

Current Concerns

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The financial industry

by Heini Lippuner*



Heini Lippuner
(picture ma)

Citizens have lost all confidence in the banks.

Even in liberal media, critical articles on the financial industry have recently been piling up. It is not just a matter of cost-cut-

ting measures in view of shrinking margins, but also, in a more general sense, about strategic orientation, corporate culture and the role of banks within the terms of economy.

In our lessons about economics we have learned that the first sector (primary production) and the second sector (industry) are supported by the third sector, the services. The banks have long since outgrown this role; today they form a true financial industry, which operates speculative business using money from the other two sectors with only a minimal addition of their own funds.

Originally, the banks were the link between private and institutional investors on the one hand, and private, industrial and government borrowers on the other. Banks also provided an efficient payment system. The banker felt responsible for his clients and treated their money as if it were his own. Today only middle and small institutes have this understanding of their role, while the big banks form an independent industry with the goal of maximising their own profit using their depositors' money.

The advance of American capitalism to Europe

This development started with the advance of American capitalism to Europe. In the 1980s, it could be seen how investment banks, business consultants and also some economists virtually glorified shareholder value ideas. Their slogan was short-term profit maximisation to increase exchange rates. Investment banks urged companies to make ludicrously ambitious acquisitions, disinvestments, and mergers without any industrial logic, just to get the stock market moving and thus to be able to collect huge commissions and consultation fees. Those who did not participate and who persistently pursued the long-term well-being of their companies were sneered at as "softies" by the liberal financial media.

Events on the stock exchange also changed radically with the adoption of American customs. Previously, the stock exchange had been a marketplace: buyers were – private and institutional – investors who were willing to pay a certain price for shares of a company, depending on their assessment of its future, whereas sellers of these shares were investors who were of a different view or needed liquid funds. This resulted in a fair price reflecting a company's prospects for the future. In 1980, the average holding period for shares in Germany was approximately 10 years; in 2000 it was less than a year.

"The stock exchange has been turned into a giant casino"

Today so-called high-frequency trade sets the pace on the stock market, which has essentially been turned into a betting office. It is no longer a matter of assessing the future of a company, but of guessing how other banks are going to operate in respect of a certain security paper and then to immediately bet against or run along. These decisions are made in milliseconds by means of sophisticated computer programmes. One large bank even went so far as to want to place its computers close to the New York Stock Exchange in order to beat the more distant competition by a few milliseconds of electronic distance. So, according to Professor Chesney, the present holding period

for shares is 22 seconds. This has nothing to do with corporate financing and sound investment. The stock market has been turned into a giant casino.

This casino is further driven by analysts and financial media. Analysts believe they can predict a company's outcome for the next quarter, and the financial media first and foremost comment on deviations from this forecast. To them it is less interesting whether, for example, a company is well positioned for the future or whether it has gained market shares. Originally, analysts used to prepare neutral recommendations for sustainable financial investments for the benefit of customer service providers; today, they provide short-term profit forecasts and targeted rumours so as to ensure movement in the stock exchanges. This promotes profit by proprietary transactions and generates commission income for the banks. Contrary to the banks' allegations that analysts are shielded by "chinese walls", they are today also agents for traders and managers, who give daily instructions to customer support as to the purchase or sale of which titles should be promoted. The aim of these requirements is to increase the return on the bank, not the welfare of the investor.

"Erosion of ethical standards in the big banks"

In the course of time, the invasion of American neo-capitalism has brought about an erosion of ethical standards in the big banks. There is no trace left of "ownership" and "accountability" to depositors. For the cadres and the management, it remains only a matter of the absurdly high bonuses at the cost of the investors, thanks to the new incentive systems. So called "financial innovation" has daily produced new derivatives using modern IT, from a simple bond, the interest rate of which depended on the amount of annual hail damage in Switzerland, to triple-packaged American junk mortgages and related insurance. Such instruments were foisted on naive customers who were unaware that they were intended to put as much risk of losses as possible on the de-

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"The financial industry"

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positor, while the profit chances would remain with the bank.

Almost inevitably, the degeneration of the corporate culture in the big banks and the greed for more and more profit and even higher bonuses led to fraud and scandals: LIBOR agreements, manipulation of foreign exchange rates, money laundering, aiding and abetting tax fraud, etc. Only a few examples out of the endless list of offenses shall be mentioned here: The six largest banks paid fines to a total of 5.8 billion US dollars for having manipulated foreign exchange rates; HSBC, CS, ING and Standard Chartered paid 3.7 billion US dollars of fines for money laundering, JP Morgan averted the threat of being charged for deceiving investors with hypo-derivatives which, according to Attorney General *Holder*, should never have been legally sold, by paying 13 billion US dollars, "without acknowledging a debt" – as is the customary procedure in the US. In the same year, however, Chairman *Jamie Dimon* increased his salary by 74%! "Deutsche Bank" is faced with a 14 billion US dollars fine for the same offenses, and is thus existentially threatened. So as to meet their superiors' "cross selling" requirements, Wells Fargo's account managers registered additional products in their depositors' folios without even telling them; the out of court settlement will cost billions.

Massive weakening of equity has no consequences for the management

The banks settle all these huge amounts from their reserves and have thus massively weakened their equity. Anyone who has invested his savings in bank shares sees their substance melting down. But only a few of the top managers were brought to account or even had to take their hat. On the contrary, *Josef Ackermann*, who headed "Deutsche Bank" at the time of its dubious business with hypo-derivatives and is therefore responsible for the 14 billion US dollar fine now holds the honorable post of chairman of the Bank of Cyprus. Only a few middle-ranking executives were prosecuted.

The financial crisis of 2008, when dozens of banks had to be rescued from collapse with taxpayers's money, made clear what risk to our society is generated by the financial industry's conduct. It is our savings they play with in their casino. Private

and institutional investors' deposits are only partly outsourced as credits to economy; a large part is lent to other banks or serves as a so-called lever for risky products, in which very little of their own money is invested. The financial authorities have tried to curb the danger of another crisis, but to date, the powerful financial lobby has managed to prevent a real reform. So nothing was done except turning a few adjustment screws, with the effect of, for instance, a gentle increase in equity or the creation of bank bonds which will be converted into equity in an emergency. Thus the banks' highest goal – the return on equity – remains untouched, and the danger of a new crisis is not eradicated.

Arguments for a division into commercial banks and investment banks

It is high time that politicians bring themselves to finally enforce a thorough reform of the financial industry. The key element of such a reform must be the division of banks into commercial banks on the one hand and investment banks (the casino) on the other. Business banks would once again fulfill the original role as service providers for the first and second sector of the economy: they would manage assets, be the hub between savers/investors and borrowers, and operate payment transactions.

Venturesome investors could place their money with investment banks, whether in the form of investments of all kinds or as shareholders. They could speculate as much as they wanted, but they would have to be aware that neither commercial banks nor the state would help if something went wrong. If practical reasons make the separation of the exchanges impossible, certain practices such as naked sales or high-frequency trading would have to be severely restricted.

Such a separation system was introduced in the form of the *Glass-Steagall Acts* in the US in the aftermath of the 1933 crisis and collapsed for good in 2008 after having been gradually eroded under the pressure of the powerful US financial industry. Undoubtedly today a separation is an extremely complex task, but it must be undertaken if a renewed crisis of the world economy is to be avoided.

So far the financial industry has learned nothing from the crisis

The financial industry has forfeited trust once and for all. It has learned nothing

from the crisis and is continuing on its old track with a few minor restrictions. It is going ahead with its false bonus systems, and the top management continues to collect exorbitant salaries for its miserable performance. Our politicians must act in the interest of the whole economy.

Many citizens in Europe are concerned about the social and political impact of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. Since the 1980s, Europe has taken over from the US practices that are recklessly geared to maximising short-term profit. The most recent version takes the form of the so-called "shareholder activists": huge US investment funds such as Blackrock, which hold large share packages. They are trying to increase their own profit by imposing strategies on European companies that do not serve to secure the long-term future. We Europeans are about to abandon the principles of social market economy – meaning responsibility for society and the environment in addition to financial success – and we are already seeing the first consequences: Like in the US, the increase in income generated over the last 25 years has gone mainly to the rich. In this period, the real income of the top 10% has risen more than twice as high as that of the lower income classes.

The discussion on the free trade agreements with Canada and the US shows that opposition to the automatic takeover of American practices is forming not only in the financial sector: European consumer protection shall not be watered down by means of the more liberal US rules. In the cultural sector too, Europe is beginning to defend itself against the powerful US media groups, which are flooding our market with their shallow bulk goods. We must protect our own cultural production against this flood.

Europe needs to recollect its strengths

"Just because we have seen off communism does not mean that capitalism has won!" – Certainly American-style capitalism cannot win. Europe needs to recollect its strengths and to defend its own model of capitalism with all its might – a market economy that strives to achieve financial goals while respecting society and the environment. If our politicians will not act decisively and with determination, sooner or later a socialist "backlash" will move our political order sharply to the left. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

How the Walloon Parliament discussed the CETA issue

Minutes of the parliamentary debate

jp.v. The following is a documentation for information put forward by “Current Concerns”: these are extracts of the public meeting progress report of the Commission on European questions of the Parliament of Wallonia dated 21 October 2016 concerning the CETA/AECG (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement/ Accord économique et commercial global). This report reflects, in all the represented parties, the deeply democratic approach for the sake of the country, as it should be for all European Parliaments. The freetrade agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada was closed on 26 September 2014. In October 2014, the Commission in charge of European Affairs has started the analytical works and subsequently voted, on 27 April 2016 on a resolution containing its claims. The latter was confirmed on 14 October by the Parliament in a plenary session. Thereafter Paul Magnette, Head of Government and Minister President of the Wallonia, agreed to conduct the negotiations with the Canadian and EU representatives in close consultation with the Parliamentary Committee.

On 21 October at 9:30 a.m., a committee meeting had been convened with the Head of Government to discuss the last results of the negotiations. As the Minister President was still in the process of negotiating with the Canadian delegation the new proposals hereof, the meeting could resume by noon only.

Mr Magnette stated his speech by mentioning first the positive developments of the discussions in some specific areas, particularly agriculture. However, he specified that there were still difficulties in a highly sensitive – but politically extremely important – case: that of arbitration.

Minister President Paul Magnette’s preliminary reflections

“I must say that the discussion we had this morning with the Canadians was very constructive, and we have recall our deep commitment for this big and beautiful country, to which we are so profoundly attached. We mentioned that, obviously, we were not against economic exchange, and moreover, we already do a lot of business with them, and that we want to continue working with them. We have taken account of the flexibility they told us to be granted in discussing, but I very honestly should mention that we are under a tremendous time pressure and that at this stage – and I am, over and over again, pleading to do it amicably – we should altogether agree to postpone the Europe-

Canada Summit and to give us some time for analysing the new proposals. I did not succeed in convincing our partners. So that’s where we are. [...]”

I have told everyone and I have told it to the highest-ranking of the European Commission and Council, we keep with a constructive approach to negotiating and trying to achieve a fair agreement. If we could reach an agreement – as I mentioned in my statement in last week’s plenary session – with social and environmental standards, human rights, protection of public services, protection of agriculture, with very strong public mechanisms, that would be a major step forward for Europe and Canada. That would strengthen the links between Europe and Canada. We would become those who set international standards. And what if we do not obtain that level? If we held, for a number of standards – for instance, public services – a mere statement, which is not even a binding commitment?

The arbitration issue is very important; it will be a key issue. Who will decide in the future, when conflicts will occur between governments and multinationals? National courts, or mechanisms? Today the mechanism, as formulated in writing in the agreement, is not very clear. It is a matter of major principles, of broad guidelines. The mechanism is not even accurately described, although there have been some improvements in the way it is specified. Should we – to quote a commonly used phrase – buy a pig in a poke? Should we accept the agreement even if, unfortunately, there is here something with a potential risk to be problematic?

This is not innocuous. Basically, there is talk of the way nationstates solve their problems with multinationals, at a time when – and that is evidenced by a number of instances – these tensions strengthen, there are many contentious issues and there is an overwhelming sense at the loss

of some of the public control by the nationstates, and that’s because it is for real.

This is what this debate we have is all about, although with great courtesy and open-mindedness, however, with little scheduling margin at this stage.

I suggest deferring to the members of Parliament in order to subsequently respond to their questions.”

Selected statements of members of the commission

Commission president *Andre Antoine* thanks the Prime Minister for leaving the negotiation table in order to come to the commission. He pointed out, his presence meant that parliament was directly involved in the negotiations for the first time. He also thanked for the various documents which Mister Magnette, the chairman of the government, had distributed to the members of the commission.

“Most of all I thank – as president of the Wallonian parliament – for actually paying careful attention to the demands of our resolution during your negotiations, since all too often such resolutions are just ridiculed. We are talking about the resolution which we passed on 27 April and which parliament accepted on 14 October.”

In the following passages we collect brief quotes from some of the commission members who belong to six different parties.

Frederic Gillot (PTB-GO!): “Prime Minister, I very much appreciate that you remain focused and oppose this treaty with determination. This determination is rooted in the democratically legitimised will of this parliament. The democratic process is functioning very well. I would like to emphasise that once again, Wallonia is not standing alone. Considering the opinion of the people in other states I can assure you that Wallonia is anything but isolated.”

Olga Zrihen (PS): “The quality of parliamentary work illustrates the democratic procedures which our fellow citizens demand, whether they are natives or Europeans. Let’s address the crucial issue now. [...] I want the concerns of our parliamentary group to be heard. A text which binds 500 million Europeans in such crucial issues for both sides of the Atlantic should not be signed under time pressure. Is it really so unthinkable to just spend another two months in order to complete all necessary negotiations and everybody can really define their positions? The awareness of responsibility for 28 member states and the seriousness in our work, all those ex-

Belgium and Wallonia

jp.v. Belgium is a federal state since 1993. The country includes three regions: the Walloon Region, the Flemish Region and the Brussels-capital Region, all of them having their own parliaments and governments. Then there are three “cultural communities”: the French, Flemish and German ones, all of them with extensive powers as well. Wallonia covers the southern part of Belgium, with a surface of 17,000 km² (out of a total of 30,000 km²) and a population of 3,5 million inhabitants (out of a total of 11 millions).

"How the Walloon Parliament ..."

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pectations on various sides, the analyses which were put together, all that deserves to be respected. With that we are not arguing against the treaty but rather that enough time is spent to dedicate ourselves to it with responsibility and serenity."

Helene Ryckmans (Ecolo): "For several days messages have reached us from everywhere, from all different backgrounds, from Canada and Europe. These messages of support and congratulation show the expectations and the will of a great number of Europeans in many countries to endorse our activities and efforts to clarify all agendas of this treaty [...]"

Christophe Collignon (PS): "First of all I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the whole government for their determined support. I think this a very rare event. One has to emphasise that. We are talking about an extremely rare democratic procedure here. It is similar to the demands of the civil society regarding the European Union negotiations. We conclude that from the mails we are getting. It should be quite healthy for a democracy that parliament should have the last word. The Wallonian parliament should therefore not be ashamed for the way this dossier is being dealt with. I would even dare to say, we are setting an example for the whole of Europe [...]"

Dimitri Fourny (cdH): "If we are to ratify this treaty securities are needed. We need guarantees for our farmers, for our entrepreneurs, for our small and medium companies and for our citizens in general. We need securities regarding the validity, the binding legal effect of the issues which are still negotiated. We need time: what is written down will remain, the spoken word will vanish. Such important matters as those which you are negotiating right now and achieve progress about cannot be solved between two doors, between to planes, between Strasbourg and Namur [the Wallonian capital]. It is crucial that we and you have enough time to work carefully and define amendments because the devil is in the detail. This is the only way to make sure that the agreements between Wallonia, Canada and the European Commission

will have a legally binding character. The texts also have to be edited so that they are coherent. This is even more important since the whole contract will amount to 1,600 pages. Even if the amendments should only be several pages it has to be guaranteed that their elements are legally binding. Therefore we are strongly demanding that you get the time you need. If it takes three weeks or one month or maybe 6 months we should allow ourselves this time but let's not slam the door towards Canada which has been opened for Wallonia..."

Final remarks of the Prime Minister

In the commission's report there are four more statements of members of the commission which will not be quoted here to keep the article concise. Parts of the Prime Ministers' response to the addresses are as follows:

Paul Magnette, Prime Minister of Wallonia: "I will try to be as transparent in my answers as possible. To start with, a brief explanation in the beginning as to why we are having this debate: In fact some people are trying to discredit our parliamentarian work today and defame it as some diversionary tactic. We are one of the few regional parliaments in Europe with the same competencies as a national parliament. Even though some parties regret it, this power has been bestowed on us. I would like to point out, that the Belgian Prime Minister and the minister of Foreign Affairs have assured us that they will appreciate the opinion of the Wallonian parliament and this is excellent. However, one cannot tell us 'We gave you this power but we urge you not to use it.' Since we are entitled to it, it is logical that we will use this controlling power. [...]"

The other reason why the situation is so intense can be explained by the fact that there is much more at stake than just the treaty with Canada. There will be many more similar bilateral trade agreements in the future and therefore it is so important. If I wanted to stress this issue even more I would be tempted to say that this current conflict is about the question what kind of globalisation we want. Whether we want it or not, integration of all parts in the world will continue to increase. In fact that is a good thing, there

is nothing worse than borders. But how will globalisation develop? Will it follow strong rules or weak ones? Will the public sector control it or will multinational corporations rule everything? Will a functioning legal system prevail or will private arbitral courts, which only those who are rich enough may appeal to, have their say? These are crucial questions we have to face [...]"

The settlement of conflicts between trading partners is the crucial point, and this issue is not about trivia. Several times an agreement seemed near but one remaining controversial point may topple the whole construction. [...] With the mechanisms of those private arbitrary courts we think that the guarantees of securities are not quite sufficient as they are planned at the moment, and that is a euphemism.

It is no coincidence that these mechanisms are still so vaguely defined. Several other countries have the same problem like us and don't want these tribunals to be established before all details have been revealed. However, we are told: "This is no problem. Just keep going. Before ratification everything will be explained." The strategy is always the same: proceeding, and at the end you cannot refuse to sign because you are the last one. No, there is a point when someone needs to say 'Still I will stop the whole thing.'" [...]"

In this treaty there are really some interesting details. It is very sophisticated, and should it ever been ratified, it will be the most sophisticated trading agreement in the world. However it contains several difficult issues. You have asked me not to negotiate in a way saying: 'Let's not worry, there are two or three minor issues still unclear. No big deal, just move on.' Instead you asked me to say: 'We want to negotiate to the end because we think that we are defining mechanisms here which will influence a whole bunch of other agreement still to come.' And this is the strategy I followed. [...]"

It was good to have this debate. In a democracy you know once you have opened the box you will not be able to cover it up again. I hope many more parliaments will develop an ambition to do at least as good a job as you did." •

(Translation Current Concerns)

“Under Hillary Clinton, we could slide into nuclear war very quickly”

ef. In most Western media, *Hillary Clinton* is already certain to win. Now comes a warning voice from Germany: *Jakob Augstein* writes in a column of *Spiegel online* (of 20 October) about the “Security Risk Clinton” and takes up the foreign policy position of *Donald Trump*: “Trump would probably be the better choice in the question of war and peace than Clinton.” And further: “As for war and peace, he [Trump] has a clean slate.” Trump wanted to “rather keep America’s nose out of the world’s quarrels.” Hillary Clinton’s position on this issue is also clear. She has expressly expressed the wish to establish a flight ban on Syria, which Augstein rightly recognised as an “act of war”. She also said, “We need some leverage against the Russians.” She would want to risk a military confrontation with Russia. Augstein rightly asks: “How can it be that the German public ignores this real danger of a Clinton victory?” His recommendation for the West: If the suffering of human beings really bothers us, “the West should stop pursuing its own power political objectives”. And further: “It is by no means that the West can do nothing – on the contrary, it can stop interfering.” He is right. There are also raising voices in the US. For example, former Congressman *Dennis Kucinich* calls for a new peace movement in America (see box).

If Hillary Clinton wins the elections ...

Tages-Anzeiger: How is the world politics going to change when Hillary Clinton implements this strategy after her probable electoral victory?

Professor Günter Meyer: The tensions of the world will exacerbate to an extent which will dwarf everything we have experienced since the end of the Cold War. This guideline for the US foreign policy, focusing above all on the military superiority of the US and bringing an unprecedented arms race, will lead to the

threshold of the third world war resp. the first nuclear war. Hopes for an end to the killing in Syria and a settlement of the proxy wars in this region are as vain as the expectation of a peaceful development in the Gulf region.

Source: Interview with Prof Dr Günter Meyer, expert on international politics and head of the Center for Research on the Arab World (ZEFARW) at the University of Mainz, “Tagesanzeiger” from 21 October 2016

Jill Stein, US Presidential candidate for the Green Party, spoke out in clear words about Clinton’s Syrian policy: “The wars have gotten bigger, we are now bombing seven countries. [...] It is now Hillary Clinton that wants to start an air war with Russia over Syria by calling for a no fly zone. We have 2,000 nuclear missiles on hairtrigger alert. They are saying we are closer to a nuclear war than we have ever been. Under Hillary Clinton, we could slide into nuclear war very quickly [...] On the issue of war and nuclear weapons, it is actually Hillary’s policies which are much scarier than Donald Trump who does not want to go to war with Russia. He wants to seek modes of working together, which is the route that we need to follow not to go

into confrontation and nuclear war with Russia.” (www.realclearpolitics.com of 12 October)

We could have known this earlier. In April this year former US-Ambassador to Switzerland, *Faith Whittlesey*, wrote of Trump’s foreign policy position: “Mr Trump believes that improving relations with Russia could be in America’s national interest. [...] [Russia] is the only country that has the nuclear capability to inflict mortal damage on the United States. [...] It can, as a Christian nation, either become a valued partner in defeating a resurgent Radical Islam or, alternatively, a possibly dangerous foe.” (<http://dailycaller.com> of 4 April)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

The US needs a new peace movement

by *Dennis Kucinich**

The most consequential statement by Secretary *Clinton* in last night’s debate was her pronouncement that a no-fly zone over Syria could “save lives and hasten the end of the conflict,” that a no-fly zone would provide “safe zones on the ground” was in “the best interests of the people on the ground in Syria” and would “help us with our fight against ISIS.”

It would do none of the above. A US attempt to impose a no-fly zone in Syria would, as Secretary Clinton once cautioned a *Goldman Sachs* audience, “kill a lot of Syrians,” and, according to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General *Dunford*, lead to a war with Russia. If the

US has not been invited into a country to establish a “no-fly zone” such an action is, in fact, an invasion, an act of war.

It is abundantly clear from our dark alliance with Saudi Arabia and our conduct in support of jihadists in Syria that our current leaders have learned nothing from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya as we prepare to plunge head-long into the abyss of a world war.

Our international relations are built upon lies to promote *regime changes*, the fantasy of a unipolar world ruled by America, and a blank check for the national security state.

As others prepare for war, we must prepare for peace. We must answer the

mindless call to arms with a thoughtful, soulful call to resist the coming build up for war. A new, resolute peace movement must arise, become visible and challenge those who would make war inevitable.

We must not wait until the Inauguration to begin to build a new peace movement in America.

Source: <http://worldbeyondwar.org/dennis-kucinich-war-peace/> as of 20 October 2016

* *Dennis Kucinich* is a former congressman from Ohio and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 and 2008.

Escalation including nuclear potential

Berlin government advisors and foreign policy experts warn of a further intensification of NATO's escalation policy towards Russia. With regard to the dangerous incidents which have been occurring during military flight maneuvers, for example above the Baltic Sea, "sooner or later" there will be no other approach left than that of "associating and dealing with one another", explains a high-ranking NATO official in the German foreign policy establishment's leading magazine. It is to be ensured that the power struggle between NATO and Russia "does not grow into a major conflict," warns a renowned Russian expert of a US think tank. Also the German Institute for International and Security Affairs ("Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik", SWP), which is funded by the Office of the Federal Chancellor, urges that in order to avoid war risks, the long-term course followed to date, in particular by the USA, should be given up and "influence spheres in their respective regional context" should instead be granted not only to Russia, but also to China. The SWP points out the nuclear component of the conflict – and warns that in the long term the possibility of a deployment of land – based nuclear missiles in Europe can no longer be ruled out.

The unipolar world

The Berlin "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" has gathered its warning against a further intensification of the escalation policy towards Russia from an analysis of the US policy towards Russia. The recently published study of this Federal Chancellery-funded think tank examines, among other things, fundamental strategic decisions taken by Washington at the beginning of the 1990s. According to the SWP, it was indeed discussed in the US capital at that time "whether influence spheres were to be conceded to the two great powers of Russia and China" – i.e. areas in their regional contexts where their interests would not be fundamentally questioned.¹ But the idea was rejected and it was decided to further develop a "unipolar world under the leadership of the USA". One way of putting this aim into practice was the expansion of NATO to include Eastern and South Eastern Europe, contrary to affirmations given to Moscow in 1990 and in spite of the fact that the Russian establishment would understand this "as a continuation of the old game of equilibrium and containment policy". "The geopolitical power conflict" resulting from the continual expansion of the Western powers' influence towards Eastern Europe and the simultaneous refusal to grant Russia its own sphere of influence,

had ultimately "culminated in the Ukraine question."

Conflict domination

After the upheavals around 1990, the United States had fixated primarily on "so-called rogue states like Iran, Iraq and North Korea" and after 11 September 2001 also "on transnational Islamic terrorism" to enforce its global dominance. But in the meanwhile, in the words of the SWP, the spotlight is on "the power policy rivalry between the US on the one hand and an emerging China as well as a resurging Russia on the other side."² This means that "the old, always present but seldom openly articulated vital power political interest of the United States" has been pushed to the fore again namely "to prevent one or more hostile powers from controlling Eurasian resources" and "from acquiring a power potential that could endanger American superiority." The US interest in the prevention of a united "Eurasia" has been described by former US President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his geostrategic classic "The Grand Chessboard".³ The SWP confirms that in effect, current Washington strategy regards Russia and China as "the potential opponents which are to be deterred by superior military power," – and "by the ability of conflict domination".

New dialogue

The journal "International Politics", published by the German Society for Foreign Affairs ("Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik", DGAP), has recently called for greater restraint in the conflict. With reference to continually recurring dangerous incidents, as for example when Russian and Western fighter aircraft met over the Baltic Sea, the head of the NATO Energy Security Unit, Michael Rühle, said in the online version of the newspaper that "sooner or later" there would be no other approach left than that of associating and dealing with one another".⁴ "Were a new dialogue with Moscow to develop – for example over talks on the avoidance of military incidents", then one should by all means once again consider further-reaching "practical cooperation". Over the last two decades, this had after all ranged from "joint peacekeeping in the Balkans to maritime search and rescue missions" as well as "from the training of Afghan military specialists to the fight against drugs and terrorism". It is true that the dealings with Russia will probably remain difficult, says Rühle; nevertheless, the current conflict "forces NATO not only to carry out a military readjustment towards Russia but also to ex-

plore new ways of dialogue and cooperation".

"Not worth a war"

As early as in July, the online version of the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit" has published a warning contribution by the Russian foreign policy expert Dmitri Trenin. As former colonel of the Soviet armed forces and present head of the American Carnegie Endowment Moscow office Trenin explained, it is currently mainly a matter of ensuring that the confrontation between NATO and Russia "does not grow into a major conflict".⁵ First steps towards understanding are indispensable on both sides; so that the West should take note of the fact that the confrontation with Russia should not be held against Russian politics alone. If, after a major conflict as the system confrontation had been, one were to forget "to create an international order acceptable to the losing party", it would inevitably lead to a new round of the competition. In fact, the dominance of the West as well as its advance into the Russian sphere of influence (by means of the NATO east expansion) was by no means acceptable to Moscow. The current conflict between NATO and Russia is "not trivial", but "undoubtedly not worth a European war", writes Trenin; now, "common precautions should be taken" to prevent it.

Medium range missiles

In this context, the SWP explicitly points out the nuclear component of the conflict. "The mere strengthening of conventional deterrence", such as "the deployment of armed forces at the front, the plans and measures relevant to bringing up reinforcements as well as the necessary safeguarding of maritime connections," could set in motion an armament dynamics that will reciprocally aggravate the security dilemma", says the new SWP analysis of US policy towards Russia. However, the new "deterrence policy" will "hardly be confined to the conventional level."⁶ In fact, after previous discussion, in which German think tanks also called for the expansion of the Western nuclear arsenal,⁷ the recent NATO summit in Warsaw explicitly referred to the nuclear nature of the alliance. (*german-foreign-policy.com*) In return, Russia has now announced that it will suspend the destruction of nuclear-weapons-grade plutonium.⁸ The SWP warns that if the tensions continue to be fueled, it may be only a matter of time before there are the first voices to suggest that the INF Treaty be revoked and land-

However, if Germany would not join the US war policy... ... and if there were a little more truth in dealing with Russia

by Karl Müller

Matthias Platzeck, former head of the German Social Democrats, former Minister-President of the German State Brandenburg and today head of the *German-Russian Forum*, has stated it clearly in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* (19 October 2016): The danger of a war with Russia has not been so strong for a long time. Threats and sanctions against Russia have not had any positive effect. On the contrary, during the past three years relations with Russia have deteriorated continuously. The situation is "more dramatic than in the past 25 or 26 years".

Matthias Platzeck's statement came a few hours before a meeting of the presidents of France, Russia and Ukraine with the German Chancellor. And he added that he found it "very prudent and farsighted" that the European Union had refrained from imposing extended sanctions on Russia a few days ago. *Angela Merkel* had invited for the meeting in Berlin and every reasonable person could only hope that there would be ways towards a diplomatic solution in the escalating conflict with Russia.

But this would include allowing for a bit more truth in dealing with Russia's politics in the past three years and also with our own Western politics since 1990. This, however, is still lacking in the leading German media. Instead, voices not matching with these media are strongly denounced ("conspiracy theory") and suppressed – with the main goal to discredit all voices trying to critically examine the politics of the United States, the NATO

states and the EU and to outline Russia's politics balanced and in accordance with the facts and to present these voices as controlled by the Russian President.

Not only the media are playing this game. The initiative came from the US Congress. Public EU and German institutions have eagerly joined in this campaign. Only a few days ago (4 October 2016) the public German TV station ZDF has broadcasted a role model for this course of action, the 45 minute programme "Putin's secret network. How Russia is splitting the West."

Willy Wimmer, who has been a Christian Democratic MP in the German Bundestag for 30 years and Undersecretary in the German Defence Ministry in the critical years around 1990, recently has repeatedly emphasised that the German leading media have lost all their plurality in issues of foreign and security politics. This diagnosis is leading to the question how far away Germany is from a democracy and an open, pluralistic society.

Having in mind that most citizens do not have the chance to verify the media products which they get served daily, one can imagine the devastating effect of the permanent twisting of facts and propaganda. In fact, any news, any report, any coverage, any commentary, wherever they may come from, should be cross-checked thoroughly.

In the past three years I have looked deeply into what is going on in Ukraine and today I have to state that the list of untruths and one-sided reporting is very long. Anyone going to the depth of the re-

ports can conclude that hardly any are correct. There is no need to use the term "Lügenpresse" to provoke thoughts.

The same is true for the conflict in Syria. The goal is to manipulate us and to steer us in a certain direction – a direction that can lead us and the world towards the abyss of a nuclear inferno. This cannot be what we want.

There are also excellent books available regarding all these questions. One of the latest has been written by the Swiss historian and peace researcher *Daniele Ganser*: "Illegale Kriege" (Illegal wars. How NATO countries are sabotaging the UN. A chronicle from Cuba to Syria.) I would like such a book to be read in all our schools. Spreading the truth is an essential task. Only the truth can give peace a chance. •



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Regrettably, Switzerland is affected as well...

km. In October 2016, the news website <https://swisspropaganda.wordpress.com> published a study consisting of 21 pages (pdf format) about *Swiss Radio and Television's* (SRF) news coverage on 20 September 2016, only a few hours after news of the attack on a UN and *Syrian-Arabian Red Crescent* aid convoy first were made public. The study is titled "Geopolitical propaganda in the public broadcasting service: An analysis exemplified by Swiss Radio and Television" and can be found at <https://swisspropaganda.wordpress.com/srf-propaganda-analyse/>.

There, the study's results are described to be "alarming: In all of the examined SRF news contributions, techniques of

propagandism and manipulation could be found at every level – be it editorial, linguistic or audio-visual. The division of speaking time to just one of the debating parties, the intransparent use of third party sources, omission of context, tendentious wording, unproven statements and suggestions, manipulative edits of film material and inaccurate translations are examples of these techniques". Furthermore, the study states that "all of the manipulation techniques used were unilaterally beneficial to the conflict party of US/Nato. As a whole, it must be said that broadcasting by Swiss radio and television was one-sided, selective and uncritical".

These statements are comprehensively well-documented by the study.

On its last three pages, the study compares SRF's broadcasting to that of *Second German Television* (ZDF) and comes to a similar conclusion there: "All in all, it is true that for ZDF the same use of propaganda techniques favouring the conflict party USA/Nato can be detected. Especially in the categories of manipulative processing of film material, manipulative translations, manipulative use of background music as well as the idealisation of the conflict party USA/Nato, ZDF's propagandistic manipulation exceeds that of SRF."

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Stop the siege of the Syrian People! Lift the International Sanctions on Syria”

A Humanitarian Appeal from the Patriarchs of Syria to the International Conscience and the Concerned Countries

cc. Given current US and EU-European plans for a further aggravation of sanctions on Syria, we here document a call of high Christian dignitaries in Syria of 23 August 2016.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria in 2011, the impact of the economic and financial sanctions increased on the daily lives of Syrian citizens. This constituted a huge burden which deepened the suffering of the Syrian people. These sanctions represent another aspect of the crisis and result in more pressure on individuals, institutions, companies, and consequently on the entire people.

The absence of new investments and the ban on international flights to Syria, as well as the reduction of exportation to the country and listing some Syrian companies on the blacklist of international trade, are considered to be economical measures towards the isolation of Syria from the international community. Furthermore, the closing of most of the embassies of western countries in Syria and the withdrawal of their employees limits the diplomatic relations and the foreign interaction of Syria with other countries. Moreover, the ban on international bank-

ing transactions with Syria puts the people in a financial difficulty. It impoverishes the citizens and threatens them in their daily bread and deprives them of their human dignity.

As a result, the prices of basic necessities become higher due to the drop in the value of the local currency and its direct influence on the power to buy. This had serious consequences on the Syrian society in all its components. It impacted all aspects of everyday life and led to the rise of new social problems.

Our appeal comes as an invitation to take extraordinary measures, and make brave, wise and responsible decisions that have a humanitarian dimension based on the Human Rights Charter and other International Covenants, mainly to lift the economic sanctions on Syria. This will meet the aspirations of the citizens who seek to improve their living conditions. It will strengthen their attachment to the land of their ancestors and help restore the harmony among all citizens. Likewise, it will limit the exploitation of the misery of the Syrian people by groups who do not want the common good of the country. It will also facilitate the work of our ecclesial and humanitarian organiza-

tions in conferring humanitarian aid and delivering medicine and medical equipment to those who need it throughout Syria. Our appeal resonates with the desire of some countries and humanitarian organizations to help the Syrian people who is suffering from the severity of the crisis. It will contribute to the relief of its suffering and dealing with the consequences of the crisis.

We hope that the international community responds to the humanitarian appeal of the Syrians: “Stop the siege on the Syrian People! Lift the International Sanctions on Syria and allow this people to live in dignity which is a basic right to all the peoples of the world”.

Damascus, August 23, 2016

John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch

Ignatius Aphrem II, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch

Gregorius III, Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch

Source: www.csi-int.org/fileadmin/Files/pdf/2016/Appeal_Patriarchs_of_Syria_-_23_Aug_2016.pdf

“Escalation including nuclear ...”
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based middle-range nuclear missiles be deployed in Europe.

Risks of war

Washington is “more and more faced with the challenge,” warns the SWP, to change its course and to allow Russia and China spheres of influence in their regional context after all, – “in the interest of global cooperation and the prevention of war risks” – as it would otherwise promote

“power rivalries with a high potential of escalation”⁹. In this case, the escalation potential is nuclear. •

^{1,2} Rudolf, Peter. *Amerikanische Russland-Politik und europäische Sicherheitsordnung*. (American policy towards Russia and European security order.) *SWP study*. Berlin, September 2016

³ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York 1997. The German version was published as: Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Die einzige Weltmacht*. Frankfurt am Main 1999

⁴ Rühle, Michael. *Jenseits der Abschreckung. (Beyond deterrence)* *zeitschrift-ip.dgap.org*, 15 September 2016

⁵ Trenin, Dmitri. Talk to each other! www.zeit.de, 8 September 2016

⁶ Rudolf, Peter. American policy towards Russia and European security order. *SWP study*, Berlin September 2016, p. 17

⁷ See: *Die Nukleardebatte der Nato. Die Nukleardebatte der Nato (II) und Grundlegende Neujustierung*. (NATO’s Nuclear Debate. The Nuclear Debate of NATO (II) and the Basic Reintroduction. german-foreign-policy.com

⁸ Russia stops plutonium destruction. www.zeit.de, 3. Oktober 2016

⁹ Rudolf, Peter. American policy towards Russia and European security order. *SWP study*. Berlin, September 2016

Source: www.german-foreign-policy.com/en/full-text/59454 from 5 October 2016 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

Curriculum 21 – resistance is growing

Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) causes educational disaster and ruins Switzerland as an educational location

Initiatives against Curriculum 21 have been launched in 11 of the 21 German-speaking Swiss Cantons. In some of these cantons the vote will take place as early as in the coming months. The resistance against the bureaucratic dictate imposed from above is great – greater than the educational bureaucracy expected. Curriculum 21 is threatening to turn to waste paper. Now authorities and lobby groups are using ever new manoeuvres in their attempts to nevertheless introduce the ineligible curriculum.

A comprehensive remodeling of the Swiss educational landscape

Rl. The coming educational disaster, organized by the German Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK-D) and their staff, has become ever more apparent for the past several years. The shortcomings of Curriculum 21 have extensively been analysed and clearly reported. However, the EDK and its gaggle of experts seem to be downright insensitive and resistant to facts. They are stubbornly adhering to Curriculum 21, and this in view of the fact that their core mandate was to merely harmonise the transitions and the educational goals among the cantons, but certainly not to carry out a comprehensive remodeling of the Swiss educational landscape. Next generations shall have to bear the consequences of these irresponsible proceedings.

Uneffective teaching

Before expanding on the dodges used in introducing this curriculum and on the following consequences, we will briefly recall to mind its most serious shortcomings. The principal criticism of Curriculum 21 is its ineligible educational and learning concept. Although specialist circles appreciatively cited the world's unique megatrial by the Australian educational researcher *John Hattie* (2013) also in this part of the world, his essential instructions concerning the uselessness of a constructivist understanding of instruction did not find their way into Curriculum 21. And they are the victims of Curriculum 21: Children who are to teach themselves the subject matter in a self-organised way – all alone and individually! This is a clear contradiction to stringent, well-managed and stimulating teaching, such as Hattie has worked out from 50,000 empirical studies as being essentially effective.

Curriculum 21 – googling instead of knowledge

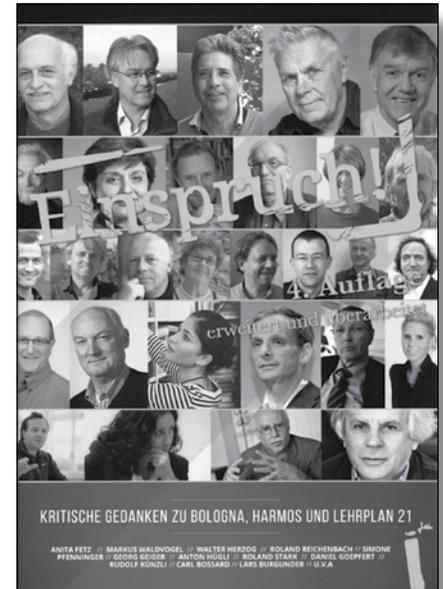
Our knowledge, that was developed in the past centuries, has been implemented for teaching in educational and factually adapted specialist didactics, allowing the schoolchildren to gain a well-founded expertise. But with the new comprehensive school subjects prescribed by Curriculum 21 (for example nature, environment and society), knowledge building becomes a question of luck. A systematic knowledge building, which would correspond to the given knowledge structure, is just about actively prevented. Being able to “google” is of no use for school leavers. Without a sound basis of knowledge googling does not help them. This method of teaching does not lead to their being “independent” – it leads to illiteracy and thus to disempowerment. (*Konrad Liessmann*. “Geisterstunde. Die Praxis der Unbildung.” (Ghost hour. The practice of illiteracy. Vienna 2014)).

Social learning neglected

Up to date, social learning was learnt and practiced in a class community led by a teacher. Due to the useless learning concept of the curriculum, this will finally degenerate into a loose meeting in a room (“learning environment”), with a learning guide playing an advisory role. Constant and longer ongoing cooperation can no longer be trained, the conflicts which normally result from this disappear, and therefore constructive conflict resolution models can no longer be learned. This also happens to the practise of concise and lasting cooperation with a teacher (a “supervisor” in later working life), this contact will now remain superficial.

Indoctrination instead of freedom

Another problem, which is generally no longer discussed in detail nowadays, is the extensive state-controlled influence on children. One example is the controversial sexual education according to UNO gender guidelines (LBGT). As the resistance against this indoctrination was increasingly growing louder in 2013, some words in the second edition of Curriculum 21 were replaced, which is typical enough. But as to content, everything remains the same. Another example, less popular but similarly extensive in its claim, is the new understanding of the world and the environment (including education for sustainable development), by means of which the curriculum tacitly departs from the Christian-Western tra-



ditions without being questioned by anyone.

If we also take into account the curriculum's concept of competence, which says that one does not only have to “know” and to “be able to do” something, but must also “want” it, then this indoctrination takes an almost evil turn. One thing is certain: Curriculum 21 will not be the means of educating responsible and free citizens.

A dead horse

Curriculum 21 cannot be upheld, neither professionally or politically, nor ethically. It belongs to the rubbish dump of history. But which are the means and tricks used to try and make this dead horse run? Here are some facts:

Curriculum 21 – citizens and experts are bypassed

In the meantime it has been widely recognised that Curriculum 21 is not a Swiss child. Its mother is a failed American “educational offensive” (*Diane Ravitch*), and its father comes from the antechamber of the Paris OECD (*Andreas Schleicher*). There was no background in Switzerland necessitating the creation of Curriculum 21 (see *Dieter Sprock*. Bologna, Pisa, Curriculum 21. *Current Concerns* No 20 of 23 September). Concrete EDK proposals as to which scholastic goals should be reached by the pupils in all cantons and when they should be reached had already been made available by 2011, in order to fulfill the 2006 constitutional obligation of harmonization. Interestingly, however, the EDK adminis-

"Curriculum 21 – resistance ..."

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tration had started with the project "Curriculum 21" much earlier! As early as 2004 – two years before the adoption of the article on harmonization in the Federal Constitution – the EDK had planned the HarmoS consortium as a "strategic priority project" with competence orientation. Curriculum 21 is the further development of this useless constructivist approach imported from the USA – a truly foolish act in its delusional perfection and couldn't-care-less-attitude.

Under clause of secrecy

It was obvious that Curriculum 21 would have failed at the outset as soon as its controversial guidelines were announced, so for example the abolition of age-group classes in favour of *cycles*, the introduction "verifiable" sections of content (*competences*) or the new *interdisciplinary goals*. So the project was worked out under clauses of secrecy. At that time many educational experts had tried to get involved in the specialist discussion. They were rejected. Obviously a discussion was not welcome!

Homeopathic revision

Consistently, there was no correct consultation process. The controversial points were excluded from the "consultation". But even in this "consultation" the criticisms were more than numerous and clear. However, relevant objections were disregarded, such as the question of access to cantonal schools or universities. Also the reduction of practical content was not questioned. Correction according to criticism was included in the revised version only concerning irrelevant points and in homeopathic doses. For example, the number of over 3,000 competences,

which led to an outcry in the press, was reduced to 300, merely by proclaiming most of them as sub-competences without further ado, which then were assigned to main competences. The total number remained the same. The scope of the curriculum, which had been severely criticized, was reduced by leaving out individual words instead of by reducing the content as required. There are many more examples. The whole thing was a farce, but everyone was supposed to feel that he could have had a say!

The democratic veto was deliberately bypassed via the route of the political-ly unauthorized EDK. Similar "consultation procedures" have been and are now being carried out in the individual cantons. Here a person's possible influence lies in the parts-per-thousand range.

Authority propaganda instead of referendum campaign

In the first cantonal votes concerning topics around Curriculum 21, a frightening deficit of democratic attitude came to light. The EDK passed the ball to the cantonal authorities. They often stoop to make the most of their superiority as authorities.

For example, a vote on an initiative which called for the Canton of St. Gallen's withdrawal from the *HarmoS* Convention showed that critics are not treated with squeamishness. This initiative was first and foremost about making a vote on Curriculum 21 possible. Propaganda was sent to the teaching staff via school management and the official channels already long before the referendum campaign started. Teachers' associations were instrumentalised. Then, during the referendum campaign, headmasters and teachers were instructed to write readers' letters. The press printed defamatory reports on

individual persons associated with the initiative. After this massive campaign the initiators felt that 30% agreement to the initiative was actually a very good result.

Beforehand referendum campaigning

Several cantonal education authorities set up tax-financed bodies beforehand, which were to mentally prepare the way and prevent potential opposition. Some cantons have set up "core teams" uniting heads of education and school authorities as well as teachers' associations. They are an important cornerstone of the strategic introduction of the curriculum. In Thurgovia, for instance, there is even a "change-management-plan" (2014) with instructions as to what measures to take in order to silence teachers. A date had not yet been set for the introduction of Curriculum 21 and the initiative to introduce it had not yet been set in motion, when already the order was given out that teachers were not to comment on it and that public debate was not desired. At the same time, one or two teachers in each school were paid with tax money for letting themselves be schooled as "multipliers", whose job it would be to introduce the curriculum. Moreover, political parties and associations were systematically integrated into the cantonal network – less on

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Letter to  the Editor**EDK: Once let them off the leash!**

The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) seems more and more to act as a body out of touch with reality from the canton's sovereignty in the educational system without democratic supervision. Attempts to exert political pressure against scientists are the last example in a long series. In connection with the controversial project *Curriculum 21*, the cartel conceals the fact that with the mysterious competence orientation and the constructivist "self-directed learning", the most radical system change in the history of the elementary school is going to abolish the qualified teacher as well as the tried and tested whole class teaching. Already in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 13.8.2013 attention was drawn to the dark

plans of the EDK bypassing the people: "Warning is given to a state re-education plan that takes the form of a 'modern' curriculum." Contrary to EDK's constant claims, they did not vote on Curriculum 21 with the Education Article from 2006. The legal basis of Curriculum 21 is a simple administrative agreement of the EDK of 2010 which de facto could circumvent the cantonal parliaments. It is an alarm signal when renowned scientists such as *Simone Pfenniger* leave Switzerland. The successful Swiss education system must not be buried secretly by means of bypassing the people!

Peter Aebersold, Zurich

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Cantonal People's initiative in the Canton of Zürich on 27 November 2016

For the maintenance of marriage and the strengthening of the family Cantonal People's Initiative «Protection of marriage»

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

On 27 November, the voters of the Canton of Zurich will vote on a national initiative which will include the definition of marriage in a simple sentence in the canton's constitution: "Marriage is the long-term and legally regulated life-partnership of man and woman." What's new, some citizens will wonder in amazement – that is well-known. You are absolutely right: In what an inverted world we live today! More than 5,000 Zurichers have found it necessary to give their signature that marriage in Zurich law is to be defined as it has been developed and transmitted over centuries in Christian-Western culture. The initiators are right: We are committed to the preservation of marriage and the strengthening of the family, as the basis of our society and as the core of the Swiss state model!

What persuaded the initiators to write in the Zurich constitution what a marriage is? Well, in the totally revised Constitution of 27 February 2005 we can read:

Forms of living together

Art. 13 Everyone has the right to freely choose the form of partnership life. In addition to marriage, the state can also recognize other forms of living together.

Marriage is thus mentioned only as a "form of living together" among others. The EDU (Swiss Federal Democratic Union) initiative would like to add to this article as a new paragraph 2: "Marriage is the long-term and legally regulated life-partnership of man and woman." So to speak, as a reminder of what form of living together is the foun-

ation and germ cell also of our society today.

Why is the People's Initiative «Protection of marriage» necessary?

It is unnecessary, the Zurich Government Council says in the voting booklet. The right to marriage and family is protected by Article 14 of the Federal Constitution. ("The right to marry and to have a family is guaranteed.") A strong minority of the Cantonal Council (around one third), who voted for the initiative, opposes this: "The Federal Constitution secures, in Article 14, the fundamental right to marriage but does not define what a marriage is, because this was unquestioned until now.

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«Curriculum 21 – resistance ...»

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a factual level and more according to party-political interests.

Muzzle for teachers

Finally, since the curriculum has been introduced prematurely, teachers are not allowed to express a different opinion from that of their employer, the educational authority (so-called duty of loyalty). Thus only the curriculum supporters among the teachers express their opinion publicly. But advertising material against the initiatives is being blatantly distributed to the teachers and parents via the school administration. Some heads of schools even tell their employees to vote against the initiatives. All this exceeds the limits of political decency. Such behaviour should almost be called tax-financed manipulation.

Slowly our eyes are opened

More and more citizens are noticing the authorities' and the EDK's inconsistencies and discrepancies. When we look at several isolated school models, we are now getting to know about the inadequacy of "learning models" à la Curriculum 21. Meanwhile, the arguments for the curriculum are sounding hollow in the ears of more and more people. The advocates are still trying to win the teachers over by using a relaxed "we-will-manage"-language. Parents are lead to believe that

their child might develop "individually", and a learning companion would be able to spend a lot of time for the individual programs of this one child, notwithstanding the fact that he or she would have to look after 20 more children and their work "individually".

The bill is presented

If Curriculum 21 is introduced, the next generations of pupils will continue to be markedly more poorly educated. But these generations would then be supposed to be able to cope well in a rapidly changing society and to secure their and our future. This will not work with Curriculum 21.

Unemployed with Curriculum 21

The conception of Curriculum 21 is moving in the direction of a "knowledge- and service-based society". But where will Switzerland really stand in 10 or 20 years? What are we going to do with a generation of pupils that have been trained as "service providers" when all jobs in this segment will have been rationalised or will be done even more cheaply abroad in consequence of the digital world of "4.0"? Practical basic skills (dexterity, accuracy, diligence and endurance) are scarcely required in Curriculum 21 and are treated only marginally. However, they provide an essential basis for the small and medium-sized business – the most important economic mainstay in Switzerland.

One of Switzerland's strengths lies in its federalist structure and competition. This also includes the school system. Directly democratic, federal, fine-tuned to the needs of every community and every canton and tailored to its strengths and weaknesses, schools can react flexibly and can be adapted to external circumstances. With the unifying Curriculum 21, Switzerland is put under centralized control, which precisely gambles away this advantage.

The Emperor's new clothes

With each cantonal vote, it becomes harder for Curriculum 21 strategists to sell their goods to the voters. Slowly, it is becoming clear that Curriculum 21 does not cater for either the children or the entire society. It is known what constitutes a future-oriented and good school. Now it is a matter of paving the way for reason while cutting across the political-official patches of fog.

School also means education

The school is not only a place where people are educated in order to get the professional armaments for the future, but also a place where they are educated to develop responsible citizenship and personalities. This is not achieved by Curriculum 21. •

If you want to dedicate yourself to a solid education, look at the numerous cantonal initiatives. You will also find detailed information on their websites.

"For the maintenance of ..."

continued from page 11

[...] Marriage is intended to preserve the meaning which it has traditionally been accustomed to for centuries as a tested union between husband and wife." (Voting booklet, p. 15/16)

It seems as if we citizens would almost have to justify why we want to preserve and strengthen the most normal and universally acknowledged institution of the Christian-Western order of values... Of course, the majority of the adult Swiss are married, as the initiators write. Naturally, most young people want to marry later and raise children. People *want* binding and responsible relationships with their fellow human beings and, in particular, with their spouse, which corresponds to human nature. In a time when media and so-called "experts" are confusing people's minds, the Zurich people's initiative "Protection of Marriage" is urgently needed.

Opposition to the dismantling of marriage

"Instead of fostering marriage and strengthening its framework conditions,

politicians are concentrating on ideological motives for a nonsensical reorganization of the institution of marriage, which does not strengthen it but devaluates and weakens it." (Committee of initiative in the voting booklet, p. 18)

The parliamentary initiative 13.468 "Marriage for All" of the Green-Liberal Party Group of the Federal Assembly which wants to enlarge the right to marriage in Article 14 of the Federal Constitution to a right to "legally regulated living communities" for couples "irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation" goes into this problematic direction. This proposal was only slightly accepted in the two parliamentary commissions for legal questions (on 2nd February 2015 by the RK-N with 12 to 9 votes with 1 abstention, on 1st September 2015 by the RK-S with 7 to 5 votes with 1 abstention). The bill is currently being prepared by the Commission of the National Council and will be submitted first to the National Council for debate.

This sociopolitical discussion takes place at national level where it belongs to, according to the Zurich State / Gouvernating Council. The definition of the concept of marriage which the initiators want

must therefore be introduced at the federal level. (Voting booklet, p. 15/16)

In principle agree: We citizens must intervene in the coming debate in the National Council and Council of States and demand from our national representatives that the text of the cantonal initiative "Protection of marriage" is also inserted in Article 14 of the Federal Constitution instead of diluting the notion of marriage there.

The Zurich popular initiative "Schutz der Ehe" (Protection of Marriage) is, however, in no way opposed to the discussion at the federal level. Rather, the sovereign's decision of the most populous canton in Switzerland plays an important role: A yes of the – mostly liberal – people of the Canton of Zurich would have some influence all over the country and, of course, the debate in the National Council and Council of States. As a sociopolitical sign against the confusion of minds and concepts, the Zurich voice is of great importance. In this sense also the initiative committee states: "The Zurich voters should proactively give a clear confession to the natural marriage of man and woman and thus as a sovereign be pioneer for the policy and the legislation." (Voting booklet, p. 18) •

Constitutional considerations about the initiative "Protection of Marriage"

mw. According to Article 8, paragraph 2 of the Federal Constitution any discrimination is prohibited, as well with regard to the form of life. *Andreas Glaser* professor in Constitutional Law, who was consulted by the committee as an expert, concludes that the initiative "Protection of Marriage" does not violate the ban on discrimination. Because even in case of a Yes to the initiative Article 13 paragraph 1 of the cantonal constitution. "guarantees the right of every human being further on to choose the form of cohabitation he wants to live in." Any discrimination intent on the part of the initiators is missing: "They do not want to put other forms of life in a worse position, but to emphasise the socially desired function of marriage by using an exclusive naming for the life-long partnership of man and woman." (Opinion Glaser, p. 12 / 13)¹

The Initiative reaffirms the fundamental right to marry and have a family

Cantonal popular initiatives are valid only if they are not contradicting superior law. Especially with regard to the "Protection of Marriage" initiative, the question arose whether its content is contrary to the scope of the Federation concerning civil law (Article 122 paragraph 1 of the Fed-

eral Constitution). The marriage law is set in the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB); there, the cantons have not to step in. But according to Professor Glaser the initiative does not concern with civil law (private law), but rather with *fundamental rights*, so it is rather to be assigned to *public law*. (Opinion Glaser, p. 8)

Fundamental rights are part of the public law, because they give a legal claim to protect the human person and her dignity against the state. So, the protection of marriage and family is guaranteed in the Constitution (Article 14) as a legal claim against the State (Federal, cantonal and municipal). (In contrast to this are claims under private law for example against a contractor or also against the spouse).

There is nothing extraordinary, if fundamental rights are guaranteed in the Cantonal Constitutions and in a similar way in the Federal Constitution. So we find the human right "human dignity shall be inviolable" for example, in article 9 of the Zurich Cantonal Constitution and in article 11 "all people are equal before the law."

By listing these central fundamental rights in the cantonal constitution, their importance is emphasised by the Zurich legislators. The initiators aim exactly at this if they want to bring the principle that "Marriage is the life-long and regularised part-

nership of man and woman" into the Constitution.

Scope of the cantonal legislature

The Zurich Government Council writes in the voting booklet, that the initiative "Protection of Marriage" is also "*to be rejected for legal reasons*" because the definition of the concept of marriage belongs to the federal level. *Current Concerns* asked Constitutional law professor *Andreas Glaser*: "Is this statement legally tenable?" Prof. *Andreas Glaser*: "Well, you rightly point the contradiction appearing at the first glance out. The initiative is valid, because it does not violate federal law. Looking at it in a bigger context the State Council probably thinks that it is politically not really useful to define the concept of marriage in the cantonal law. The Civil Code is leading here in practically all relevant areas. On the other hand there is a cantonal scope in the perspective of fundamental rights, in particular what would concern also promotion measures of the canton.»

In dubio pro populo (when in doubt, for the people)

Particularly noteworthy are the judgments of the Swiss Supreme Federal

Growing up in the mountains

by Max Hugelshofer, "Schweizer Berghilfe"*

Growing up in the mountains is great. The children have a lot of freedom, they are outside and get a feeling for nature. However, only if they learn a trade in their home country and later find a job, the mountain area remains alive. A glance at five Swiss families supported by the Swiss mountain aid and projects that contribute precisely to this.

Little *Carina* can not really talk yet. "Muuh", she says when she sees a cow. Her bigger sister *Ivana* she calls "Ivi." But at yodeling, Carina can be almost as good as a big one. When her eldest sister, *Ramona*, takes her on the lap and starts the song "Gloggejodel" with her, the two-year-old sings along enthusiastically. Making music is in the blood of the hill-farming family *Buchs* from Im Fang in the Canton of Fribourg. Father *Patrick* used to be a yodeler himself, and all the children are or were in the yodel choir. Actually, the *Buchs* family could have founded an own choir. The number of singers would not be lacking. Patrick and *Monika* have ten children, five boys and five girls, from 19-year-old *Samuel* to half-year-old *Lukas*.

Nobody finds this exceptional in the family. "There's a family with twelve children nearby, and one up in the village with eight," says *Monika*. "I myself grew up with ten brothers and sisters. This is nothing special here. "It was always clear to *Monika* and *Patrick* that they wanted to have many children. How many exactly, was not that important. "I need life around me. It is exciting how each of our children has got their very own personality. And it's nice to see them all developing in their own way".

The children themselves react puzzled to questions about their many siblings. They have never thought about the fact that their family is not quite the average. The 14-year-old *Stefan*, who oth-

erwise is no friend of long speeches, gets to the point: "Sometimes one of the brothers and sisters is annoying, but it is always nice to have someone close to you whom you are fond of."

The children have all their own friends and hobbies: *Magaly* (11) and *Ivana* (12) play guitar, *Christelle* (9) and *Yanick* (7) love to play for ever with Lego. *Ivana* joins a ski club and wants to be a ski racer. But most often they are together with their family. This is already only due to the fact that there is very much to be done in the everyday life of the *Buchs* family. And all of them go along.



Family Buchs (picture Isabel Plana, "Schweizer Berghilfe")

There is nothing more beautiful, than the work outside in the mountains

Our visit to the *Buchs* family took place on a Sunday since on an other day they would never be at home together. "On Sunday, we only do any work if it is absolutely necessary," says *Patrick*. This means he gets up at 4 o'clock, drives to his parents' home to milk the cows that are now placed there for the time being, thereafter to the self-leased *Alp Gerstara* where he milks the goats. At 6.30 a.m. *Samuel* comes also to the *Gerstara* to do the stable, while *Patrick* drives home with the milk cans in the car. He delivers the goat milk to the small court-dairy where *Monika* is already making the cheese. With the cow's milk *Patrick* continues directly to *Charmey*, where he delivers it to the cheese dairy. At about

8 o'clock he is back home. Little by little the younger children have also gotten up in the meantime and arrive at the "Zmorgetisch" (breakfast table). *Patrick* has already got up again to continue working at the dairy, when *Monika* realises that *Ivana* and *Magaly* are soon to play the guitar at Sunday Mass. The transport is quickly organised.

Meanwhile, *Patrick* sets out with *Stefan* and little *Carina* to the nearby stable. There are two calves in the stable still to be fed. As they return, *Emmanuel*, the second oldest has arrived. He undergoes the agricultural traineeship in *Rossens*, in the French-speaking part of the canton. He has got to work today, but returns briefly home specifically for the photo session

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"Constitutional considerations ..."

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Court concerning the obligation of the authorities to interpret the texts of popular initiatives. They shouldn't lightly be assessed as illegal, but possibly as valid: "Within different options to interpret, those shall be selected which best correspond to the sense and purpose of the initiative and lead to a reasonable result and which appear on the other hand as compatible with the meaning of the constitutional interpretation of the par-

ent legislation of federal and cantonal law." (Federal Court decision BGE^oI39^oI 292, considering 5.7, p. ^o296) Or in the words of Professor Glaser: "As long as a referendum a people's initiative / popular initiative is not obviously inadmissible, it is to be declared as valid and to be subject of a referendum." And he adds: "The Federal Court proceeds 'specifically after the principle in dubio pro populo' and choses the alternative closest to the initiators intend with a view on the compatibility with the parent law." (Opinion Glaser, p. §59)

Good to know! In the future this provides more steadfastness to us as citizens against the cantonal authorities, who tend to declare people's initiatives, which do not fit their plans as invalid with vast and played up "reasons" •

¹ Prof. Dr. Andreas Glaser, Chair of State, Administrative and European Law at the University of Zurich, opinion on the validity of the cantonal popular initiative "Protection of marriage" dated 22 December 2014

"Growing up in the mountains"

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with the entire family. And since he is already here, he comes right along as Patrick, Stefan, and Carina drive to the second, even higher, Alp to look after the sheep grazing there.

When finally "Zmittag" (lunch) is at 12.30 p.m., the members of the Buchs family have already worked more than others on an entire working day. But that is everyday life for them, and no one is bothered by it. Not even Emmanuel. The 17 year old does not make a difference between leisure and work. "When I'm off, I help here in the yard", he says. "I don't need to go out, and I don't like sitting around the room. There is really nothing more beautiful than being able to be out here in this wonderful mountain world." He by all means wants to stay here in the valley. It is here where he grew up and is at home. At Fribourg, where he is currently absolving the apprenticeship, it is already too flat for him. "All of the cattle have moved to the alpine pastures of late and I was really envious of the cows. They are allowed up in the mountains and I have to stay down."

Finding a good job is difficult

Growing up and live in the mountains is not at all easy. Especially for the parents. Finding a good job is more difficult than in the lowland. And to keep a job after the first child is often impossible for young mothers because there is no child care service available. In the Upper Vallais, a group of inhabitants have joined forces to change this. The result was the *Children's Daycare Center Gogwärgi* named after an old word for a dwarf, where children are attended for one and a half years from the age of 6 months until starting school. In the afternoon and outside the school hours, school children are also cared for up to the age of twelve. Today, there are four children in the morning, who are supervised by daycare leader *Brigitte Furrer* and the two interns *Kerstin Zurbriggen* and *Jessica Amstutz*.

Shortly before lunch, two more children join the group. They were in the kindergarten in the morning, which is housed in the same building – a former schoolhouse. Together, children and attendants have lunch. Thereafter the teeth have to be cleaned before one finally may continue. The two boys put together a Lego racing car in ever new variations, and the little girls hunt tirelessly through the playhouse and down the small slide.

Even if there are often a few tears on saying farewell to mommy, the children are fond of the "Gogwärgi" where they can get to know new friends to play with. "Unfortunately, my own children had very little contact with peers at this age," says *Dagmar Furrer*, Fieschertal's local councillor and president of the *Children's Daycare Center Gogwärgi*. "Just for this reason alone I would have appreciated, had there already been a daycare center in my time. But, above all, I would have been glad to see the additional care offer." For *Dagmar Furrer*, the daycare center is also an important instrument against the emigration. "If you want young families to stay here or even move here from outwards, you have to provide them with the necessary infrastructure." Last but not least, the "Kita" (shortcut for "Kleinkindertagesstätte" (children's daycare center)) is strengthening the Goms region because it has created four new jobs. *Brigitte Furrer*, the director of the daycare center, is also from the region, but had to move to the lowlands to pursue her profession. Now she was able to come back.

Care of children and adolescents in the Bernese Oberland

However, it is not just the children from the mountain area, for whom a daycare service is on demand. An example from the Gadmental in the Bernese Oberland shows a different kind of care for children and adolescents. In Grin near Gaden, *Christian Feuz* and *Isa Oggier* made a home out of a ruinous farmhouse. For themselves, for their three children and for a handful of adolescents and young adults who are not able to get along in society at the moment.

In the kitchen of this house *Wuli* fights with the bread kneading machine. The kneading hook absolutely will not engage. And that after the preparation of the dough was anything but easy, since he miscalculated badly the amount of water needed. But

Wuli does not give up. He enjoys having success without any help. Even if it is demanding. The 16-year-old, whose complete name is *Abduwali Dhiblawe*, has grown up in different homes and has spent his former life more or less on the sofa. He did not know about day-to-day structures, and working intently is something new for him. He must learn both before he has a chance to find an apprenticeship, to gain a foothold in professional life and to integrate into society. In the remote hamlet Grin, near Christian and Isa, he has the chance to do so. "It's strict, but I like it very much," he says.

At the moment, *Wuli* is one of three young people who take part in the assisted living and working project. Moreover the former farmhouse is the home of Christian's and Isa's three children *Lola*, *Elio* and *Maël*. Together with one or two persons performing alternative civilian service (so-called "Zivis") and the employee *Pedro Burri*, they form the Evergrin-Team. With so many people, there is lack of space. There are not rooms enough at all in the house. This is why a "Zivi" and *Wuli* are currently living in a self-rebuilt construction trailer. "We came to our first construction trailer when we had acute space problems", *Christian* remembers. Out of necessity he made a virtue and built a room on wheels. Meanwhile, he and his people have become experts for such trailers and are also enhancing them on customer order. "It's a very good job for our people. It is very versatile and satisfying because it is easy to see what has been done." At all, the physical work for the people cared for is being considered an important component on the way to a more self-determined life. For example, the Evergrin-Team carries out gardening by order of a third party, maintains paths and refurbishes dry walls. About half of the income of the Feuz/Oggier family comes from these contracts, while the other half is paid for care allowances. At the moment the Evergrins are again busy with enhancing a new construction trailer

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****"Schweizer Berghilfe"**

"*Schweizer Berghilfe*" (Swiss Mountain Aid) is an organisation exclusively financed by donations, with the aim of improving the livelihoods and living conditions in the Swiss mountain region.

It promotes the self-help of the mountain people, thereby contributing to the development of economy and habitats, preserving regional culture, cultivating the cultural landscape and counteracting emigration. In the year 2015, the "Schweizer Berghilfe" supported 513 projects with 23.8 million francs.

www.berghilfe.ch



Family Buchs (picture Isabel Plana, "Schweizer Berghilfe")

"Growing up in the mountains"

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er. It is urgent, because soon a new person performing alternative civilian service will come, and he has to live somewhere.

Out of Wulis unruly dough has now become a sweet smelling bread. Also, he made two large bowls of salad, while Isa prepared a tarte flambée. At the lunch table, the whole Evergrin-Team comes together. They are reporting on the work in the morning, joking, chattering and planning the afternoon. And they are eating heartily, because it tastes good. Another success story for Wuli.

Apprenticeships in remote areas

Particularly important for the mountain area and for the youth there is, of course, a good offer of apprenticeships. In many remote regions in the mountains there is a lack of this. *Joel Wechsler* from Luthern in the Napf area was lucky. He could do his apprenticeship as a milk technologist directly in the village, in the "Napf-Chäsi". Since childhood it was clear to Joel that he would become a cheesemaker. At the age of ten, he wanted a little cheese kettle as birthday present and experimented with it on the parental farm. "It fascinates me, how many different foods you can make from milk," says Joel. And he likes them all. "In our family, I am certainly the one who eats the most milk products. Surely, four kilos of yogurt a week and a lot of cheese."

Getting the apprenticeship at the "Napf-Chäsi" (cheese factory) was not the only luck for him. The way to work is short and master cheesemaker *Markus Stirnimann* has steadily expanded the cooperative cheese dairy over the past decades and has included various specialties into the range of goods. This makes Joel's work and training very versatile. Hard cheese, soft cheese, yogurt, butter – Joel already has produced everything in a wide variety. "Many of my mates from the vocational

college ("Berufsschule") are doing more or less the same year after year. I am glad, that this is different for me." So Joel wants to remain true to the local cheese dairy. He already has discussed his future professional career with the boss: First, there are some "years of travel" for Joel to gain experience in other companies and to expand his horizons. Then he will return to Luthern. Anyway he can not imagine to live somewhere different.

Affinity with the mountain world

This affinity with the homeland is something that connects many adolescents and children from the mountain region. But how do youngsters from the flatland think about this? Could they live here? The apprentices of *Reishauer AG* from Wallisellen near Zurich have done the test. Once a year, they become "mountain movers". One part of the apprentice training camp of this industrial enterprise has become an assignment in the mountain area since 1972. These assignments are coordinated by "bergversetzer" (mountain movers), the organisation for assignments in the mountain area, financed by the "Schweizer Berghilfe". This year the young men are working for the family *Barbüda* in Luchsingen in the Glarnerland.

The lamas of the family *Barbüda* peek somehow critical over their fence. From the house sounds clatter, clanking, laughter and shouting. Young people carry beams and doors behind corral of the lamas, rubble keeps falling from a window into a dumpster standing by. *Barbüdas* rehabilitate their house. But first the old flat has to be hollowed out. During the severe demolition work *Barbüdas* receive valuable help from the low-lands. 14 apprentices from the first year of their apprenticeship spend their time here. For one week, they live in a ski lodge nearby and help the *Barbüdas*. During the work on the construction site, they work hard and, by the way, get to know each other and their trainers better. "Such hard work forges a strong bond," says *Raymond Schneider*. He must know, because he has been accompanying his apprentices to the camp for 30 years. "We've done a lot of different work," says Raymond. "But demolition is best. Then the lads really can let off steam. We always like to be ordered for that kind of work."

The youngsters enjoy the change to the everyday working life and show full effort despite the onset of muscle soreness on the third day. Some of them know the mountain area from holidays, for others it is a completely new experience to spend only a few days outside the agglomeration. "It's nice, but I'm glad I don't have to live here", says one. "The people are all very nice. And I find it impressive

how much *Christian* and his wife *Barbara* do themselves on their construction site", says another.

Even if the work is hard and not always funny: For a long time the boys will keep the work in a good memory. And thus also the mountain area. *Fabian Bucher*, coordinator at "bergversetzer", knows this from experience. "Everybody benefits from a work effort in the mountain region", he says. The adolescents get an invaluable experience, the mountain people will be able to count on their understanding and solidarity for a lifetime. And the employer can carry out work for which otherwise the money would be missing. *Christian Barbüda* even cites figures: "A construction company offered me to do the demolition work for several tens of thousands francs. Plainly, we could not have afforded that". The *Reishauer* apprentices have already moved mountains with their commitment to the *Barbüda* family. And they know that growing up in the mountain area is beautiful, but also challenging.

These examples show how much the support of mountain aid contributes to a living mountain region. "When children and adolescents benefit from this, our help will be particularly long-term", says *Regula Straub*, Managing Director of "Schweizer Berghilfe". "And when I look at these children and adolescents, I do not worry about our mountain region".

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

The projects

For each project presented in this article, you can find further information at www.berghilfe.ch, a gallery with further pictures and also a video of some projects.

Family Buchs, Im Fang/FR
www.berghilfe.ch/imfang

Children's Daycare Center Gogwärgi
www.berghilfe.ch/gogwaergi

Evergrin Gadmen/BE
www.berghilfe.ch/grin

"Napf-Chäsi", Luthern/LU
www.berghilfe.ch/luthern

Working with the family *Barbüda*, Luchsingen/GL
www.berghilfe.ch/luchsingen



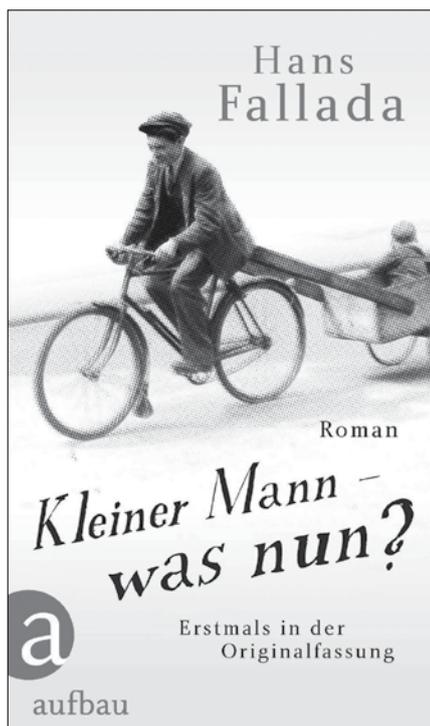
Cheesemaker apprentice in Luthern.
(picture Yannick Andrea, "Schweizer Berghilfe")

Little man, what now?

by Christian Fischer

In 1932, Rowohlt Press published the novel “Kleiner Mann, was nun?” (“Little man, what now?”) written by the previously hardly known writer *Hans Fallada*. The book immediately became a giant success, even a world success, because it describes the period of the years 1930/31 in Berlin in Germany from the perspective of simple but honest people in an environment in which there were also more than enough dishonest people, and it is empathetic and full of detail. Enthusiastic letters were received by the publishing house, sent by people like *Thomas Mann*, who had just been awarded the Nobel Prize, *Kurt Tucholsky* and *Carl Zuckmayer*, and also by several apprentices who recognised their situation in the book. And yet, the text had been greatly shortened with regard to the emerging Nazis, and it was reissued after 1933 in a partially modified version in which there were no negatively drawn Nazis. This was even done with Fallada’s consent, as he could not imagine going into exile. He retired to a farm in Mecklenburg and there he wrote other well-known books besides carrying out his rural work.

Now the *Aufbau-Verlag* has published the complete text for the first time, after the manuscript had been found in the archives. Reading this book is well worthwhile. For one thing, you get a very vivid and detailed impression of the situation in Germany at the time of the economic crisis at the end of the Weimar Republic. For another thing, you read a very human and touching story, which is of timeless value.



ISBN 978-3-351-03641-6

Pinneberg, a small employee, marries the woman who is expecting his child, and does his best to earn a living for her and himself, and also for their small son, in whom he rejoices in spite of all the difficulties and the spiteful remarks of people around him. He is confronted with unworthy treatment at work, and he puts up with a lot, but not with everything. He meets temptations that could lead him astray from the honest path, but he remains steadfast, even if he does not know how he will pay his rent the following month.

Since the book is not crime fiction, there is no spectacular story. The suspense arises from the fact that Fallada takes his readers with him into the small people’s everyday life. We can see what it was like in the management of a small company, or how a salesman was treated and harassed in a department store. We are in with a young couple expecting a baby and trying to get a furnished room they can afford to pay, and we feel with them when they calculate how many marks and pennies they can spend and how little they can afford. But we also learn what gives them pleasure, and that among the many repulsive people who they are, however, dependent on, they also meet compassionate people, and also how they lose these out of sight. The book is full of everyday life full of unexpected twists and encounters, which we sometimes also anticipate, and everything is portrayed from Pinneberg’s perspective – not just as external action, but always accompanied by his thoughts and feelings, his worries and hopes.

Yet Pinneberg is very lucky to have his wife – a modest person who is well able to cope with life and who keeps him without flinching on the right path from which he sometimes threatens to deviate. She encourages him with her confidence. She might almost be seen as the embodiment of the sentence “we can make it”, if this sentence had not gotten to sound so dull because of another woman from Mecklenburg. In this book, however, the confident attitude is the human leitmotif, which is presented convincingly and true to life. In the face of the adverse circumstances this woman, called “Lämmchen” (little lamb), might almost be regarded as a worldly innocent and fairy-tale invention.

But Fallada – or *Rudolf Ditzen* as was his real name – knew what he wrote about. Of course he wrote about himself, though not biographically but in literary transformation. He had professional difficulties himself in the twenties – change of job, alcohol and drugs, embezzlement, prison term – he was a little man himself. In 1928, he met a woman who stabilised him. Their

first son *Uli* was born in 1930, and the family’s economic situation was fairly stable, but not rosy. In 1931, he began to write the “Little man”, and in 1932, as this was a world success, he was able to retire with his family to a farm at the end of the world, as far away from political events as possible.

His own experiences at the lower end of society, his extensive contact with people standing on the edge of the abyss, and at the same time his empathy for these people, to which when all was said and done he also belonged, his own will to lead a decent life – and ultimately his untameable narrative talent – allowed him to depict his time as vividly as hardly any other writer has succeeded in doing. And life with his wife made it possible for him to invent the figure “Lämmchen”, which is precisely not an invention – there is a live person behind it. The book is also a declaration of love he made to her.

The reviewer had the good fortune, as a child and into his adult age, to get to know this woman, *Anna Ditzen*, Fallada’s widow. She continued to keep the farm up into her retirement age and also rented rooms to summer guests for financial reasons. This is how we met in the 50’s. Shortly, after the German reunion, just before her 90th birthday, she died. Without her, there would be no writer Hans Fallada. She gave him four children, but he always brought her much suffering, in the end he left her, there were other women, drugs and alcohol, and he died exhausted in 1947. Yet she always stood by him and supported him, though not unconditionally: she did not accept the drugs and she did not let him into the house with drugs. But she preserved and cultivated his work beyond his death, and would not hear any-thing bad said about him; she knew that he was a weak man and a great writer. This vigorous and unsentimental woman never gave up anything or anyone, but she always looked for what was next needed and where anyone needed help. Only once she was near an emotional breakdown, and that was when her daughter *Lore* died. But she had to go on because she had another son, *Achim*, who was still a child. And she managed, also in this situation.

Whoever reads “Little man, what now?” and was so lucky as to know this woman, does not only see the 1931 Berlin rise up in his mind alive as it was. He is not only shown how to live decently though times are bad and how to rely on marital cooperation to help you find your way to this; but he can also see this book as a monument dedicated to a strong woman. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)