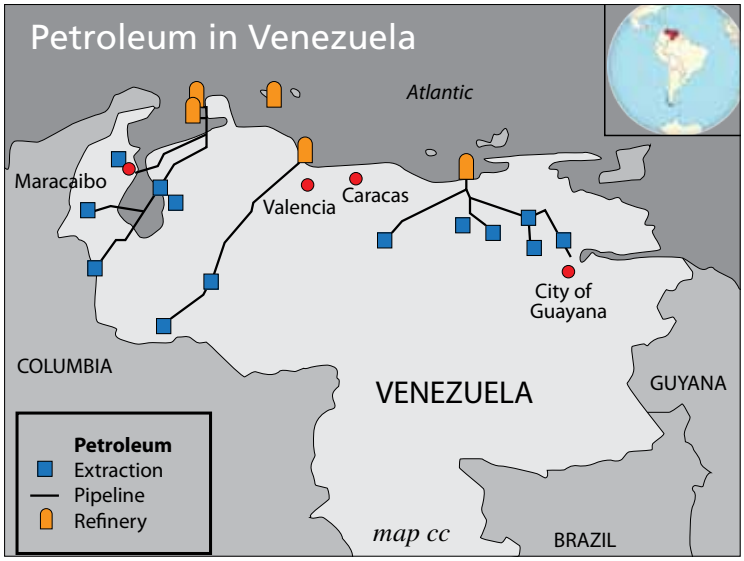
English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

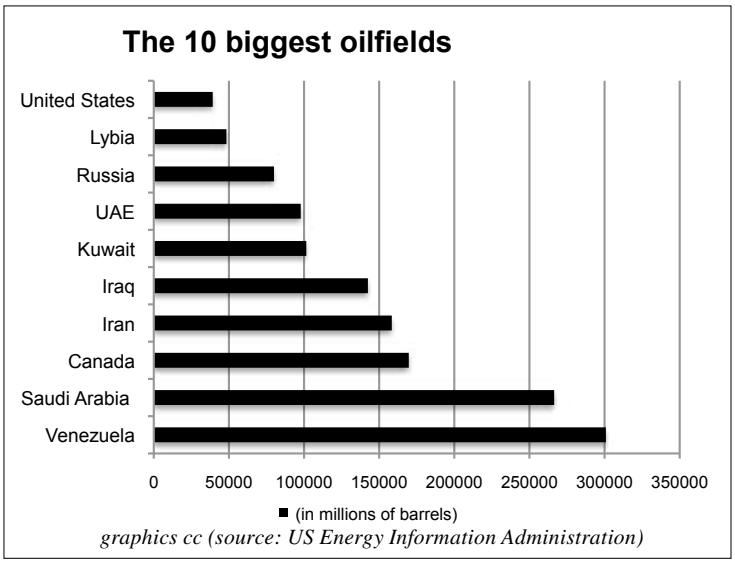
"The United States government must cease interfering in Venezuela's internal politics"

Solutions can only be brought about through negotiation

Open Letter by Noam Chomsky, Laura Carlsen, Miguel Tinker Salas, Greg Grandin, Alfred de Zayas et al.

cc. The following open letter was signed by 70 personalities, most of them from the USA. Many of them are scholars: Latin America experts, political scientists and historians. They are joined by filmmakers, civil society personalities and other experts. The letter was published in New York on Thursday, 24 January 2019. It is directed against the ongoing interference in Venezuela by the United States.





Venezuela is the country with the largest attested oil deposits in the world. With more than 300 billion barrels, constituting one quarter of the worldwide reserves, as estimated by OPEC, can be located in this South American country. (Situation: 2017)

The United States government must cease interfering in Venezuela's internal politics, especially for the purpose of overthrowing the country's government. Actions by the *Trump* administration and its allies in the hemisphere are almost certain to make the situation in Venezuela worse, leading to unnecessary human suffering, violence, and instability.

Venezuela's political polarization is not new; the country has long been divided along racial and socioeconomic lines. But the polarization has deepened in recent years. This is partly due to US support for an opposition strategy aimed at removing the government of Nicolás Maduro through extra-electoral means. While the opposition has been divided on this strategy, US support has backed hardline opposition sectors in their goal of ousting the Maduro government through often violent protests, a military coup d'etat, or other avenues that sidestep the ballot box.

Under the Trump administration, aggressive rhetoric against the Venezuelan government has ratcheted up to a more extreme and threatening level, with Trump administration officials talking of "military action" and condemning Venezuela, along with Cuba and Nicaragua, as part of a "troika of tyranny." Problems resulting from Venezuelan government policy have been worsened by US economic sanctions, illegal under the Organization of American States and the United Nations as well as US law and other international treaties and conventions. These sanctions have cut off the means by which the Venezuelan government could escape from its economic recession, while causing a dramatic falloff in oil production and worsening the economic crisis, and causing many people to die because they can't get access to life-saving medicines. Meanwhile, the US and other governments continue to blame the Venezuelan government solely for the economic damage, even that caused by the US sanctions.

Now the US and its allies, including OAS Secretary General *Luis Almagro* and Brazil's far-right president, *Jair Bolsonaro,* have pushed Venezuela to the precipice. By recognizing National Assembly President *Juan Guaido* as the new president of Venezuela something illegal under the OAS Charter the Trump administration

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"'The United States government must ...'"
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has sharply accelerated Venezuela's political crisis in the hopes of dividing the Venezuelan military and further polarizing the populace, forcing them to choose sides. The obvious, and sometimes stated goal, is to force Maduro out via a coup d'etat.

The reality is that despite hyperinflation, shortages, and a deep depression, Venezuela remains a politically polarized country. The US and its allies must cease encouraging violence by pushing for violent, extralegal regime change. If the Trump administration and its allies continue to pursue their reckless course in Venezuela, the most likely result will be bloodshed, chaos, and instability. The US should have learned something from its regime change ventures in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and its long, violent history of sponsoring regime change in Latin America.

Neither side in Venezuela can simply vanquish the other. The military, for example, has at least 235,000 frontline members, and there are at least 1.6 million in militias. Many of these people will fight, not only on the basis of a belief in national sovereignty that is widely held in Latin America in the face of what increasingly appears to be a US-led intervention but also to protect themselves from likely repression if the opposition topples the government by force.

In such situations, the only solution is a negotiated settlement, as has happened in the past in Latin American countries when politically polarized societies were unable to resolve their differences through elections. There have been efforts, such as those led by the Vatican in the fall of 2016, that had potential, but they received no support from Washington and its allies who favored regime change. This strategy must change if there is to be any viable solution to the ongoing crisis in Venezuela.

For the sake of the Venezuelan people, the region, and for the principle of national sovereignty, these international actors should instead support negotiations between the Venezuelan government and its opponents that will allow the country to finally emerge from its political and economic crisis. •

Source: h*ttps://www.commondreams.org* from 24 January 2019

signed by:
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US attempted coup in Venezuela violates international law

*Interview by Amy Goodman (Democracy Now!) with Prof. Dr iur. et phil. Alfred de Zayas as well as Prof. Dr Miguel Tinker Salas**

Alfred de Zayas (picture ma)

As President Trump announces that the US will recognise opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's new leader and sitting President Nicolás Maduro breaks off relations with the United States, we speak with a former UN independent expert who says the US is staging an illegal coup in the country. Alfred de Zayas, who visited Venezuela as a UN representative in 2017, says, "The mainstream media has been complicit in this attempted coup. … This reminds us of the run-up to the Iraq invasion of 2003." We also speak with Miguel Tinker Salas, professor at Pomona College and author of "The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela" and "Venezuela: What Everyone Needs to Know."

Amy Goodman: We continue to talk about the situation in Venezuela. Is this a coup d'état? We're joined by Alfred de Zayas in Geneva. He visited Venezuela in 2017 on behalf of the United Nations. At the time, he was the UN independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. Still with us, Miguel Tinker Salas of Pomona College in California. Alfred de Zayas, welcome to Democracy Now! Talk about what we are seeing right now in Venezuela. Are we seeing a coup d'état unfolding?

Alfred de Zayas: First of all, Amy, I am quite honored to be on your program. I endorse every word that my knowledgeable colleague, Professor *Tinker Salas,* has just said.

As far as a coup d'état, well, it is not a consummated coup d'état. It is an attempted coup d'état. Now, we all believe in democracy. Your program is called *Democracy Now!* Now, there's nothing more undemocratic than a coup d'état, and also boycotting elections. As you know, there have been 26, 27 elections in Venezuela since *Chávez* was elected in 1998. So, if you want to play the game, you have to participate in the elections. And if the opposition refused to participate in the elections, they bear responsibility for the situation that has ensued.

Beyond that, I want to endorse the words of my Secretary-General *Guterres,* who has called for dialogue. I very much supported the mediation carried out in 2016, 2018 by *José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero,* the former Spanish prime minister. And that actually would have led to a sensible compromise. The text was on the table, was ready for signature. At the last moment, *Julio Borges* refused to sign it.

Amy Goodman:Now, is it a coup d'état?

Alfred de Zayas: Well, this is a matter of semantics. We have here an unconstitutional situation in which the legislature is usurping competences that belongs to the executive and to the judiciary. The judiciary has already declared all of these actions and declarations of the National Assembly to be unconstitutional.

Now, I am not a constitutional lawyer in Venezuela, but I did have the opportunity, when I was in Venezuela in November, December 2017, to speak with all stakeholders, with members of the National Assembly, of the Chamber of Commerce, of the university students, opposition leaders, opposition NGOs, PROVEA[1], Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the OAS representative there, etc., and, of course, with all the ministers. Now, the function of a rapporteur is not to go around grandstanding. The function of the rapporteur is not naming and shaming. The function of a rapporteur is to listen and listen, and then to study all the relevant documentation and arrive at constructive proposals, which I formulated in my report, which was presented to the Human Rights Council last September 10, 2018. Now, I formulated many recommendations, and actually the government already implemented some of my recommendations even shortly after my visit, because I also gave the foreign minister of Venezuela, Mr *Arreaza* – I gave him a six-page confidential memorandum upon my departure. Some of that was reflected then in my report.

But my concern – and I think it is a concern of every person who believes in democracy and in the rule of law – is to calm the waters. My concern is to avoid a civil war. One thing that I told to members of the opposition is that you simply cannot topple the government, and Maduro is not simply going to roll over. I mean, there are 7, 8, 9 million Venezuelans who are committed Chavistas, and you have to take them into account. What are you going to do with them if you topple the government through a coup d'état? What are you going to do with these people? These people are most likely going to fight. Now, we don't want fighting. We don't want shedding of blood. Therefore, the only logical avenue now is to call for dialogue. And I hope that the Vatican and Mexico and Uruguay will lead the way.

Amy Goodman: What about the role of the media in what is happening right now in Venezuela? You would have no idea, if you watched the networks in the United States – I'm not just talking about Fox, I'm talking about CNN and MSNBC – if you watched in any regular way –

Alfred de Zayas: No, I know. Of course.

Amy Goodman: – what is unfolding, the level of involvement of the United States, right through to this video that Vice President Pence posted right before Juan Guaidó announced from the streets that he was the president, the head of the National Assembly, the Nancy Pelosi equivalent.

Alfred de Zayas: Well, the mainstream media has been complicit in this attempted coup. The mainstream media has prepared, through a conundrum of fake news, an atmosphere that the public should accept this regime change imposed by the United States on the people of Venezuela because, ultimately, it's supposed to be for the good of the Venezuelans.

Now, this reminds us of the run-up to the Iraq invasion of 2003. Now, the mainstream media supported all the lies, all

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* *Amy Goodman* is an American broadcast journalist, syndicated journalsit, invstigative reporter and book author. She gained particular fame through the daily program Democracy Now! presented by Pacifica Radio WBAI, which she co-founded in 1996 as a long-time news editor. Goodman is particularly committed to democracy and human rights and to the independence of the media. Goodman has received numerous awards for her work

* *Alfred de Zayas* is an American lawyer and historian, J. D. Harvard, Dr. phil. Göttingen. He is an emeritus member of the New York and Florida Bar Associations, a long-time leading lawyer at the UN High Commission for Human Rights, long-time chairman of the petitions department, visiting professor of law at several universities. From 2012 to 2018, he was the first UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order. As the first UN rapporteur in 21 years, he visited Venezuela from 26 November to 4 December 2017. Alfred de Zayas is a Swiss citizen and lives in Geneva.

* *Miguel Tinker Salas* is a Venezuelan historian and professor at Pomona College in Claremont, California. He specializes in modern Latin America and has published books and essays on Mexico and Venezuela. He is a frequent political analyst.

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the manipulations of *George W. Bush* and of *Tony Blair* to convince the world that *Saddam Hussein* had weapons of mass destruction. And on this excuse, it was made somewhat palatable to world public opinion that you would enter Iraq and change the government by force. Now, the fact is that here you had not only a crime of aggression, not only an illegal war, as former – the late Secretary-General *Kofi Annan,* in more than one occasion, stated. Here you have actually a revolt of 43 states, the "coalition of the willing," against international law. If there is one tenet of the UN Charter that is *jus cogens*, that is peremptory international law, it's the prohibition of the use of force. And this attack on Iraq was conducted by 43 states in collusion, breaking all the rules of international law. Now, that was preceded by this media campaign.

Now, we have had, for the last years, actually, a media campaign against Venezuela. And I am particularly familiar with it, because before I went to Venezuela, I had to read everything and all the reports, not only of "The Washington Post" and of "The New York Times", but also the reports of the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* the reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc., proposing that there was a humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

Now, when I went to Venezuela, I again took the opportunity to interview representatives of Amnesty International and PROVEA and the other opposition NGOs, but I also had the opportunity to study the documents, to compare, to see the statistics, etc., etc. And, of course, there was no humanitarian crisis. There was hunger. There was, what we say in Spanish, zozobra. There was suffering. There was malnutrition, etc., etc. But it's not just stating that there is an economic crisis. That's not the crucial point. The crucial point is which are the *causes* of that so-called humanitarian crisis. And certainly, those who are crying humanitarian crisis should be the least to say that they should now solve the problem. There's a principle of international law called *ex injuria non oritur jus* [law (or right) does not arise from injustice], which is the principle to estoppel. So they should be estopped from demanding regime change when they themselves are the ones who are aggravating a situation, caused initially by the dramatic fall of the oil prices.

I wanted to make a reference to a professor, *Pasqualina Curcio,* of the University of Caracas. I had the opportunity of seeing her for a couple of hours when I was there. And she published a book called "The Visible Hand of the Market". This is a book that documents the financial blockade, documents the whole complex economic war being waged against Venezuela, which reminds you of the economic war that was waged against *Salvador Allende.* And what's interesting is, after three years of economic war against Allende not succeeding in toppling Salvador Allende, it took a coup d'état by General Augusto Pinochet, which brought the Chilean people 17 years of dictatorship.

We should be asking ourselves: Do we want a coup d'état in Venezuela? And what legitimacy would the government of *Guaidó* have? And what kind of elections would be held? Now, there have been, as I said, 26 or 27 elections in Venezuela since 1998. And President *Jimmy Carter* and the *Carter Center* went repeatedly to Venezuela to monitor those elections. And Carter had a very good opinion of the system and of the safeguards of elections in Venezuela. So, if the opposition really considers itself democratic, it has to play the democratic game, and it has to participate in the elections. They have chosen to boycott the elections over the last years.

And another thing that I think it's important to notice is that the mainstream media has always presented the opposition as peaceful demonstrators. Now, there are ample videos, photographs of the violence committed by the so-called *guarimbas*[2] in Venezuela in the years 2014, especially 2017. I had the opportunity of interviewing not only victims of police brutality in Venezuela, but also victims of the guarimbas – persons who were just trying to go from point A to point B, and there was a barricade somewhere, and then they were either killed or they were seriously injured or burned. I interviewed them when I was there.

So, I must say, *audiatur et altera pars*, let's listen to both sides, and let us not just concentrate, as the mainstream media does in the United States, on the arguments of the opposition. You also have to take into account the 7, 8 or 9 million Venezuelans, who are human beings, who have democratic rights, who have expressed those democratic rights in their ballot box. And you simply cannot shove them away.

Amy Goodman: I'm going to give Miguel Tinker Salas the last word here, what you expect to see. I mean, what we've seen in the past, before, President Chávez, there was almost a coup against him. The military took him; he got free. Same happened in Ecuador with Correa, but he also was able to free himself and continue as president. On the other hand, you had President Aristide in Haiti, proven US links there to the coup. He was flown out. And you had President Zelaya in Honduras. He also was forced out of his position. He did not succeed in maintaining power. What do you think will happen here, Professor Tinker Salas?

Miguel Tinker Salas: I think part of what the US is trying to do, and the opposition, is to see if there are fundamental cracks within the military that would facilitate their strategy. That, again, would lead to a coup d'état. That, I think, would not be the best outcome for Venezuela. I insist, if we continue to ratchet up this brinkmanship, we run the risk of exacerbating this crisis and obscene violence. And I think we should try to avoid the violence. I think the best-case solution is to find some process by which negotiations and discussions can take place. We can have cooler heads prevail, and begin to have a conversation in which we recognize the presence of the other. Because if there are elections tomorrow and if the government wins, the opposition will not recognize; if the opposition win, the Chavista supporters will not recognize. That's a stalemate. We have to be able to break those loggerheads and find solutions in which, long terms, Venezuelans come to term with the presence of the other in society and recognize the humanity of the other and find dialogue and a peaceful solution to this crisis.

Amy Goodman: I want to thank you both for being with us, Miguel Tinker Salas, professor at Pomona College, author of The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela and Venezuela: What Everyone Needs to Know, as well as Alfred de Zayas, joining us from Geneva, Switzerland, former U.N. independent expert, visited Venezuela in 2017 on behalf of the United Nations. •

Source:
www.democracynow.org/2019/1/24/former_un_expert_the_us_is; The War and Peace Report, from 24 January 2019, licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

Editor's notes:

1 Venezuelan Education-Action Program on Human Rights, PROVEA

2 violent opposition against President Maduro in response to elections they feel are unfair

Reviving democracy

Direct democratic goals of the Gilets Jaunes

by Diana Johnstone[*]

Diana Johnstone (picture wikipedia)

The Gilets Jaunes are usually defamed in the media as chaotic, lighting cars and destroying businesses. In fact, however, they are fighting for a fundamental democratic right: co-determination. Diana Johnstone on the resurgence of civic self-will and the establishment's attempts to suppress it.

The video on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBiHJxGx1g) became a big hit: The little song sung on it contrasts ironically, in a friendly light tone, "the good guys" ("les gentils") – the elite – with the "bad guys" ("les méchants"), the ordinary people. (Picture screenshot youtube on 27.1.2019)

French democracy – dead or alive?

Or perhaps one should say, buried or revived? Because for the mass of ordinary people, far from the political, financial, media centres of power in Paris, democracy is already moribund, and their movement is an effort to save it. Ever since *Margaret Thatcher* decreed that there is no alternative, Western economic policy is made by technocrats for the benefit of financial markets, claiming that such benefits will trickle down to the populace. The trickle has largely dried up, and people are tired of having their needs and wishes totally ignored by an elite who know best.

President *Emmanuel Macron*'s New Year's Eve address to the nation made it perfectly clear that after one unconvincing stab at throwing a few crumbs to the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) protest movement, he has determined to get tough.

France is entering a period of turmoil. The situation is very complex, but here are a few points to help grasp what this is all about.

The methods

The Yellow Vests gather in conspicuous places where they can be seen: the Champs-Elysées in Paris, main squares in other cities towns, and the numerous traffic circles on the edge of small towns. Unlike traditional demonstrations, the Paris marches were very loose and spontaneous, people just walking around and talking to each other, with no leaders and no speeches.

The absence of leaders is inherent in the movement. All politicians, even friendly ones, are mistrusted and no one is looking for a new leader.

People are organising their own meetings to develop their lists of grievances and demands.

In the village of Commercy, Lorraine, a half hour drive from Domrémy where *Jeanne d'Arc* was born, inhabitants gather to read their proclamation. Six of them read in turns, a paragraph each, making it quite clear that they want no leaders, no special spokesperson. They sometimes stumble over a word, they are not used to speaking in public like the TV talking heads. Their second appeal of the Gilets Jaunes de Commercy invites others to come to Commercy on January 26–27 for an assembly of assemblies.

The demands

The people who first went out in the streets wearing Yellow Vests last 17 November were ostensibly protesting against a hike in gasoline and diesel taxes that would hit people in rural France the hardest. Obsessed with favouring world cities, the French government has taken one measure after another at the expense of small towns and villages and the people who live there. That was just the last straw. The movement rapidly moved on to the basic issue: the right of the people to have a say in measures taken that affect their lives. Democracy, in a word.

For decades, parties of the left and of the right, whatever their campaign speeches, once in office pursue policies dictated by the markets. For this reason, people have lost confidence in all parties and all politicians and are demanding new ways to get their wishes heard.

The fuel tax was soon forgotten as the list of demands grew longer. Critics of the movement note that achieving so many demands is quite impossible. It's no use paying attention to popular demands, because the silly people ask for everything and its opposite.

That objection is answered by what has quickly emerged as the single overriding demand of the movement: the *Citizens' Initiative Referendum (CIR)*.

The referendum

This demand illustrates the good sense of the movement. Rather than making a "must" list, the GJ merely ask that the people be allowed to choose, and the referendum is the way to choose. The demand is for a certain number of signatories perhaps 700,000, perhaps more to gain the right to call a referendum on an issue of their choice. The right to a CIR exists in Switzerland, Italy and California. The idea horrifies all those whose profession it is to know best. If the people vote, they will vote for all sorts of absurd things, the better-knowers observe with a shudder.

A modest teacher in a junior college in Marseilles, *Etienne Chouard*, has been developing for decades ideas on how to or-

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[*] *Diana Johnstone,* born in 1934, studied Russian regional science/Slavonic studies and earned her doctorate in French literature. She has lived in Paris for many years and works as a freelance journalist for various US and international media. She is the author of several books, including "The Politics of Euromissiles: Europe's Role in America's World", "Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, Nato, and Western Delusions", "Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton". Most recently, she wrote the preface and commentary on the memoirs of her father Dr Paul H. Johnstone, "From Mad to Madness". He was a former senior analyst of the Strategic Weapons Evaluation Group (WSEG) in the Pentagon.

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ganise direct democracy, with the referendum at its centre. His hour has come with the Yellow Vests. He insists that a referendum must always be held after a long debate and time for reflection, to avoid emotional spur-of-the-moment decisions. Such a referendum requires honest, independent media which are not all owned by special interests. It requires making sure that politicians who make the laws follow the popular will expressed in the referendum. All this suggests the need for a people's constitutional convention.

The referendum is a bitter point in France, a powerful silent underlying cause of the whole Gilets Jaunes movement. In 2005, President *Chirac* (unwisely from his point of view) called for a popular referendum on ratification of the proposed Constitution of the European Union, certain it would be approved. The political class, with a few exceptions, went into full rhetoric, claiming a prosperous future as a new world power under the new Constitution and warning that otherwise Europe might be plunged back into World Wars I and II.

However, ordinary citizens organised an extraordinary movement of popular self-education, as groups met to pour through the daunting legalistic documents, elucidating what they meant and what they implied. On 29 May 2005, with a turnout of 68%, the French voted 55% to reject the Constitution. Only Paris voted heavily in favour.

Three years later, the National Assembly – that is, politicians off all parties – voted to adopt virtually the same text, which in 2009 became the Treaty of Lisbon. That blow to the clearly expressed popular will produced such disillusion that many backed helplessly away from politics. Now they are coming back.

The violence

From the start, the government has reacted with violence, in an apparent desire to provoke responding violence in order to condemn the movement as violent.

An army of police, dressed like robots, have surrounded and blocked groups of peaceful Yellow Vests, drowning them in clouds of teargas and firing flash balls directly at protesters, seriously wounding hundreds (no official figures). A number of people have lost an eye or a hand. The government has nothing to say about this.

On the third Saturday of protest, this army of police was unable to stop – or under orders to allow – a large number of hoodlums or Black Blocs (who knows?) infiltrate the movement and smash property, vandalise shops, set fire to trash cans and parked cars, providing the world media with images proving that the Yellow Vests are dangerously violent.

Despite all this provocation, the Gilets Jaunes have remained remarkably calm and determined. But there are bound to be a few people who lose their tempers and try to fight back.

The boxer

On 8th Saturday, 5 January, a squad of plexiglass-protected police were violently attacking Gilets Jaunes on a bridge over the Seine when a big guy lost his temper, emerged from the crowd and went on the attack. With his fists, he beat down one policeman and caused the others to retreat. This amazing scene was filmed. You could see Yellow Vests trying to hold him back, but Rambo was unstoppable.

It turned out that this was *Christophe Dettinger,* a French Rom, former light heavyweight boxing champion of France. His nickname is "the Gypsy of Massy". He got away from the scene, but made a video before turning himself in. "I reacted badly", he said, when he saw police attacking women and other defenseless people. He urged the movement to go ahead peacefully.

Dettinger faces seven years in prison. Within a day, his defense fund had gathered 116,433 euros. The government shut it down on what legal pretext I don't know. Now a petition circulates on his behalf.

The slander

In his New Year's Eve address, Macron patronisingly scolded his people telling them that "you can't work less and earn more" – as if they all aspired to spending their lives lounging on a yacht and watching stock prices rise and fall. Then he issued his declaration of war:

"These days I have seen unthinkable things and heard the unacceptable." Apparently alluding to the few opposition politicians who dare sympathise with the protesters, he chastised those who pretend to "speak for the people", but are only the "spokesmen for a hateful mob going after elected representatives, police, journalists, Jews, foreigners and homosexuals. It is simply the negation of France."

The Gilets Jaunes haven't been "going after" anybody. The police have been "going after" them. People have indeed spoken up vigorously against camera crews of channels that systematically distort the movement.

Not a word has been heard from the movement against foreigners or homosexuals. The key word is Jews.

Qui veut noyer son chien l'accuse de la rage. (French proverb).

As the French saying goes, whoever wants to drown his dog claims he has rabies. Today whoever wants to ruin a career, take vengeance on a rival, disgrace an individual or destroy a movement accuses her, him, or it of antisemitism.

So, faced with a rising democratic movement, playing the "antisemitism" card was inevitable. It was almost a sure thing statistically. In almost any random batch of hundreds of thousands of people, you might find one or two who have something negative to say about a Jew. That I'll do it. The media hawks are on the outlook. The slightest incident can be used to suggest that the real motive of the movement is to revive the Holocaust.

This gently ironic little song, performed on one of France's traffic circles, contrasts the "nice" establishment with the "bad" ordinary folk. It is a huge hit on *YouTube*. It gives the tone of the movement. *Les Gentils et les Méchants*.

It didn't take long for this merry number to be accused of antisemitism. Why? Because it was ironically dedicated to two of the very most virulent critics of the Gilets Jaunes: May '68 star *Daniel Cohn-Bendit* and old "new philosopher" *Bernard-Henri Lévy.* The new generation can't stand them. But wait, they happen to be Jewish. Aha! Anti-Semitism!

The repression

Faced with what government spokesman *Benjamin Griveaux* described as "agitators" and "insurrectionists" who want to "overthrow the government", Prime Minister *Edouard Philippe* announced a new "law to better protect the right to demonstrate". Its main measure: heavily punish organisers of a demonstration whose time and place have not had official approval.

In fact, the police had already arrested 33-year-old truck driver *Eric Drouet* for organising a small candle ceremony in honor of the movement's casualties. There have been many other arrests, with no information coming out about them. (Incidentally, over the holidays, hoodlums in the banlieues of several cities carried out their ritual burning of parked cars, with no particular publicity or crackdown. Those were cars of working class people who need them to go to work, not the precious cars in the rich section of Paris whose destruction caused such scandal.)

On January 7, *Luc Ferry*, a "philosopher" and former Minister of Youth, Education and Research, gave a radio interview on the very respectable *Radio Classique* in which he declared: "The police are not given the means to end this violence. It's unbearable. Listen, frankly, when you see guys kick a poor policemen when he's down, that's enough! Let them use their arms once and for all, basta! […] As I recall, we have the world's fourth army, capable of putting an end to this garbage."

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Theresa May's error

by Roland Hureaux, France

Roland Hureaux picture ma)

Brexit increasingly resembles a television series full of surprising twists and turns, the end of which is not in sight.

After two years of negotiations, both sides believed they had reached an agreement on the conditions to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. But the treaty was clearly rejected by the House of Commons on 14 January with 432 votes to 202, as many Britons believe that their Prime Minister, Ms *May,* has made too many concessions. The majority consisted of a coalition of still active Brexit opponents with those who judged the outcome of the negotiations too unfavourable to British interests.

One wonders why Ms May let herself in for something that increasingly resembles a true way of the cross.

There are two ways to get out of the European Union.

The first and easier one is purely and simply the termination of the EU accession, which is possible for any sovereign state. All European regulations would have continued to apply to the United Kingdom until the London government decided to modify or repeal them.

Had this modification posed a problem for the European Union, for example if the UK had newly demanded duties on imports from the continent where there were none before, then this could have been negotiated bilaterally. Conversely, if the European Union had confronted the United Kingdom with unfavourable decisions, bilateral negotiations would have been just as possible. However, these negotiations would have taken place after Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, in complete freedom. The WTO treaties, to which both the European Union and the United Kingdom are parties, limit from the outset the economic leverage that would have been used by Brussels or London.

As far as the legislative power of the EU is concerned, it would have been transferred to the UK, according to the theory of the successor state, without all previous regulations having necessarily to be revised. The same theory would have applied to agreements with third countries which would have remained in force for as long as they were not called into question by any of the contracting parties (United Kingdom or third country).

The second way to leave the European Union is to apply Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, which organises the complicated withdrawal procedure, bearing in mind that the United Kingdom remains a member of the EU as long as the procedure is not completed.

Why choose a simple solution when there is also a complicated one? The British government has chosen the second way, very probably to make the break a little more gently. This decision could also have had something to do with Ms May's opposition to Brexit at the outset.

If the British did not know before, I am sure they have now understood that the purpose of this complex procedure is to make the withdrawal of a state from the EU as complicated as possible so that it will be discouraged from the outset. The negotiating partners on the part of the European Union, first and foremost the French Commissioner *Michel Barnier,* have also done nothing to ease the Brexit, in order to prevent the resignation of another member through this procedure. They were encouraged to do so by the French President *Macron* and, more discreetly, by the German Chancellor.

The result of this slowness could, however, be different: If another country decides to resign, it will in future know that taking the direct and shorter route, namely that of unilateral termination of accession, is better because the negotiations then take place after the resignation and not before. •

Source: L'erreur de Theresa May. *Boulevard Voltaire.* 16 January 2019

(Translation *Current Concerns)*

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Ferry called on Macron to make a coalition with the Republicans in order to push through his "reforms".

Last month, in a column against the Citizens' Initiative Referendum, Ferry wrote that "the current disparaging of experts and criticism of elitism is the worst calamity of our times."

The Antifa

Wherever people gather, Antifa groups may pursue their indiscriminate search to root out "fascists". In Bordeaux last Saturday, Yellow Vests had to fight off an attack by Antifa.

It is now completely clear (as indeed it always has been) that the self-styled "Antifascists" are the watch dogs of the status quo. In their tireless search for "fascists", the Antifa attack anything that moves. In effect, they protect stagnation. And curiously enough, Antifa violence is tolerated by the same State and the same police who insult, attack and arrest more peaceful demonstrators. In short, the Antifa are the storm troopers of the current system.

The media

Be skeptical. At least in France, mainstream media are solidly on the side of "order", meaning Macron, and foreign media tend to echo what national media write and say. Also, as a general rule, when it comes to France, the Anglophone media often get it wrong.

The end

It is not in sight. This may not be a revolution, but it is a revelation of the real nature of "the system". Power lies with a technocracy in the service of "the Markets", meaning the power of finance capital. This technocracy aspires to remake human society, our own societies and those all over the planet, in the interests of a certain capitalism. It uses economic sanctions, overwhelming propaganda and military force (NATO) in a "globalisation" project that shapes people's lives without their consent. Macron is the very embodiment of this system. He was chosen by that famous elite to carry through the measures dictated by "the Markets", enforced by the European Union. He cannot give in. But now that people are awake to what is going on, they won't stop either. For all the lamented decline in the school system, the French people today are as well-educated and reasonable as any population can be expected to be. If they are incapable of democracy, then democracy is impossible. •

Source: *globalresearch.ca.* This article was first published under the title "French Democracy Dead or Alive?" *https://www.globalresearch.ca/gilets-jaunes-2019-french-democracy-dead-alive/5665302 from 12 Janaury 2019.*

The Franco-German Treaty of Aachen endangers Franco-German relations

Press release by Mouvance France[*]

The Franco-German treaty signed by Macron and Merkel in Aachen on Tuesday 22 January will have the opposite effect to that intended, as it will affect the relations between the two peoples.

This treaty, prepared secretly and without public discussion, became known only a few days before it was signed. It is concluded between two Heads of State or Government with a serious lack of legitimacy: Emmanuel Macron is involved in the Yellow West crisis, and Angela Merkel has reached the end of her office term and is only concerned with day-to-day business. A sad caricature of the Elysée Treaty signed on 22 January 1963 between Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, which ended a century of hostilities between the two countries.

The Franco-German partnership was very balanced in the spirit of its renowned signatories. This is no longer the case. The euro, as it is handled, is the main cause: it stimulates German industry and causes the slow death of French industry. Trade, including agricultural trade, is showing an increasing surplus for Germany and a deficit for France. As if there was an concerted plan to weaken French power, control over our industrial flagships - products of national engineering such as Alstom, Nexter, soon perhaps Naval Group and others - is being transferred across the Rhine or elsewhere under the pretext of cooperation. Airbus, the result of the efforts of generations of French engineers, is now beyond any French control.

The treaty implies the project of a future merger of the two nations into a single state: one parliament, one state budget, one army. This also includes French support for Germany's demand for a permanent seat on the Security Council. Even if this has no prospect of success, this support will appear to the whole world as a sign of devotion. By leaning on Mrs Merkel, Macron hopes to drag the other countries in a final leap towards supranational integration. Exactly the opposite will happen: This treaty does not seem to be in line with the Lisbon Treaty, as it makes enhanced cooperation between individual member states subject to the other states' consent (Article 21), which will only create resentment against our two countries.

The projeted integration, which runs counter to history, which everywhere sees a return to the sovereignty of nations, does neither directly nor indirectly meet the will of our two peoples. Peoples, like individuals, do not like promiscuity. Two neighbours who get along well will quickly hate each other if certain boundaries that separate them are torn off. The Franco-German reconciliation seemed to have been achieved. By forcing us to share the same bed, Macron and Merkel are challenging it.

The treaty gives the question of language only a subordinate place: both the Germans and the French practice the language of the other less and less. Macron himself has never bothered to learn a little German. The result is a mutual ignorance, as a Germanomaniac French oligarchy is demonstrating, who wants to imitate everything that comes from the other side of the Rhine, but has no idea what is happening there.

Our German friends should not be deceived: The apparent Germanophilia of the so-called French elites is less a sign of interest in genuine Germany than of their pathological contempt for the French people. The French, with whom their government negotiates in secret, are not the French people. They do not represent the people. They should beware of the effects of contempt and hatred that a majority of the French feel for the political elite they are dealing with! This treaty will certainly not bring the two peoples closer together, but in fact it will divide them.

This treaty is a punch below the belt to the citizens' demands: it includes strengthening the euro, which is the main cause of the imbalance between the two countries and of the decline in purchasing power the Yellow West are rightly complaining about: being neither xenophobic nor germanophobic, in view of this contempt they might however become so. •

[*] Mouvance France is a political association independent of the party landscape. It has positioned itself in clear contrast to the current Government's policy. The Board comprises the following persons, among others: Roland Hureaux (President), Dominique Marcilhacy, Elisabeth Faure Viard, Francis Choisel, Tarick Dali, Serge Federbusch, Guy de la Barthe, Michel Leblay, Karim Oouchikh, Guillaume de Thieulloy

(Translation: *Current Concerns*)

The preparations for war in Europe proceed: "Integrity initiative" and "Aachen Treaty"

by Karl Müller

It can no longer be overlooked that in the powerful states the responsible politicians, the military and the media are arming for war – and not all of them are doing it to prevent a war. Moreover: The big powers are already waging war – mostly in proxy wars, but also in direct confrontation. One of these war theatres is Syria. The number of victims – most of them civilians who would have liked nothing better than to live in peace – is already in the hundreds of thousands.

Cold War and hot wars

This was not different in the first Cold War: Despite the UN Charta passed at the end of World War II, the hot wars in Korea, Indochina, Afghanistan and many regions in Africa killed millions of people, not counting the material and cultural destruction.

There is a new cold war between the NATO states and Russia and the consequences are not only a return to the arms race but also a new massive propaganda effort establishing enemy stereotypes. This includes the turning away from the imperative of truthfulness in political speech, reporting and commenting. Even persons calling themselves scientists propagate war. The cards are no longer on the table, unwelcome facts are suppressed, everything needs to match the enemy stereotype – and for those refusing to join in life is made difficult.

The work of the secret services, their covert operations and ploys are booming. And if something seems to be leaked, we cannot be sure if we really get the facts. There are only a few personalities left who try to get to the bottom of things – which is not surprising because such people live dangerously.

But should we accept this?

Some see their task in informing, for example about the so-called "Integrity Initiative"[1] which started in 2015. So far, in the German speaking countries only the *Nachdenkseiten, Telepolis* and Swiss Propaganda Research have reported on this, also the German speaking Russian stations *RT Deutsch* and *Sputnik*. According to the available reports, the "Initiative" is controlled by a pseudo-private institution in

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"The preparations for a war in ..."
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the United Kingdom, financed by the UK government, but also by NATO and Facebook. More or less covertly, networks of secret agents, army officers, politicians, journalists and "scientists" are to be established which – according to the "Initiative's" [meanwhile deactivated] web page (*www.integrityinitiative.net*) – want to work against propaganda and disinformation. Focus is mainly Russian "propaganda" and "disinformation" – and much is suggesting that the true motive is not love of truth but propaganda against Russia – and the means of choice is disinformation.

All this is not surprising, and it does not make sense to go into details or to fuss here particularly. A cynic might sum it up: Quod erat demonstrandum (which was to be proven)!

Cynicism is not a solution

But cynicism is not a solution. Even the distanced comprehension of evil cannot do good. What has happened to make people lose respect for war?

What does it take to arouse emotions in people allowing them to say "No to War", openly and honestly? What does it take to encourage him to take an active stand for peace?

The extent of public deception

The extent of public deception has become large.

On 22 January 2019, the French President *Emmanuel Macron* and the German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* signed a new treaty in the German town Aachen, steeped in history: the "Aachen Treaty"[2]. The date of signature was chosen deliberately: on 22 January 1963 the Élysée Treaty was signed. Official sources stated that the new treaty was in line with the Élysée Treaty which was concluded between *Charles de Gaulle* and *Konrad Adenauer,* updating the old treaty. This statement, however, is wrong. The Élysée Treaty was a step towards reconciliation between France and Germany after centuries of hostility – and, at least for de Gaulle, the attempt to release Germany from US-American guardianship – with the goal of a "Europe of Fatherlands". The "Aachen Treaty" has nothing to do with this objective.

A German-French treaty for war preparation?

This is not the place to highlight all details of the treaty. However, this treaty is directed against the idea of sovereign democracies; military cooperation is a central aspect. *Sevim Dagdelen,* spokeswoman for disarmament of the Linke faction in the German Bundestag, called the "Aachen Treaty" a "bizarre mixture of military build-up and war preparation with neoliberal and authoritarian orientation."[3] On his Facebook page, the spokesman for European politics of the Linke faction, *Andrej Hunko,* stated pointedly: "Formerly, the historic Élysée Treaty marked an important step towards reconciliation between Germany and France. The recently signed treaty does not have much to do with it: back then it was about reconciliation, today it's about armament!"

Telling is also the headline of the definitively not left-wing German "Handelsblatt" of 22 January 2019: "Germany is approaching France in defence". And how should we understand the statement of the SPD politician *Fritz Felgentreu*, cited in the "Handelsblatt": "In face of the US withdrawal from Syria we see that Europe would not even be able to replace the withdrawing troops. Hence we cannot even discuss if we want to replace the troops or not." Earlier he had stated: "We should start at last discussing concrete projects with France."

Von der Leyen is soliciting in the "New York Times"

The German approach towards French "security and defence political goals and strategies" (Article 4 of the "Aachen Treaty") sounds ominous. It matches the plan to make Germany ready for war – contrary to the law in force. On 18 January 2019, the German "Minister of War" *Ursula von der Leyen* took the same line in a commentary in the "New York Times" – one of the main media of the US American war party. The title of the column was addressing the US public, formulated along the *Obama-Clinton* line: "The World Still Needs NATO". The enemy stereotypes are Russia and China. The height of cynicism is reached with the picture in the internet edition of the newspaper: Soldiers of the KFOR stand in front of the American and NATO flags after the army formation ceremony in Pristina, Kosovo, in December. – This is the result of the first NATO war of aggression, contrary to international law, after 1991.

Germany and the "Integrity Initiative"

Both, the "Integrity Initiative" and the "Aachen Treaty" are meant to make Germany readier for war.

This includes an important detail from a leaked message from the man responsible for the "Integrity Initiative" in Germany to his British "agent handler": "The depth of vulnerability and the intensity of the Russian attempts make Germany a very tough but very important goal." The German also complains that Germany was particularly receptive for "Russian influence".

This must be put in perspective: Indeed, the German-Russian relations have a long tradition, also in the positive sense. The National Socialist Germany outrageously rampaged in Russia, killing tens of millions. Many Germans are still aware of this. And they also know that there can be no peace in Europe without Russia. And that it is of material interest for Germany to maintain good relations with Russia.

The German aversion against a new war, even a war against Russia, is meant to be broken. This matches the statements of the political scientist Peter W. Schulze, cited by Sputnik on 9 January 2019: "This campaign has been running uninterruptedly since the end of the first decade of the new millennium and is meant to weaken the remaining pragmatic circles interested in a moderate cooperation with Russia led by common interests and in addition to demonise Russia further." •

The Aachen Treaty

km. The German version of the "Aachen Treaty" (officially: "Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration") has 16 pages.

A detailed preamble is followed by 7 chapters: "European Affairs", "Peace, Security and Development", "Culture, Education, Research and Mobility", "Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation", "Sustainable Development, Climate, Environment and Economic Affairs", "Organisation" and "Final Provisions".

The most extensive are the chapters on the intensification of foreign policy and military cooperation (Chapter 2) and on cross-border joint projects (Chapter 4).

The main objectives of the Treaty are obviously the coordination and alignment of more and more German and French policy areas as well as the claim to assume a leading role within the EU in the direction of a globalist-oriented "deepening" by means of close agreements.

The other EU states have not been consulted as far as known.

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[1] Cf. *https://swprs.org/die-integrity-initiative/* of January 2019 with further hints; or Florian Rötzer, the first to report: "Integrity Initiative: Britische Beeinflussungskampagne gegen Russland?", *https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Integrity-Initiative-Britische-Beeinflussungskampagne-gegen-Russland-4232365.html* of 26 November 2018

[2] The German version of the Aachen Treaty can be found here: *https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/997532/1570126/c720a7f2e1a0128050baaa6a16b760f7/2019-01-19-vertrag-von-aachen-data.pdf,* the French version is here: *https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/allemagne/relations-bilaterales/traite-de-cooperation-franco-allemand-d-aix-la-chapelle/*

[3] Sevim Dagdelen. "Nein zum Aachener Aufrüstungsvertrag", in: Telepolis of 21 January 2019; *https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Nein-zum-Aachener-Aufruestungsvertrag-4283180.html*

Who is this demanding EU actually?

Switzerland must no longer allow itself to be blackmailed

by Dieter Sprock

If we follow the discussion in the Swiss media about the framework agreement called for by the EU, we are above all struck by the fact that hardly ever the question arises: Who is this demanding EU actually? There is, however, plenty of reason why it should be asked: For years it has not been possible to approve the EU budget, because billions have been disappearing into the bureaucracy's black holes. Bureaucracy and regulations have taken on an extent that no one can take stock of any more. The poorer countries are becoming poorer and poorer, and also in the richer countries, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The economically strongest country in the EU, Germany, has the highest proportion of poor people, whose wages or pensions are below the poverty line. The grievances in the EU – above all the democratic deficit and the senseless destruction of money – stink to high heaven. No longer can lipstick be put on the pig.

More and more countries are trying to free themselves from EU dictation and to make a policy for their own population again. People are beginning to understand that the freedom of capital is not their freedom and that the increasing impoverishment of their countries is a consequence of the greed of the richest of all. In all EU countries, the parties critical of the EU are increasing their share of the vote. Less and less people want to continue seeing the policies of their countries determined by Brussels. Malicious tongues are already calling Brussels the new Moscow, thereby referring to the communist past.

Demand and threaten

If proof had still been needed of the undemocratic character of the EU, it will now, at the latest, be provided in form of the demands make on Switzerland: the EU is making demands and at the same time threatening sanctions. It demands the automatic adoption of EU law. And it is threatening to withdraw Switzerland's stock market equivalence if the latter does not heed its calls – there is no reason for this from a technical point of view. The EU is threatening to block Switzerland's market access to the electricity sector – although Switzerland is doing a good job as an electricity hub in Europe. The EU is threatening not to continue the existing bilateral agreements – although there is no objective reason to do so. …

A sovereign state cannot respond to such a setting. Contracts should be negotiated without threats and can be terminated and renegotiated without sanctions being expected – otherwise they are dictates. The EU's demand for automatic adoption of EU law must be rejected without any ifs or buts.

Expert opinions

Since the Federal Council has now released the negotiated draft of the framework agreement for consultation and sent it to the consultation process, not a single day has passed without ever new "experts" repeatedly having their say. We read that they want to "contribute to clarification", call for "objectification of the discussion" and offer "thinking aids", because it is such a "complex topic", that the "man in the street" has for a long time been incapable to follow all the trains of thought. Others are warning against "the decline of the Swiss economy": If the framework agreement fails, the EU (!) might downgrade Switzerland "to the status of a third country", wrote the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on 19 January, without showing any outrage. It continued to say that you clearly misunderstand democracy if you only see it as the "rule of the majority" and accept this fatalistically; and it called for assertive government. Other "experts" call for accession to the EEA or even directly to the EU as a solution.

Whatever all the "smart" experts may find out, nothing changes the nature of the EU itself. It simply does not represent the interests of the people. It is in the service of high finance, which, in the form of the internal market, has created an area for itself in which it can boundlessly move goods, people and capital, in order to make the greatest possible profit – at any sacrifice.

The citizens have the final say

The framework agreement is about access to Switzerland. It is intended to open up the Swiss market for services of all kinds to the financial market – including schools, universities and medical care – as well as public services, in particular water and electricity supply.

The CVP (Christian People's Party of the Canton of Aargau recently expressed its concern that large Swiss companies are increasingly owned by foreign investors. In contrast to the past, many of these shareholders no longer behave like responsible owners, but are only interested in their own profit ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 10 January). It is not alone in this concern.

Switzerland is therefore faced with the choice of either offering up even its sovereignty and its globally unique direct democracy to mammon, or of defending them by rejecting the framework agreement.

The financial industry is fighting with no holds barred to achieve its goals. Fortunately, Swiss citizens still have the final say in form of the referendum. •

Federal referendum from 10 February 2019

The other side of the coin

Supplement to the urban sprawl initiative

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The initiative was launched because, in the opinion of the initiators, the present Swiss spatial planning was not sufficiently effective (cf. Current Concerns No. 2 from 23 January 2019). Anyone who investigates the matter, however, will come across a centrally controlled settlement policy that has been going on for years and that ploughs up our country in such a way that citizens are inclined to say: Stop! Perhaps you remember the metropolitan spaces, introduced in Berne around the turn of the millennium on the model of the EU. On this basis, the Confederation pursues its costly agglomeration policy, which promotes the regional concentration of commerce and industry in "urban areas" – so to speak the counterpart to the natural parks in "rural areas", which are also planted from up high. What both have in common is the breaking down of cantonal sovereignty through the creation of "regions" that allegedly are more in tune with the needs of today than the cooperation between the cantons, which is independent of the Confederation. Both are directing spatial policy with the bait of subsidies worth millions in a way that not only serves the much-desired economical use of building land but above all weakens the independent planning of the once sovereign cantons and autonomous communes. It is advisable to consider this other side of the coin before deciding on further steps in settlement policy.

One of the main reasons for Switzerland's economic success is – in addition to the right of citizens to make democratic decisions – the decentralised structure and the associated flexibility of our economy. Unlike in many other countries, commerce and industry have never been concentrated exclusively in the cities. Textile factories and later on mechanical and electrical engineering companies also settled in many villages in Switzerland from the 19th century onwards. This applies even more to commerce and service companies: 99 per cent of Swiss companies are still small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which operate primarily in the immediate vicinity, anchored in their communes. Not only do they pay their taxes (in addition to payments to the Confederation and the canton) into the communal coffers, but managers and employees are also often active in the associative life and in communal politics. Therefore, the per capita economic performance in urban and rural areas is relatively balanced and the population in urban and rural areas generally meets on an equal footing.

Agglomeration policy: Concentration of the economy in the "urban area"

The current example of "Wil West" makes it clear that it is less and less the cantons and communes that shape building and economic policy today, but newly formed supra-regional organisations that gear their projects primarily to getting hold of the generously flowing federal funds. In the "Regio Wil", for example, there are representatives from 22 communes in Thurgau and St. Gallen, as well as from the business community, and the branch manager is simultaneously the head of the "Wil West" project. This huge green field area of 158,000 square metres is to be built over from 2023 to 2038 (!) for commercial, industrial and service company use, creating up to 3,000 jobs. The preliminary project work alone amounts to CHF 1.45 million, a separate motorway connection costs CHF 16.3 million. The total infrastructure costs are an estimated 132 million (*https://www.wilwest.ch/projekt/daten-fakten/*). The main attraction: The federal government is contributing 37 million francs to the Wil agglomeration programme.

Restrictions on communal autonomy and disadvantages for local businesses

"With the realisation of Wil West, the two Cantons of Thurgau and St. Gallen are sending a decisive signal for the long-term economic strengthening and positioning of the entire region. At the same time, the concentration of new settlements and business expansions of existing local companies on a central area will counteract further urban sprawl in the communes." (*https://www.wilwest.ch/wil-west/vorhaben/)*

Sounds good to me. A closer look, however, reveals the major disadvantages of such a huge project. First, only 103,000 of the 158,000 square metres of the site are located in the construction zone. The rest would therefore be re-zoned – this is not in the spirit of sustainable spatial planning. Since it is completely open anyway how much a site in Wil West is sought after by resident and new companies, one could actually limit oneself to the already zoned area.

Secondly, the communes in the region that are not directly involved are disadvantaged. Because they have to pay, so to speak, for the creation of new commercial building land in Wil West: For a company anchored in the commune, the canton may not allocate building land under certain circumstances, because the large-scale development swallows up all reserves. This happened in Oberuzwil, where a small business with eight employees had their lease terminated by its owner and therefore looked for another plot of land to build its own factory building. Although the company owner wants to stay in the commune and the local council wants to enable that, there is little hope. Because there are no building land reserves in the commune, and the management of Regio *Wil* is hardly interested in approving new zoning outside the Wil West site ("Wiler Zeitung" from 22 January 2019). The commune may therefore lose one taxpayer and eight jobs.

Thirdly, centralised planning simply does not fit in with Switzerland's small-scale, decentralised economy. One cannot recommend the tradesman from Oberuzwil to settle in Wil West. He has built up his regular clientele in the communeand neighbouring places over the years, while he would have to start all over again at another location. Especially from an ecological point of view, it makes most sense if the customers live close to a business – to keep distances short.

Where does the federal government take the 37 million?

For agglomeration projects and nature parks, the Confederation is drawing on resources of the former *investment aid fund* in a big way. From 1974 to 2008, the Confederation and the cantons provided this fund with regular contributions, so that capital of around CHF 1.5 billion was available.

The fund supported financially weak mountain communes in their expensive infrastructure tasks (e.g. mountain roads, avalanche barriers), but not à fonds perdu, as is customary today. Rather, the communes received long-term (30-year) repayable interest-free loans. Almost all loans were repaid by the communes and could be lent to other communes (totalling 1222!). "It was an example of the federalist subsidiarity and solidarity principle," *wikipedia* praises the *Federal Law on Investitionshilfe für Berggebiete (IHG)* [Investment Aid for Alpine

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Vote to Self-determination initiative: Quo vadis, direct democracy?

mw. The Self-determination initiative (SBI) was rejected on 25 November 2018 with 66.3 per cent of the votes. Now the *Voto-Studie*[1] (vote survey) on citizens' voting behaviour comes to results that give us a lot to think about.

For example, 43 per cent of the over 1,500 voters surveyed stated that "they found it rather difficult to understand what the bill was about" (Voto-Studie p. 4) – an alarmingly high proportion in the country of direct democracy. But no wonder – as the "information" provided by politicians, the media and representatives of large corporations was often confusing or even runs counter to facts! Accordingly, one-third of the naysayers cited "Switzerland's credibility as an international negotiating partner" as their main motive, which was in reality not compromised at all by the initiative. 16 per cent voted "against Switzerland sealing itself off", which was also not the issue. And, as a result of thousands of repetitions, the title "Anti-Human Rights Initiative" remained stuck in many people's minds ...

In the report of the newspaper "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on the Voto-Studie, it was apparently now suddenly possible to state briefly, objectively and comprehensibly what the initiative was about: "At its core, the Self-determination initiative wanted the Federal Constitution to be established as the supreme source of law and to take precedence over international law – with the exception of mandatory international law. International law contradicting the Federal Constitution was to be renegotiated and, if necessary, terminated."[2] Why not explain it like this before the vote? In that case the readers would have had no problem understanding the concern of the initiative. The proponents, at any rate, had apparently understood it, because they voted largely in favour "because one wanted to remain sovereign or self-determined" (Voto-Studie p. 25).

Free formation of opinion instead of small-scale thinking

Another – extremely alarming – finding of the study is the increasing sharpness towards people and groups with different political views: "The decisive factor for the decision taken was primarily the political attitudes, first and foremost party identification: […] There was hardly anyone in the left-wing camp who might have agreed to the request (6 or 7 % agreement). But even in the political centre and, moreover, to the moderate right, the SVP (Swiss People's Party) initiative could not achieve a majority. Only on the far right was it able to achieve a majority, albeit a clear one (74%). *Generally speaking, ideological or party-political affiliation dominated the decision so strongly, that other characteristics were only of minor importance*." (p. 23; emphasis *mw*)

This kind of small-scale thinking may be common in some representative democracies, but it is alarming in direct democracy. An objective discussion of the most diverse opinions is an indispensable prerequisite for the formation of democratic opinion. In Switzerland, honest and open exchange of opinions at the regulars' table or at an open forum for discussion has always been the rule. Of course, we have also seen some instances of political trench warfare in the past, but in principle the way in which fellow citizens deal with each other in their joint responsibility for the commune is quite different from that prevailing in the authoritarian state. The fact that our political culture has suffered such damage as expressed in the Voto-Studie – above all in connection with the overriding question of how closely Switzerland should link itself to the EU and other supranational constructs – is an alarm signal. We citizens, but also the media, are called upon not to continue pouring oil on the fire, but to do our utmost to help cultivate and strengthen our community-related political culture. •

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[1] *Voto-Studie* zur eidgenössischen Volksabstimmung vom 25. November 2018, finanziert von der Schweizerischen Bundeskanzlei. (Study on the federal referendum of 25 November 2018, financed by the Swiss Federal Chancellery.) Authors: Thomas Milic, Alessandro Feller and Daniel Kübler, *Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau* (ZDA), and Anke Tresch, Laurent Bernhard, Laura Scaperrotta and Lukas Lauener, *FORS,* the social science research centre in Lausanne.

[2] "Zu schwere Kost für das Stimmvolk" ("Too heavy food for the electorate"). "*Neue Zürcher Zeitung"* from 11 January 2019

"The other side of the coin"
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regions] from 21 March 1997 *(https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solidarität).*

With the coming into effect of the *New Regional Policy* (NRP) – in the style of EU regional policy – the IHG was repealed with effect of 1 January 2008. The CHF 1.5 billion will only go to regional projects selected by the Federal Administration, such as nature parks and agglomeration programmes. Mountain communes now have to see for themselves how they manage. Many are currently paying back their previous loans, thereby filling the pot of money. In Ticino, Valais, Glarus and Graubünden, entire valleys have merged to form single communes that are no longer anchored in the population as before, but could allegedly be managed "more efficiently", i.e. more cost-effectively. As it has long turned out, this is not true: Small communes are still the most economical in terms of their budgets. It is bitter that now nature parks and large-scale commercial zones are being allocated the money that was originally intended for the financially particularly strained alpine regions. •

Current Concerns

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From adjustment syndrome to mainstream obedience?

by Marita Koch

Why do many people hesitate to express their opinion when it is contrary to the mainstream? Why do we remain silent among friends and colleagues when we disagree? Among many other suggestions, Allan Guggenbühl's book "For my child only the best" also provides interesting food for thought on this question by transferring the concept of the adaptation syndrome from stress research to today's educational reality and thus explaining aspects of education towards a free expression of opinion.

> "If someone is in the adjustment mode, then his mental horizon has narrowed. Autonomous thinking and unusual conclusions are no longer possible."

"The adjustment syndrome"

Guggenbühl deals with the "adjustment syndrome" from its natural and necessary forms up to its problematic aspects, also in adults. Adjustment, he explains, is in principle vital. Empathy is the ability to empathise with another person. The child learns to understand its caregivers, to recognise what the parents expect from it. At first it does not act on the basis of objective considerations and rational insight, but adapts to the expectations of the parents because it loves them, because it learns from them how to live, because it wants to be in harmony with them. Thus, it becomes a cooperative member of the family, of the community.

Guggenbühl explains that children sometimes also develop strategies how to influence parents to achieve certain goals such as attention or recognition. They know what they like to hear, so they "tell them what they want to hear in order to monopolise them".[1] [all quotes translated by *Current Concerns]* "The reverse of empathy is deception," says Guggenbühl. "Smart children intuitively notice which words to use, how to conduct themselves to get their own way with adults,"[2] says Guggenbühl. Many parents, Guggenbühl writes, would not notice their children's ruses, but would believe them everything. But there is a corrective in families: the quarrel, says Guggenbühl. A lot of things are brought up that are otherwise unspoken, "the masks are dropped".[3] Such quarrels are not supposed to be dangerous in the family. Because parents and children are closely connected, they would find the way to each other again.

This is more problematic at school. Here, reprimands, entries in reports, timeout or a diagnosis with the request to attend a therapy are at stake. At this point, Guggenbühl does not go into detail how the schools deal with such problems, he only briefly describes the usual measures.

Problematic aspects of the adjustment syndrome

Of course, we still need empathy as adults to create harmonious communities. But it becomes problematic if we do not find our way out of the mode of adjustment even if we are called upon as participants in solving real problems, be it at work, in the community, in associations, in the state. If we are not able to weigh in independently and courageously, after rational considerations into the various areas of our everyday life. If we speak for the sake of harmony or in order not to give offence or to provoke a dispute but simply tell them what they want to hear or remain silent. Guggenbühl vividly describes the situation at many workplaces: "Equality is pretended, a pronounced jovial tone is cultivated and hierarchies are kept flat, the boss is on friendly terms with all employees, at functions he toasts to everyone to the festive season and chats merrily about seemingly private matters such as children, holidays and leisure activities. However, nobody knows how decisions are reached and how their own performance is assessed.

If it is not clear who and where power is exercised, increased adjustment can be the result. One submits to the corporate culture for fear of making a mistake and endangering one's own position. One carefully scans which topics are en vogue and how one has to deal with potential decision-makers. Holders of high positions often do not realise that their subordinates mask themselves and that they themselves live in a bubble. The employees laugh heartily at their jokes, praise their ideas and show off their coolness. However, they actually are on their guard. They don't dare to communicate what they really think about work, the company or their bosses."[4] Who doesn't remember a lot of situations? An example: The situation in many teacher's staff rooms before the vote on Curriculum 21 was extremely tense: It quickly emerged that criticism was not only not desired but even expressly prohibited.

To oppose in such a situation, required heroic courage and was perhaps not always conducive. However, the consequence is that one has to endure an endless series of "information events" and training courses with no discussion or criticism. When the adjustment mode prevails, "hypocrisy is common practice and caution is required".[5] Apart from the fact that such processes are unworthy of a community of adult experts and weaken all those involved, the urgently needed substantive discussion cannot take place in this way. "School management does not know that employees are critical of a reform."[6] Of course, such processes are not only the result of an anxious "adjustment mode" of employees, but often submission is required by superiors or even by "the prevailing opinion". "The higher ranked the educational institution, the more only political correct opinions are allowed. Who questions the honesty of the #Metoo movement, questions the causes of climate change, uses the plural of students instead the correct gender expression in German, speaks of pupils instead or learners or talks of bums, makes himself suspicious."[7]

Attention: Pitfall – patting on the back!

An expression of the adjustment mode, sometimes difficult to understand and even harder to break, are flatteries. "If the adjustment mode dominates in a group, the feel-good conversation is prone to become the norm. At meetings, breaks, but also on the job, the content of communication is reduced to praise and mutual reassurance of how well you do and how nice you are. At the extreme, a patting on the back culture develops which becomes unbearable for outsiders. Praise is used as a strategy to avoid personal conflicts. […] Pretended enthusiasm and positive feed-back are neutralising points of controversy. […] Praise serves as an obfuscation petard to prevent possible conflicts. […] Everybody is anxious not to leave the mainstream."[8] I would like to add the subject of admiration here. Sometimes in a team, a company, a club, just any group of people one or several are admired excessively. The result is that one expects everything from those admired. Every word is taken as correct, every assessment or evaluation is sacrosanct. Such an adjustment mode is the death of any issue related dispute and the development of new ideas. It prevents relevant critical

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aspects from being acknowledged and discussed. "If someone is in the adjustment mode, then his mental horizon has narrowed. Autonomous thinking and unusual conclusions are no longer possible."[9]

We cannot overestimate the problematic, even dangerous consequences of the adjustment mode. Reforms tolerated without discussion in schools and universities[10] lead to an educational catastrophe, the extent of which we do not yet foresee. Municipalities often get into debt with prestigeous buildings, preferably sports halls, because too few dare to question such projects. In the economy, the adjustment mode leads to mismanagement, such as resulting in the grounding of the proud Swissair or the 300 million francs damage due to *Pierin Vincenz*'s mismanagement at Raiffeisen-Bank. Many of those responsible have supported everything he wanted in preemptive obedience.[11] As we extend our thinking, we see that the adjustment mode even has its share in wars. Therefore, the following pressing question arises: How do we get out of this? Moreover, what is the alternative? Is quarrel a solution, as Guggenbühl suggests for families? How could a constructive, solution oriented, dispute look like in a civil society? Thereto Switzerland has actually developed good approaches.

"I have spoken"

In the communal assembly, everyone who wants to speak has the word. He expresses himself to an issue without aiming at the person and without defaming others. One speaks in such a way that one can still look one another in the eye and respect the opponent after the debate and the vote has taken place, even if one disagrees completely with his position. Couldn't we go from here and create new citizens awareness at all levels? What I find impressive in this context is the yellow vest movement, as *Diana Johnstone* describes it in this edition: People don't let themselves be fobbed off with some cheap baits, don't fall for questionable "communication offers", but insist on initiative and referendum. They obviously have no leader who tells them what to think and no gospel to follow. The prudence is impressive: If you follow Johnstone, they don't use violence, but remain persistent in their cause and presence. They want what we citizens are entitled to in the 21st century: They want to determine their life and their country themselves.

For pedagogy is also to be considered: How do children and adolescents become citizens who do not participate in everything as a result of a problematic mode of adaptation? It certainly involves taking them seriously and having genuine discussions with them, especially with young people. We must not allow them to become accustomed to manipulative communication strategies. Guggenbühl says, for example: "Paradoxically, there is a danger with settings that delegate the responsibility for the learning process to children and adolescents. [...] From the child's point of view, this is a Macchiavellian move. They [the children and adolescents] know very well that it is the adults who are in charge, who decide about right and wrong and who judge their performance. [...] Many children and adolescents therefore switch to adjustment mode and refrain from critical statements. [...] One completes the task without working in depth with the content, but replicates the expectations one assumes."[12]

This is much the same when adults are told: "Your opinion is important to us"[13] and in reality it is obvious to everyone that it is dangerous to express any contradiction.

The task remains: What does it really mean to take children and adolescents serious? •

1 Guggenbühl, Allan. *Für mein Kind nur das Beste. 2018, p.89*
2 Ibid p. 89
3 Ibid p. 91
4 Ibid p. 93f
5 ibid. P.94
6 ibid. P.94
7 ibid. P.96
8 ibid. P.99
9 Ibid. P.100
10 Of course, there have always been honest, clear-headed citizens who do not allow anyone to order them to be quiet and who, for example, become active in initiative committees.
11 In an investigation *Charlotte Jaquemart,* economy editor SRF, comes to the following assessment from the enquiry: The Gehrig report is also devastating for *Johannes Rüegg-Stürm,* former Chairman of the Board of Directors. Without mentioning the University Professor from St. Gallen and specialist in corporate governance by name, it becomes apparent that the Board of Directors under his direction has not supervised Pierin Vincenz at any stage. The Board of Directors also failed to prepare the bank for all the acquisitions with organisational measures and corresponding guidelines. However, all the yes-men in the management – including former CEO *Patrik Gisel* – who all failed to contradict Pierin Vincenz are thus complicit in the expensive Raiffeisen debacle. In preemtive obedience, the employees did what they knew Vincenz wanted them to do. In: Raiffeisen-Untersuchung. Ein vernichtendes Fazit. In: *Raiffeisen-Investigation.* A devastating conclusion. 22 January 2019
12 Ibid p.97
13 Guggenbühl, Allan. In*: Einspruch! 2* (Objection! 2), 2019, p.47

"The higher ranked the educational institution, the more only politically correct opinions are allowed. Who questions the honesty of the #Metoo movement, questions the causes of climate change, uses the plural of students instead the correct gender expression in German, speaks of pupils instead or learners or talks of bums, makes himself or herself suspicious."

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Objection is necessary!

ev. The first edition of Objection! was dedicated primarily to presenting the background to the ongoing reforms in the education system. It allowed authors to express their views on the role of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Swiss Conference of Education Directors (EDK) and foundations such as Bertelsmann, as well as new paradigms such as competence orientation and others.

In the new Objection! 2 the word belongs first and foremost to those concerned: These are parents and teachers, but also experts from the fields of paediatrics, curative education, apprentice training or members of authorities. The descriptions give an insight into a development that is alarming for a democratic state: It is above all the consistent refusal to discuss and the way in which these changes are implemented, which is unbearable for Switzerland and in which experts, teachers and parents are in the mildest case simply ignored in their justified objections. All the more important, therefore, that some of them now have a voice. A look across the borders with further contributions from Great Britain and Germany shows that these "reforms" are being pushed forward on a larger scale. For example, the letter to the editor from Germany to our newspaper (see below) shows exactly the same trend in dealing with parents who are serious and prudent about their children's welfare. The booklet makes it clear that, on the one hand, the processes in our schools turn an entire generation into objects of unreflected reforms - let us remember that a child only attends school once and that the experiences gained are decisive for his or her future life. But the contributions also make you think, because they make education policy visible as a lever for the dismantling of democracy. It would be desirable that Objection! 2 is widely distributed and the urgently needed discussion on the issues it raises is getting off the ground more generally.

The reading also encourages us in this respect: A variety of statements from very different perspectives and backgrounds of experience have come together here, which all show: People do not let their own reasoning be taken away from them - and they also gain experience with it, which strengthens them on this path.

In the following we reproduce the editorial of the editors.

"This report about a long, but ultimately successful resistance against official arbitrariness and cover-up attempts should also encourage other parents not to simply give up their school."

Nicole Fuchs and Susanne Weigelt. To dare the political way. Objection! 2, p. 10

"One of the key experts now in these systems is the advisor. Every minister has advisors and it´s a particular career now, it´s a career route: 'The political advisor'. They often come from think tanks, which are very much involved now in the reform process. Again, it´s a sort of a de-democratisation. These are small groups who have usually a very clear political position which they then feed into government through the work of advisors and through other networks, which again have no democratic oversight or accountability. So, it´s a massive change in the whole political structure and structure of government."

Stephen Ball, The Transformation of Education and Democracy. Objection! 2, p. 51

"Public educational institutions in democracy do not have to adapt to a ‚change' given by God or the market, but rather reflect critically on it and possibly resist it.

Jochen Krautz. Imperatives of "change". Objection! 2, p. 44.

"'This is a conspiracy theory, Mr Pichard. There will be no comprehensive tests. There will only be individual samples to check what the learner's level of education is.'"

(Education Director Eymann, Basel-Stadt in the 'Basler Zeitung' from 30 April 2015)

Facts check: comprehensive tests are carried out in northwestern Switzerland (BS, BL, AG)." *Objection! 2, p. 60*

When we first went public with "Objection" almost three years ago, we were overwhelmed by the interest. We had to reprint the brochure four times. A total of 12,000 copies were sold in Switzerland.

At the time, our aim was to counter the impression that the media everywhere had suggested that the criticism of the "school reforms" that had been going on for years and that had hardly ever been openly discussed was motivated solely by conservative right-wing motives. It was repeated like a mantra-like that these "reforms" corresponded to social change and were therefore undisputed. People who reject such "reforms" are fundamentally hostile to progress. That is why we asked numerous politically left- to left-liberal-thinking, well-known personalities from science, politics and those active in the school-pedagogical environment to present their critical point of view on the never-ending "reforms" and the way they are enforced; many were happy to do so. Our demand with "Objection" was: Pause, reflect together and examine whether this permanent reform euphoria has really brought progress or rather regression to the school. So we demanded a genuine public discourse.

In fact, people in Switzerland know that our schools have been very successful and have contributed significantly to our prosperity today. This is precisely why many people ask themselves who is actually putting this immense pressure on our educational institutions to keep up and notoriously maintain new radical change. It is astonishing that politics and education administration speak out almost unisono in favour of any "reform", as if it were an existential inevitability. Experienced pedagogues wonder how it was possible for education to become a matter for experts only. It is obvious that school boards and district school councils, bodies that allow every citizen to get involved in public school, have been marginalised with the introduction of "professional" school management. The high "ethos of the school" that the OECD experts described in their first country examination in 1989 in their report has been radically questioned since this professionalisation. In the meantime, fewer and fewer parents understand what is really happening in the classrooms. A general feeling of unease is spreading; fathers, mothers and grandparents are increasingly having to work with their children on evenings and weekends. They experience that their children's enthusiasm for learning and "going to school" increasingly fades after a short time. More and more par-

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ents are forced to offer their children private tutoring – mostly with great financial sacrifices – or to teach them at private schools. Pediatricians speak of "burnout" even among lower school students. Radio broadcasts discuss the question of whether public schools still enjoy the trust of parents or not. Such indications show that the "reforms" imposed on our children from the top down are in some cases a hard thing to do instead of serving their development.

In this new issue of "Objection" we want to let those "affected" have their say. They speak on behalf of many families who are also in need. Not everywhere unpleasant phenomena appear in the same way. This has to do above all with the fact that not all school administrations implement the prescribed "reforms" with the same solicitude in their teams. But most personal reports are similar. They show that a great deal in school and teaching today follows completely different didactic and content-related principles than just a few years ago. Due to the diminished insight into school, which today is reserved only for "experts", many parents inevitably draw the conclusion that their children's problems point to deficits in their upbringing or in their child's personality.

The descriptions of parents as contemporary witnesses are supplemented in this brochure by statements from various critical experts from curative education and paediatrics. Representatives of the teaching staff and teacher associations, vocational training, educational science and teacher training also have their say. In this way, the processes can be differentiated and it is easier to judge what is really going wrong today.

One gloomy side of the school reforms are the methods used to try to have all those involved down the ideologically "right" path to toe the line. With partly very subtile, but clearly manipulative techniques, which are predominantly borrowed from business administration or management theory, an open discourse is deliberately prevented both in the institutions and in the public. Professional control mechanisms lead to a general climate of meek silence and withdrawing into the private sphere, so that everyone tries to cope with the situation himself. This precarious situation manifests itself, among other things, in the fact that many parents and teachers who have their say in this brochure are unable or unwilling to speak openly. Out of fear of repression, stigmatisation and disadvantages for children and family, they have mostly chosen anonymity – although very reluctantly. This circumstance alone should be an alarm signal for every democratically minded person in our country. •

Beat Kissling,
Alain Pichard,
Yasemin Dinekli
(Editors)

Letter to the Editor

Experiences of a mother

I read the article "Schluss mit Schbas!" (="Enough with schbas! (fun)") about the spelling method "Writing by listening" by Dr *Reichen* with great interest. We are affected parents of four children from Thuringia – now adults. While our daughter, who started school in 1995, was still being taught according to the GDR system (which was adopted by Finland). The children of this age group coped very well with it. The same primary school two years later set our son the example of "writing by listening". The school received EU funding for this. The result of this example was a child who left the 4th grade for the regular school completely insecure, barely familiar with reading and writing. Many pupils of this class went to a comprehensive school. There the German teacher wrote a dictation in class 5 in order to get an overview of the knowledge. The result was sobering, because all these students who were taught according to Dr Reichen's system had more than 20 mistakes to show. As the ability to grasp textual tasks was insufficient, the children also had problems in other subjects.

Since the creativity of the pupils should not be disturbed, there were no rules, no order system, no domestic practice in the primary school for two years.

We have invested about 1000 Euro in the tutoring to work through everything that was missed in four years. But what about the children whose parents cannot afford this money?

Thanks to the commitment of the German teacher in the secondary school and the tutoring, our son was able to write and read safely after grade 6. The energy used for this could have been used by the child for other purposes.

Already in the 1st grade some parents had critically questioned this system with the headmaster and the class teacher. Objections and discussions were dismissed. Also the school office did not answer our calls.

The third child was also taught according to this method, and we had to invest a lot of money in tutoring.

The fourth child we trained despite resistance of the school office in another primary school, which still taught with the primer. Like his sister, he had no difficulty reading or writing.

After the reunification, we were horrified when the headmasters and teachers immediately jumped at the new methods from the old federal states, adopted them without criticism and threw proven learning principles overboard overnight. It also appeared that critical teachers were silenced.

We can only encourage all parents to oppose Dr Reichen's learning principle of "writing by listening" with all their might, as it suggests children to have abilities that they actually do not have, that is to write texts three months after school enrolment. None of the flowery promises about the benefits of this learning method have come true.

Katrin Kirchner, Erfurt

(Translation *Current Concerns)*