

# Current Concerns

The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility,  
and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## Direct democracy is based on honesty, mutual respect and mutual trust Inconsistencies in the Federal Council's policy

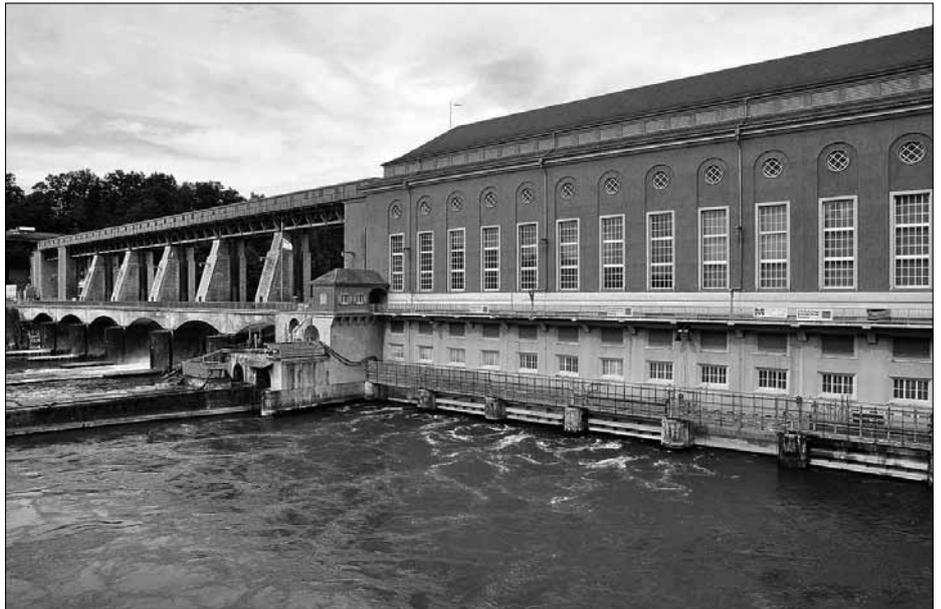
by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

*It is fascinating to read how the Swiss people, together with the Federal Council and the Federal Assembly, developed the Swiss model in more than 100 years, with numerous plebiscites on parliament's proposals or on popular initiatives; how the Government and the Parliament have incorporated the concerns of the majority of the people and have developed them further and then presented them again to the sovereign. This was possible only in an open and honest interaction between the people and the authorities. Or in more general terms, the direct democratic state model on the level of the confederation, in the cantons and communes, lives on mutual respect, trust and encounter on an equal footing between the citizen and the state – openly and honestly. The spoken word is valid, the law holds and is lasting; those who want to change a rule will do so in the constitutionally prescribed way. The sovereign has always the last word.*

Today it is still like this in most Swiss communes, and so it was in the politics of the Confederation until about 25 years ago. However, since many federal politicians as well as directors and members of the staff of various federal offices are more focused on the EU, the OECD and other foreign networks than on their own country and the concerns of the population, the direct democratic process drags on. The intended dominion of the executive – eagerly supported by Brussels, Strasbourg and Washington, because they just know their top down-approach – is an irreconcilable difference to direct democracy.

### How does the Federal Council with the honest information of the voters? Energy Strategy 2050 as an example

*“The best security of supply according to the study is not provided by autarky, but by an optimal integration into the European network. This underlines the Federal Government's approach that opening the power market cannot be postponed*



Power plant Eglisau-Glattfelden, hydraulic power station at the High Rhine since 1920.  
(picture wikipedia)

*forever or even be revoked, as certain circles are requesting.” (Federal President Doris Leuthard on 28 October 2017<sup>1</sup>)*

Prior to the voting on 21 May 2017 on the future energy strategy of Switzerland until the year 2035, it was not mentioned that the security of electricity supply for Switzerland would not be given without an electricity agreement with the EU. The allegedly needed conclusion of such an important contract would certainly be an essential part of an almost strategy for the next twenty years.

However, no sooner than Ms Leuthard had been able to fix a “yes” in the people's votes, the *Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE* subordinate to her placed an order at related departments of the ETH and the University of Basel on a study of the security of power supply. The results of this investigation<sup>2</sup> were presented by the DETEC (Federal Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications) on 27 October 2017 at the “Design of the electricity market – the challenges” conference in Berne.<sup>3</sup> Apparently this study wasn't really necessary, as

Doris Leuthard explains in the interview that its result is what she had expected, namely: “The study recommends that we integrate ourselves even more into the European electricity market and liberalise the market in Switzerland further. After 2035, funding of renewable energy will be cancelled. By then, we will hopefully be integrated in the European electricity market.”<sup>4</sup> With these few sentences, Leuthard bares her actual plans for the Swiss electricity supply, unfortunately just after the referendum on the Energy Strategy 2050 took place.

Those who support a further extension of the bilateral approach with the EU through further agreements can see by the example of the electricity agreement quite specifically that we would massively lower our sights in terms of our federalist and direct democratic system.

### “Inland market opening” means total liberalisation of power trading

A precondition for the conclusion of the electricity agreement with the EU is a rad-

**"Direct democracy is based on ..."**

continued from page 1

ical liberalisation of the Swiss power trading. However, the Swiss voters have never agreed to such plans so far. In 2002, the *Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB)* took the referendum against the Power Market Act because it envisaged the liberalisation of the electricity market. The people followed the SGB and rejected the law at the ballot box. Reacting on that, the Parliament amended in 2007 the law to some extent and decided to liberalise electricity market in two steps, which came into force in 2009. One could call this action of the federal authorities in Berne a democracy-preventing attrition tactic, because it is unacceptable for citizens to exert, within a few years, a second referendum with 50,000 signatures to be collected on an almost identical topic – which nobody embraced to do. According to that law of 2007, major customers with an annual consumption of more than 100,000 kilowatt hours of electricity can freely choose their suppliers, i.e. also those from abroad, where the electricity prices are lower. Private households and small and medium-sized enterprises continue to be bound to the Swiss electricity suppliers; they were allowed to buy on the free market according to plan from 2014 onwards. But this step didn't become effective until now. (Source: *Finanz und Wirtschaft* from 6.6.2017)

Doris Leuthard replied on the interviewer's objection that the conditions for the electricity agreement were not given at all, because the domestic electricity

market was only partially open: "We are ready. All it takes is a federal decree for the full opening." ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 28 October 2017) – However, this federal decree is not a trivial matter, because it will be subject to the facultative referendum, and the people's approval is unlikely to be expected this time.

**Swiss hydropower plants  
must remain in the hands of cantons  
and communes!**

Federal President Mrs Leuthard states in the interview crystal clear what market opening would mean in Switzerland. However, it is also clear that the federalist Swiss electricity supply, a public service under the supervision of the electors, is of great importance to our country and not so easy to crack: "Since the partial opening of the market a few years ago, there were not any mergers between the roughly 700 Swiss power providers. With so many players and more than 8,000 different rates, it becomes difficult. [...]" Let's hope it will be difficult and remains difficult. The majority of the "many players" are cantons and communes. Water and waterpower have always been under their custody. The smaller power plants are typically fully 100% owned by cantons and communes, the same applies even to *Axpo*, a really large group that bustles in foreign wind parks, instead of bringing Switzerland forward in the area of solar and wind power. Only a few Swiss power providers are trading on the stock exchange, and their shares are mostly in the hands of cantons and communes. It goes without saying that the majority of the Swiss people wants to retain

sovereignty over water and hydropower as basic facilities of the public service and will make a stand against its sales to foreign power giants.

Ears are burning if we have to listen to the speech of the responsible head of the Department: "The small suppliers balk at the full liberalisation, because there is little level of suffering. [...] We have to talk to the cantons and the Association of Power Providers and tell them: If you want to be responsible further on and do business, you have to restructure. This will certainly be a difficult discussion."

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It is important to note that before the referendum on the revised Energy Act (EnA), the Federal Council did not openly and honestly inform and debate the essential facts of its energy policy. Of course, Switzerland as a small state is still reliant on energy imports, of course it is together with its neighbouring countries part of the power grids in its geographical situation in the midst of Europe. As *Oliver Koch* – who participated as a representative of the EU Commission in the DETEC meeting in Berne on 27 October – said that the EU is likewise interested in cooperating with Switzerland: "The EU, for its part, is benefiting from the well-developed Swiss electricity grid and the numerous hydroelectric power plants that can serve as buffers if there is no wind nor sunshine."<sup>5</sup> Power trading and cooperation between Switzerland and its neighbouring countries is working at best today, even without

continued on page 3

### Opening up of the agricultural market instead of protecting domestic production

*mw.* On 24 September 2017, the Swiss people adopted the counter-(contrary) proposal on the Food Security Initiative of the Farmers' Union with a high percentage of "yes". No wonder in the light of the multi-million-dollar campaign of the supporters, who hung the whole country with homely placards and thus led the voters to believe in the protection of domestic agricultural production, what didn't correspond to the content of the vote in any way (see *Current Concerns* No 19 from 15 August, No 21 from 10 September and No 22/23 from 23 September 2017).

Now the Federal Council has come to the public's attention with an "overall view of the medium-term development of the agricultural policy" (Federal Council press release of 1 November 2017). As part of agricultural policy from 2022 (AP22 +), the Federal Council plans that "domestic and foreign agricultural markets should be better networked under trade agreements". The Federal Council wants to "give new perspec-

tives" to the "actors of the agriculture and food industry", among other things "digitisation will play an important role". In the opinion of the Federal Council, the dismantling of the border protection is "economically advantageous and – accompanied by suitable support measures – manageable for the Swiss agriculture and food industry". As stated in the three *Current Concerns* articles mentioned above, in reality this policy would mean the end for a large part of the producing Swiss farms.

What must be said here in favor of Federal Councillor *Johann Schneider-Ammann*, head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER): He did not lie to the people and the peasants before the vote, but supported already in the summer exactly the same position and started to think about the "new perspectives" for the farmers. For example, their coercion to merge their farms, because according to the housekeeping book calculation of Mr Schneider-Ammann for the double

floor area only one instead of two tractors would be needed so that the direct payments from Berne could be halved in the longer term ...

On the other hand, the leaders of the Swiss Farmers' Union SFU, who are now complaining so loud, have misled the peasantry and the people. They should not have withdrawn their popular initiative signed by 150,000 voters. And they should not have drummed up business for the counter-(contrary) proposal, knowing that its formulation can be interpreted in one way or another.

Now the SFU and political parties such as the SVP or even the Greens – who do not want open borders for imports of cheap, but in terms of environment and health far less strictly controlled food, as required by Swiss law, – stand before their self-wrought mess. We will see how they will themselves work out of this, and how they would reflect on their commitment to using their resources for the producing Swiss agriculture and the consumer demand for healthy nutrition.

**“Direct democracy is based on ...”**

continued from page 2

Electricity Agreement. If, however, Germany or France should run short of power one day, they will no longer supply Switzerland – with or without agreement. So in terms of energy as well as food, the more self-sufficiency the better.

**Latest bits and pieces concerning the Institutional Framework Agreement**

According to Doris Leuthard, the EU Bilateral Agreement on Electricity is supposedly “since three years [...] stuck because the framework agreement with the EU is not concluded, because the Swiss people voted for the control of immigration” (“Neue Zürcher Zeitung” from 28.10.2017). Actually, everybody knows that the EU Commission has proclaimed long before the vote of 9 February 2014, that without a framework agreement, after which Switzerland would have to adopt EU law and be subject to the case-law of the ECJ, there will be no new bilateral agreements. We should be fine with this, because by having more than 100 bilateral agreements with the EU concluded, we are actually fully served. But as Ms Leuthard expressed some time ago that she wants to firm up the framework agreement within her presidential year – i.e. until 31 December 2017! – she is slowly coming under pressure.

Responsible for the negotiations with the EU is, by the way, primarily the newly elected Federal Councillor *Ignazio Cassis*, who, a few days ago, took office as head of the *Federal Department of Foreign Af-*

*fairs FDFA*. That creates hope for a wind of change in Berne. Since after his election, Cassis made the much-noticed remark that he wanted to press the “reset button” with regard to the Institutional Framework Agreement. After his first 100 days in office, Cassis wants to advance an opinion on it, as he stated on 21 October 2017 on the FDP delegates’ meeting in Engelberg (Radio SRF, *Echo der Zeit*, 21.10.2017). Shortly before his election, Cassis also joined the “Pro-Tell Society for a Freedom of Arms Law”, which opposes the takeover of the restrictive EU arms law within the framework of the Schengen Law. When his accession was interpreted by the media as a vote against Schengen, Cassis resigned again from “Pro Tell”. Nevertheless, he explained to the FDP delegates in Engelberg: “I adhere to the freedom of arms, as it is appropriate to the Swiss tradition.” As finally said ... In contrast, the leaving Chief of the FDFA *Didier Burkhalter* in Engelberg who had always spoken in a convoluted manner about the question of the supreme decision-making body in the framework agreement suddenly spoke plain language: “All possibilities for an institutional solution with the EU have been analysed, and the ECJ plays a role in all variants, because it applies legislation of the EU.”

In contrast, according to *Radio SRF* on the 21.10.2017, Liberals (FDP) foreign politicians, such as Councillor of States *Damian Müller* (Lucerne) and National Councillor *Walter Müller* (St. Gallen), support the reset button of Federal Councillor Cassis in the sense of a pause: they want to discuss the negotiating mandate

concerning the Framework Agreement once again. – That’s a pleasing trend in the Liberals party!

**To re-adhere to the rules of the democratic discourse**

Precisely because the EU leaders are not familiar with the direct democratic and federalist Swiss model, it is the responsibility of our Federal Councillors and their officials and negotiators that they represent clearly in Brussels what fits and what doesn’t fit to our country – and that they eventually pause for a moment and press the “reset button”. It is up to us as citizens and to the parliamentarians to request from the Federal Council open and honest information of the public on what is being negotiated in Brussels. It is unacceptable that today not even the Foreign Affairs Committees of the National Council and the Council of States do know what exactly is the supposed content of the Institutional Framework Agreement. Or that we happen to read in the daily press that the Federal Council wants to deprive our cantons and communes of the hydroelectric power stations and to leave them to the “open market” or to major European corporations.

An indispensable part of the political culture in the direct democratic Switzerland is the fair dealings at eye level and mutual trust between authorities and administration on the one hand and the population on the other hand. We must not allow to lose these precious achievements due to some executive and administrative officials’ striving for power and prestige. •

**Importance of Swiss hydropower for energy supply of the country**

“Today (1.1.2017) there are 643 hydropower plants in Switzerland that each have a capacity of at least 300 kilowatts, and these produce an average of around 36,264 gigawatt hours (GWh/y) per annum, 48.2% of which is produced in run-of-river power plants, 47.5% in storage power plants and approximately 4.3% in pumped storage power plants. Roughly 63% of hydroelectricity are generated in the mountain cantons of Uri, Grisons, Ticino and Valais, while Aargau and Berne also generate

significant quantities. Roughly 11% of Switzerland’s hydropower generation comes from facilities situated on bodies of water along the country’s borders.

The hydropower market is worth around 1,8 billion Swiss francs (basis = delivery from power plant at 5 cents per kilowatt hour), and is therefore an important segment of Switzerland’s energy industry.”

(Swiss hydropower. *Homepage of Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE*)

<sup>1</sup> „We cannot postpone a power market opening for ever.” Interview with Federal President Doris Leuthard. Giorgio v. Müller and Helmut Sanders. *NZZ online* from 28.10.2017

<sup>2</sup> “Modelling of the system adequacy [security of supply] in Switzerland in the field of Electricity”, published by the Federal Office of Energy SFOE 26 October 2017; [www.bfe.admin.ch/themen/00612/00613/index.html?lang=de&dossier\\_id=06901](http://www.bfe.admin.ch/themen/00612/00613/index.html?lang=de&dossier_id=06901)

<sup>3</sup> *Press release of the Federal Council*. Security of power supply ensured despite difficult market conditions. Berne, 27.10.2017

<sup>4</sup> “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” from 28.10.2017; cf. also report of the SFOE of 27 October 2017. “Modelling of the system adequacy [security of supply] in Switzerland in the field of Electricity”. Management Summary, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> *Press release of the Federal Council*. Security of power supply ensured despite difficult market conditions. Berne, 27.10.2017

# Performance and political stability thanks to our federalism

by Pierre-Gabriel Bieri



P.-G. Bieri (picture  
Centre Patronal)

represents a factor for competitiveness and prosperity.

*The National Federalism Conference which was held in Montreux last week [26 to 27 October] showed that the institutional set-up of Switzerland with a live view of the current challenges is not outdated. On the contrary it represents*

a special consideration: He pointed out that the alleged “weakness” of federalism in reality represents its strengths. He also emphasised the importance of the numerous intersecting trenches (linguistically, geographically, financially), allowing to move minorities and majorities without risking a confrontation of entire blocks.

## A factor of political stability

To the chapter “main challenges”, such as digitalisation or cyber risks, “experts” and politicians debated about the possibilities of smaller cantons to develop flexible and original solutions and about the greater resistance of decentralised and redundant systems. Concrete examples confirm that centralisation doesn’t go necessarily with performance and speed.

Federalism is a very important political issue. But what is its interaction with economy? Does it slow down or favour even Switzerland’s extraordinary competitiveness? The Conference in Montreux dealt also with this question. A scientific study concluded that federalism helps to optimise public services, that it drives the innovation spirit and the competition or that it absorbs uneven distribution of incomes and therefore reduces the need for redistribution.

In a much more fundamental way it was underlined that the main and most important effect of Swiss federalism lies in the great political stability and that the economy will benefit of the stability. The foreign companies which settle in Switzerland are looking for exactly this stability. This asset cannot be underestimated in a time in which other European countries are negatively influenced by contradictory demands of the community. In addition, there is the possibility of exchange with geographically and culturally related authorities which are able to understand the problems and needs of companies located there.

## Actions in favour of federalism!

Obviously, Federalism was not invented to stimulate the competitiveness of Switzerland, but it has created a political and social framework which promotes prosperity. In this sense, it deserves to be defended

systematically, not only with words, but also by acting relentlessly against the technocratic plans and too simple solutions which want to move competences to the top. The freedom and the responsibility which are called for companies are also due to the basic political communities, namely the cantons.

This vigilance effort embodies a practical application of federalism which is likely to be understood by the people. And just as carefully you have to explain it. •

(Translation from German *Current Concerns*)

Source: *Centre patronal, press and information service* of 1 November 2017

## A term involuntarily estimated, but hard to understand

On 26 and 27 October 2017, the fifth Federalism Conference was held in Montreux. This event was launched by the Conference of Cantonal Governments and is held every three years since 2002. But, what exactly does federalism mean? This question, which passers-by were asked unexpectedly in front of the camera, regularly caused hesitation and embarrassment. Yet a survey early this year showed that there is a strong identification with this term: 59% of the “opinion leaders” (mainly politically right-wing) and 46% of the general public (more leftist than right-wing) see “an inviolable fundamental principle”, and these numbers are higher compared to earlier surveys. Only a very small minority would question federalism.

Quite a few people are not sure what it is exactly about and many want more detailed information. Schools could be incorporated into this reconnaissance work such as the media. In this sense, one feels a slight disappointment in reading some press articles which reported on the Conference in Montreux, but were unable to reflect their spirit or just the content reliably. Sure, celebrating federalism in this official meeting which was organised by insiders came a little to its limits. However, a rich program with interesting presentations was offered which would have earned to be shown to a broader audience.

The original contribution of the political scientist *Michael Hermann* is worth

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# “They are the true face of France”

by Natacha Polony, France



Natacha Polony  
(picture  
wikipedia)

For his book “Le Peuple de la frontière”, [The people at the border] journalist *Gérald Andrieu* has met ordinary people – in fact those who, on the occasion of the presidential election, were demanded to make a decision without that one ever seemed to be really

interested in them.

“I care no longer to climb. This imposing edifice of society above my head holds no delight for me. It is the foundation of the edifice that interests me.”\*

This sentence summarises the intellectual and moral development of *Jack London*, an autodidact, who became a socialist by sharing the misery of the people. This quotation is in the front matter of a book that teaches us what journalism should be. *Gérald Andrieu*<sup>1</sup> has chosen the most radical way: going to meet the people – in the sociological as well as in the political sense of this term. Common people, but above all the components of the political entity called France. He, who had reported on presidential campaigns, as political journalists do, by following the candidate from the train station to the airport, from the summit to the ballroom, he turned his attention to those who were called upon to vote, while no one seemed to pay real attention to them. Two thousand kilometres of walking from Dunkirk [North Sea] to Menton [Mediterranean Sea] along the French eastern border lodging at the inhabitants during the six-month of the presidential campaign. His disturbing report is, in all modesty, a lesson for everyone who is active in journalism or in politics, without ever seeking to meet the citizens in their diversity, in their distress and in their beauty.

One is seized by emotions, sometimes shedding tears, while reading the story of these accidental encounters in human fraternity. It are the poor who are capable to give everything. Like *Charlotte*, an unemployed mother who meets the journalist and proudly invites him to her home to have him try her sauerkraut. Sixty kilometres forth and back, as she brings him back to their meeting point. There are people, too, who carry their suffering with dignity, without self-pity, and without blames. The former workers of the *Cellatex SA* spinning mill in Givet in the Ardennes, who in 2000 poured acid into a stream, to get heard at last.

*Cellatex SA* was a textile factory struck with full force by the effects of free trade, by the interdiction of protective tariffs in 1994 by the WTO. There are also the for-

## The de-industrialisation destroys social life of communities

*Figarovox*: Your walk was also a journey through the France of small shops and closed factories. Is de-industrialisation a big problem?

*Gérald Andrieu*: The land I crossed seemed to me to be exhausted, destroyed by years of *laissez-faire*: factory closures, closures of small shops in city centers. And when faced with a recent event of this kind, such as the merger of *Alstom* with *Siemens*, one has to assume that the current directorate, like the earlier ones, will hardly pay attention to the consequences for the population. Nevertheless, the factories and the industry – it is idiotic to have to remember – structure the regions and the local life. There you meet, there you exchange ideas, you help and support each other, you fight, if necessary, side by side. One often speaks of “community”. One way to implement it would be to maintain the jobs in those areas;

even though the new state leadership may find a factory very old-fashioned compared to the start-ups they dream of so much! Now, if I mention the social cohesion formed by the factories, the companies and the public services, it is because in the France that I crossed, many communities have become sleeping communities. You live far away from your place of work. Every morning you get in the car to drive 30, 40, 50 kilometers to the grafting. In the evening you come home without meeting your neighbour. Sometimes you do not even know their name. And the shopping centers where you stop on your way home are not the places to make new relationships ...”

Source: Excerpt from an interview of 6 October 2017 with *Gérald Andrieu* by *Alexandre Devecchio* for “*Figarovox*”.  
(Translation Current Concerns)

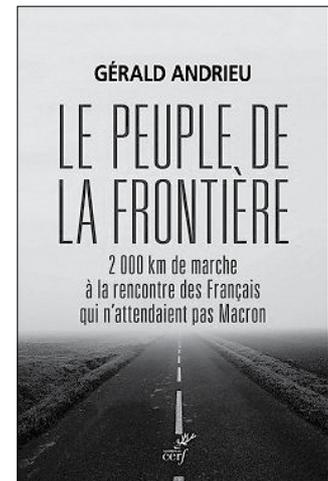
mer workers who became sick or workers who wake up in the middle of the night, because they have the three-by-eight-hour-shift rhythm still in them. Or the employees of Fessenheim, the oldest nuclear power plant in France. *Gérald Andrieu* cites the statistics that every politician has on his desk: 500 service providers, 800 employees with their families – 5200 potentially affected people. “Numbers, clouds of numbers. But I,” he writes, “see faces around me.” Rarely do politicians and journalists perceive these faces. Rarely do they encounter France so closely. Because you need time for that, and that special benevolence – so different from the proclaimed benevolence in an election campaign in order to galvanise a persuaded electorate to embody the good. A benevolence that forbids you to judge when the words are sounding the anger and the urge to overturn the table. Despite of some of his interlocutors’ willingness to make statements that would be criticized by “moral” media (because on this trip migrants and borders are also mentioned), *Gérald Andrieu* confirms that he has nowhere met that “encapsulated” France, that editorial offices like to design and to describe, but simply “physically, economically, and in their identity unsettled” French people.

## Cannon fodder in the economic war

“I must warn our president,” writes *Andrieu*, “that France of the ‘rien-du-tout’ [of the ‘insignificant’ – a term used by *Emmanuel Macron*, translator’s note], of the negligible and the neglected people has not waited for him. [...] Is *Macron* a

committed ‘European’? He has no other choice but to be convincing, because these ‘rien-du-tout’ often feel that they are only needed as cannon fodder for an industrial, commercial and financial war, against which today’s Europe does not protect them, or worse, which is stoked up by it (today’s Europe). Instead of more mobility and flexibility – which both are already too well known by the border crossers, whom I met on my way – they want some protection and economic security.” Every person facing public elections or assuming the right to propagate political ideas, ought to love with all his heart these many faces in unsecured and often difficult life situations. He ought to be moved by their fears, but also by their generosity

continued on page 6



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# UN expert calls for democratisation of the media

## International Day of Democracy – Friday 15 September 2017



Alfred de Zayas  
(picture ma)

*Democracy and self-determination are crucial in preventing national, regional and international conflict, but are under attack from “fake news”, incomplete news and “political correctness”, says Alfred de Zayas, United Nations Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, in a statement to mark International Day of Democracy on 15 September:*

“Democracy is essential to achieving a more just world order. Only by genuinely reflecting the interests of the people can governments stem the tide of disillusionment, exploitation and conflict that plague today’s world.

True democracy requires education, access to multiple, reliable sources of information and opinion, consultation in good faith with all those affected by decisions, and open debate free of intimidation, ostracism and the constraints of ‘political correctness’.

It means combining majority rule with respect for minority opinions and the human dignity of all.

True democracy cannot function properly without a pluralistic and free press, but ‘fake news’, ‘spin’ and campaigns focused narrowly on trendy issues confuse and corrupt the democratic process.

It is not only governments that engage in the dissemination of fake news – false or deliberately skewed information – but also the private sector, corporate media, and other conglomerates that try to create what *Noam Chomsky* called ‘manufactured consent’.

While freedom of opinion and expression are indispensable to democratic society, such freedoms must serve – not manipulate – democracy. What is needed is free access to pluralistic information and opinion – rather than homologated news services that echo each other and try to impose a ‘politically correct’ version of reality.

The media has a responsibility to disseminate information, without selectively suppressing pertinent facts, or forcing the facts into a single possible interpretation. Democracy needs alternative news services and a general democratisation of the media.

Democracy exists when there is a direct correlation between the will of the people and the policies that affect them. This requires more than pro forma periodic voting, especially given that such exercises demonstrate a lack of genuine choice in terms of candidates and rarely result in policy change.

Direct, participatory and responsive democracy, in all its forms, is of critical importance, and must be used to enable people to give genuine, free, prior and informed consent before governments enact legislative and other decisions that impact on their lives.

UN Member States affirmed at the ground-breaking 2005 World Summit that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

They also noted the significant fact that, while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy. All peoples and nations have the right to find their own formula for democracy. Indeed, democracy is an expression of self-determination.”

Source: [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22074&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22074&LangID=E)

### “They are the true face ...”

continued from page 5

and their dignity. He would also have to be ready to meet them.

On his return, *Gérald Andrieu* said that he had encountered another, very tangible and perceptible border. Namely when he met fellow journalists asking him: “What do the inhabitants on the French borders say about *Macron*?” After the answer: “Nothing, they do not speak of him”, they were completely disturbed. – Two worlds and an alienation from those who are also citizens and who should be considered by every democrat as an important part of the political community. And then there are

those journalist colleagues who read the book and call it “maurrassien”<sup>2</sup> because it describes landscapes and speaks of France and the French.

To perceive them. To like them. Is that so difficult?

\* Jack London, “What Life Means to Me” from “*Revolution*” full quotation: “I care no longer to climb. This imposing edifice of society above my head holds no delight for me. It is the foundation of the edifice that interests me. There I am content to labor, crowbar in hand, shoulder to shoulder with intellectuals, idealists, and class-conscious workingmen, getting a solid pry now and again and setting the whole edifice rocking. Some day, when we get a few more hands and crowbars to work, we’ll topple it over, along with all its rotten life and unburied dead,

its monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism. Then we’ll cleanse the cellar and build a new habitation for mankind, in which there will be no parlor floor, in which all the rooms will be bright and airy, and where the air that is breathed will be clean, noble and alive.” [translator’s note]

<sup>1</sup> *Andrieu, Gérald. Le Peuple de la frontière. Editions du Cerf, October 2017. Gérald Andrieu is an independent journalist, was editor-in-chief of the magazine Marianne, is co-author of the book “Bienvenue dans le pire des Mondes. Le triomphe du soft totalitarisme.” (Editions Plon, Paris 2016)*

<sup>2</sup> In today’s France, a very negative adjective. After *Charles Maurras* (1868–1952), French writer and nationalist (“right-wing extremist”) political publicist. [translator’s note]

Source: *Le Figaro* from 14.10.2017

(Translation: *Current Concerns*)

# The Catalans have the right to choose their future freely

by Dr phil René Roca, “Forschungsinstitut direkte Demokratie”\* (Research Institute Direct Democracy)

I have Catalan roots. My paternal great grandfather immigrated from the Catalan peasant village Viladesens into Switzerland in 1888. He first settled in St. Gallen, worked for a compatriot at a bodega, and married a German cook. Together with her he moved to Zurich-Oerlikon and built up a Spanish bodega. My grandfather married a Spanish woman, who he had come to know during his numerous visits to Spain. Their relationship started during a traditional Catalan folk dance, the Sardana. This folk dance, like the Catalan language was forbidden under the *Franco*-dictatorship (1939–1975). Singing Catalan songs was also strictly forbidden under the penalty of rigorous punishment. I remember well – meanwhile my grandparents had returned to Spain – that after the dictator’s death all the place-name signs in the towns were corrected from Spanish (Castilian) into Catalan – painted by hand. In the people’s hearts, the Catalan language and culture – their freedom – had remained alive.

## The Catalan nation

The Catalan language developed between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century and was the strong expression of an independent community. The Catalan history is pivotally characterised by fight for freedom, independence and autonomy. For example, the



situation after the “Spanish war of Succession” (1701–1714): The allied states Castile and France destroyed the Catalans who were allied to England and Austria.

Castile, with its capital Madrid, annexed Catalonia and its territories, abolishing

continued on page 8

## Catalonia’s autonomy

1469	Union of Aragon and Castile, Catalonia as part of Aragon remains internally independent	1939–1975	<i>Franco</i> dictatorship, centralisation, autonomy suspended	2009–2011	553 of the then 947 Catalan cities and municipalities vote for referendums on independence
1479–1713	rule of Spanish viceroys in Catalonia	1939–1977	The Catalan autonomous government keeps on existing during the dictatorship abroad	9.11.2014	form a total of one third of voters 80% approve independence, the vote is prohibited by Spanish court
1635–1659	French-Spanish War, Catalonia remains part of Spain, parts to France	1978	Spain becomes parliamentary monarchy	1.10.2017	Independence approved by the people in a referendum
1700–1714	defeat of Catalonia in the Spanish War of Succession, Catalonia without self-administration	1979	new statute of autonomy by new Spanish constitution	10.10. 2017	declaration of independence suspended by Catalan government in favour of negotiations with Spain
1812–1814	Catalonia part of French Empire	2006	vote on extended statute of autonomy approved by government and king	21.10.2017	Central government announces dismissal of Catalan Parliament
1814–1923	again part of Spanish Monarchy without autonomy	since 2007	Economic crisis, Spain under economic dictation of EU	27.10.2017	Catalan Parliament approves independence, impeachment of Catalan government by central government
1923–1931	military dictatorship of <i>Miguel Primo de Rivera</i>	28.6.2010	Partido Popular ( <i>Rajoy</i> ) sues in Spanish constitutional court which after 4 years declares statute of autonomy unconstitutional in 14 out of 223 points	21.12 2017	Spanish central government calls new elections
1931	Second Spanish Republic				
1932	autonomy since 1714 again newly codified				
1936–1939	Spanish Civil War				

## Out of the frying pan into the fire?

by Karl Müller

km. No one wishes the people of Catalonia to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. After numerous “Colour Revolutions” and a glance into history, mankind has learned: Again and again, justified concerns have been exploited and abused for the purposes of power politics. Two topical background analyses show that also the cause of the Catalans who wish to realise their right to self-determination is not free from these strivings. Other forces that are not so close to the people play a role.

One of these analyses can be found in the “Strategic Newsletter” of 1 November 2017. The author of this analysis ranges the events in Spain among the attempts to dissolve nation states in Europe:

“The increasing calls for a breakup of nation states in Europe as they can be currently heard in Catalonia also have another less obvious aspect [...]. For the hard-core believers in Europe”, the author of the analysis is referring to *Leopold Kohr*, “the large historical nation states of Europe need to be broken up into smaller units of some 5–8 million inhabitants to make sure that the European population accepts an Empire-like supra-national EU super-state.” This was

valid for regions like Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland, Lombardy and many others. Further we read: “Corresponding plans have existed since decades, having been promoted more or less, according to the circumstances. As early as 1957 Leopold Kohr [...] has come up with a plan to dissolve nation states all over Europe [...] into a patchwork of 50 small states based on ethnic and language differences which would all be subordinate to a single European federal super-state.” This would “facilitate its extension to global organisations or their absorption into even larger federations” [...] In 2005, this plan [...] reappeared in a book titled “The Size of Nations” by *Alberto Alesina* and *Enrico Spolaore*. They argue that “the economic integration is fostering the political desintegration” of nation states.

Two of the most important obstacles complicating the leaving of a ‘nation’ like Catalonia, Corsica, Padania, Scotland or Bavaria from their corresponding nation state, the necessity of a separate currency and a separate market, had disappeared with the creation of the Euro. Thus the legitimization of national borders and the existence of nation states would

vanish into thin air with the creation of the Euro.”

The author of the other analysis, also published on 1 November 2017, is *Thierry Meyssan*. In his critical review of various efforts for secession in the Middle East, in Africa and in Europe he also discusses Catalonia.

According to Meyssan, *Carles Puigdemont* “has never attempted to hide his Anglo-Saxon supporters. He is a journalist, and created a monthly magazine in order to keep his sponsors up to date with the evolution of his combat. Obviously enough, it is not in Catalan, but in English – *Catalonia Today* [...]. He also animates associations which promote Catalan independency, not in Spain but overseas they are financed by *George Soros*.”

All this should not be understood as arguments against more Catalan self-determination, against more autonomy or even an independent state Catalonia. But the path towards it has to be a legal path, with negotiations and without violence. Those who wish the best for the Catalans and the European nation states should keep this in mind in the necessary dialog on an equal footing. •

### “The Catalans have the right ...”

continued from page 7

all Catalan rights and banning the Catalan language. Such things repeatedly happened. The well-known Catalan writer and anthropologist *Albert Sánchez Piñol* states it this way: “In 1714, Spain ceased to be a confederation and became what it is today: a strictly Castilian project. Every time a republic was proclaimed or a dictator died, with every democratic upheaval, Catalonia led the longing for collective freedom. Til today.”

### Constitution with deficiencies

In 1978, after the Franco dictatorship and a short transitional period, Spain gave itself the still valid democratic constitution. The Spanish people sanctioned this constitution, as the majoritarian of the Catalans did also. The latter received a so-called Statute of Autonomy, which from then on gave them certain political freedom. However, until today the constitution can only be changed by the Spanish central government, respectively the parliament in Ma-

drid. There is no constitutional right of referendum or initiative in Spain. In 2006, following a proposal by the Catalan Parliament, the Spanish Government and Parliament opted for an improved and expanded Statute of Autonomy (for example on the tax issue). The Catalan people gave their blessings to the changes by referendum. Then, of all people, *Mariano Rajoy* and his conservative party, then sitting in opposition, filed a complaint against the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy at the Spanish Constitutional Court. The court finally overturned (after four years of proceedings!) the democratically negotiated compromise: it eliminated fourteen central articles of the statute and corrected twenty others. That was the birth of the today’s independence movement.

### What is to be done?

Since then, the Spanish government has denied any dialogue. Rajoy is now head of government. He himself and his party, the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP), are involved in various corruption scandals. Ironically, this party is now arguing with the democratic constitutional state. Noth-

ing can be expected from either this party or its head of government. Even the lawyers are of no help. Most of the time they negotiate the conflict in a positivist way and never apply the principles of natural law. The European Union (EU), which otherwise interferes permanently in the internal affairs of its member states, completely failed to support the Catalan position. The EU is afraid that in the Euro area more people would want to emancipate themselves. This would contradict the centralized and undemocratic construct of the EU. The international capital that follows an unfortunate chaos-theory has already spread its net.

Therefore, there is only one thing: the international community must support the Catalan people to obtain their rights. One solution, for instance, would be the return to the Autonomy Statute, which was negotiated in 2006. However, this requires that a dialogue takes place on equal footing between Madrid and Barcelona, because “Democracy means Dialogue”, as the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” recently titled. •

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# Switzerland is breeding young IT zombies, who do not understand our complex world

by Klaus J. Stöhlker\*



Klaus J. Stöhlker  
(picture ma)

The path to digital serfdom is pre-ordained. Bank employees and consultants are managed and recorded digitally. They have to meet the performance standards in order to find employment. Anyone

who does not look like everyone else, slim and agile, is quickly considered hard to control and, for this reason, an outsider. Have not the great writers and futurologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century already written about this?

Switzerland, as an advanced country with the highest WEF ratings, is already producing a population that will meet the new world standards. Therefore, there is officially no longer a Swiss people but only a mixed population; therefore, we are taught hardly any Swiss history, but rather only European and world history.

Whoever wants the equality of the many destroys the freedom of the few. As a result, a kind of “surveillance capitalism” is emerging, which makes a necessity of the commercial surveillance of the many, so that a very few can control 8 to 10 billion people. We are dealing with four world powers which have worked on such systems: the US, Russia, China and Israel, the latter more likely a branch of the US.

Switzerland has recognised the signs of the times. It globalises its economy, reduces the power of politicians and their parties, optimises its two technical colleges in Zurich and Lausanne, and creates a global mixed population with a constantly controllable education that meets all the requirements of Silicon Valley and of internal security.

If you want to know what the future holds, you should take a closer look at the education of your children and grandchildren. This is today arranged according to the principle of zero tolerance. Who as a student behaves incorrectly or – in the opinion of the school board, which has to follow the *Curriculum 21* – is guilty of a gross violation of rules, will be punished immediately. If the offense is not confessed, the child is assigned to Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. There are no discussions or clarifications; the consequence

follows the action stringently. *George Orwell* could not have described this better.

The goal is to raise willing workers for the economy, who are socially competent, environmentally conscious, gender-responsive and independent; and who are ready to learn for life. This is owed to a pedagogical superstructure which is assigned to the cantonal school administrations and has been built up in the last 20 years. It is targeted at the creation of an ideal society where the human being is self-motivated and acts independently within the framework of given specifications. Closely linked to this pedagogical superstructure is the notorious KESB, the child and adult protection authority, which withdraws the right to care for children and loved ones from families, and also takes away their right to manage family assets independently.

Thus Switzerland has already quietly entered the antechamber of the surveillance state. The first stage is formed by kindergarten and school, the homes of learning, where skills that will lead to a

new Swiss being are to be developed in a disciplined manner. Professional toddler education is to prevent problematic influences or a lack of support. The result is a person who fits into the digital age. In this discreet world there are no more teachers, but more and more coaches. They act as consultants to students. Responsibility for the learning process is internalised by the student himself.

“Being monopolised by the group happens unconsciously,” writes *Allan Guggenbühl* in “Total Data – Total Control”, edited by *Konrad Hummler* and *Fabian Schönenberger*, partners of the “MIAG”, a company owned by Eastern Swiss intellectuals, as well as in collaboration with the liberal Progress Foundation and published by *NZZ Libro*.

What is going on in Swiss public education is a scandal. The adaptation of young people to the Californian IT world results in an output of students whose knowledge levels are steadily declining,

continued on page 10

Letter to  the Editor

## Educational reforms – viewed through rose coloured glasses

How is it that non-teaching education association representatives feel better informed than the local teaching experts? How can one argue that the intended paradigm shift in education with *Curriculum 21* has a positive impact on business and economics when the practical test is yet to come? Why do they insist on the early foreign languages, even though scientific studies and recently published cantonal comparisons show that the early foreign languages are less efficient and very expensive, and the suppression of German lessons is one of the main causes for the 20% school leavers with poor knowledge of German (*Pisa 2012* and *2015*), who can hardly be integrated into the work process? Did we forget that the economic success of our country is based on a broad elementary education and that we can not afford a two-class society?

The information culture in the economy, public administration and the media has changed completely in the last two decades – almost unnoticed by the public – and has also affected the education system. Instead of neutral information, there is more and more state propaganda: Negative things are hidden and positive things are exaggerated or contrived.

Reforms and innovations are presented as absolutely necessary and only positively reported. In order for the reforms and projects managed from above to be carried out without disruption, critical voices (veto players) are eliminated using methods of “change management”, and decades of experience are ignored. The supervisory authorities have been bound by secrecy and data protection and have no voice to the public. There are no more school experiments to test the new methods on a small scale in practice, in order to be able to undo them at best without great costs and losses. In order for the public to perceive the projects, which are usually worth millions, as successful, they are marketed with favourable assessments, prepared surveys and PR methods. The daily media take over such prepared success reports usually without critic for lack of time reasons. With such filtered information, voters are left in the lurch and they cannot form an objective opinion unless they obtain additional information from alternative media.

Peter Aebersold, Zurich

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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## Children should continue to learn cursive\*



Action "Rettet die Schreibrschrift": Wolfgang Hildebrandt ("Aktion Deutsche Sprache", on the left), Thomas Paulwitz ("Deutsche Sprachwelt") and Prof Dr Uta Seewald-Heeg ("Neue Fruchbringende Gesellschaft", on the right) handover the signatures to the Culture Minister Dr Susanne Eisenmann. (picture dsw)

The President of the German Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education ("Kultusministerkonferenz", KMK), Dr Susanne Eisenmann, MD, has received a petition to rescue the cursive. This was announced by the *Deutsche Sprachwelt* (DSW) on 3 November 2017. Over 17,200 citizens sign with their signatures on the KMK, to ensure that primary schools continue to teach the children the cursive. Language conservationists have now handed over to Dr Eisenmann, MD, who is also Baden-Wuerttemberg's Minister of Culture, seven large folders filled with petition lists.

Dr Eisenmann was confirmed in her decision to ban the abolition of joint writing tuition in her state. Due to the great popularity that the advocates of the joint writing during the collection of the signatures were allowed to learn, they are sure: "The mood in the population is clear: The cursive writ-

ing must remain. If children are able to write fluently and relaxed, they have an excellent tool for acquiring education and knowledge. They recognise spelling mistakes more quickly and thus learn to avoid them."

The magazine *Deutsche Sprachwelt* (DSW) from Erlangen, the *Aktion Deutsche Sprache* (ADS) from Hanover, and the *Neue Fruchbringende Gesellschaft* (NFG) from Köthen (Anhalt, Sxony-Anhalt) had collectively collected the signatures. Just a few years ago, they had already handed over a first, smaller amount with some 2,100 signatures to the former KMK President *Bernd Althusmann* in Hanover. The second delivery now followed in Stuttgart, with more than 15,100 signatures.

DSW editor-in-Chief *Thomas Paulwitz*, ADS chairman *Wolfgang Hildebrandt* and NFG chair Prof Dr *Uta Seewald-Heeg* thanked the Minister of Culture for her efforts to rescue the connected handwriting.

Their gratitude was connected with the wish that Dr Eisenmann in the KMK would take a stand for the reintroduction of handwriting tuition in all federal states. "We do not need less, but more handwriting," Paulwitz explained. Many of the advantages of connected writing – promoting fine motor skills, thinking and learning – are not only obvious, but also scientifically proven. Children should not be educated to become "writing-stutterers" by being deprived of arbitrarily appropriating a cultural asset.

In addition to Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, Saxony and, most recently, Schleswig-Holstein have given up the idea of replacing cursive writing with the so-called basic typeface – blockletters with little hooks that leaves it up to the pupils how they connect the letters – with correspondingly devastating results. The next goal of the action "Save the Script" ("Rettet die Schreibrschrift") is now that even federal states, known as writing-indolent, such as



Thuringia, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania are again ready to give more weight to handwriting lessons at elementary level. •

Source: [www.deutsche-sprachwelt.de](http://www.deutsche-sprachwelt.de) of 3 November 2017

\* "Cursive", also known as "longhand", "script", "joined-up writing", "joint writing", "running writing", or "handwriting" is any style of penmanship in which the symbols of the language are written in a conjoined and/or "flowing" manner, generally for the purpose of making writing faster. Formal cursive is generally joined, but casual cursive is a combination of joins and pen lifts. The writing style can be further divided as "looped", "italic", or "connected". (Wikipedia)

### "Switzerland is breeding ..."

continued from page 9

whose ability to express themselves verbally and in writing has diminished enormously and whose general level of education declines from one age group to the next. They acquire competences, but ever less prowess. We, the elders, who were trained according to the principles of freedom from the writings of *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi*, *Paul Geheeb*, *Wilhelm von Humboldt* and *Ivan Illich*, marvel at fu-

ture generations of IT zombies that no longer understand the complex world in which they grow up.

A new variety of individuals is being bred: inquisitive but gladly adapting to the system. If you do not conform to this profile, you have to inherit, marry, or acquire a lot of money to escape this system pressure. It goes without saying that only a very few succeed in doing so, because lots of "free cashflow" and intelligence rarely coincide. And one of these alone does not suffice.

ADHD, i.e. attention deficits, has long been treated with the help of *Ritalin*. We

chemically sedate those who cannot concentrate, who are prone to anger, who are sensitive to the weather or who tend towards aberrations. If you do not like this or if you would like to say goodbye to this society but are not seriously ill, the road to state-sanctioned and medically controlled suicide is open to you.

Those already working today have little breathing room outside of the consumer economy. Unless it be in the remote alpine valleys of Misox or Goms. •

Source: <https://insideparadeplatz.ch> from 24.10.2017

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# A troubled child finds its way

## How empathising can have an impact on children's development and learning

### A teacher tells about her work

by Miriam Spalinger

*cc. Teaching is a highly complex process. During lessons, the teacher often has to make several decisions in parallel in the shortest possible time. How these decisions will turn out depends largely on the teacher's view of the children and the teaching process. Without reflecting on this in the individual situations, the teacher's knowledge of a child's history, of its current interaction with schoolmates, parents, and educators flows in involuntarily. The understanding of the learning process, the teacher's view of the human being and the resulting – resp. lacking – optimism prove to be decisive for the situational and long-term successful activity in the classroom.*

*Today, unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency to assign a psychological, not infrequently also a psychiatric diagnosis to every child with learning or behavioural problems as quickly as possible – often associated with the idea that the anomaly was congenital and not accessible to normal educational influence. With fatal consequences for the child which is thus unnecessarily determined in its development. Unfortunately, it also happens that parents, educators, or teachers are glad for such diagnoses due to false guilt or shame feelings – they supposedly feel disburdened by such diagnoses.*

*Not so in the following example of an experienced primary teacher. Miriam Spalinger traces the path of her pupil "Paul" in a primary school class of 20 pupils. She succeeds in describing complex psychological processes in an understandable and simple language. In addition to the empathic attitude with which she understands her students, she also has an understanding of the child's psyche, from which she develops a constructive pedagogical approach to solving problems. The descriptions show what is possible, if one incorporates the broad pedagogical experiences and fundamental findings from personal development and personality psychology, if one realises the human being as a social being, whose personality development and learning takes place in an interpersonal context. And they also illustrate the importance of shaping the class community – in contrast to an isolating "individualisation" that often frustrate children and leaves them alone.*

Before the winter holidays I was informed by the headmistress that a new pupil was

assigned to my class. She told me about the unhappy start of this child's schooling. The boy, *Paul*, had had great difficulties in every class since kindergarten: He was displaying behavioural problems, shouted loudly into the classroom, and instead of working at his desk, he ran around in the classroom and watched the others working quietly. Paul made high demands on himself when learning; everything had to be perfect the first time: If something didn't work out right away, he got angry. Other children soon excluded and bullied him, which put a strain on him. In addition, he was said to be the only cause of disturbance and quarrelling in the classroom. Cooperation between teachers and parents had been described as difficult. In the last class, in a private school, the parents of his classmates exerted pressure until Paul had to leave class. His parents then taught him at home and hoped that their child would get a new chance in public school. They wanted the school management to have their son accompanied by a remedial teacher who would take special care of him. But that was not possible at our school. However, the class teacher could apply for support. The headmistress reassured the parents: She had consciously made sure that Paul was coming to a teacher who attached great importance to a quiet learning atmosphere and who time and again succeeded in creating a good classroom community out of a scratched group of pupils. She knew that the teacher also dealt with the questions of how to understand and help children with learning and behavioural difficulties in her free time. As the parents did not see any other solution, they agreed to admittance to my class.

It turned out that the cooperation with the parents worked very well. It was important, however, that they experienced that their child was understood correctly and that their serious concerns were taken seriously.

#### My concerns

Usually, I am keen on such new challenges. However, that evening, I was also concerned about whether I would be able to get a child with so many negative experiences in the first years of schooling on a positive path in my pupils group. I started to deliberate what I have learned in the seminars on individual psychology and developmental psychology with Dr *Anne-marie Buchholz*\* that I had often attended: I know that every child – no matter how

difficult its behaviour is – does not want anything more than being a successful pupil. It wants to be well received and accepted by the teacher and his classmates. I can imagine well how a child feels that has not been able to experience the feeling of being in good hands in a class, yet. I know from my own experience that it is important for Paul to start with the positive and put trust in him that he will be able to change with my support and that he will continue to develop. With this assurance and confidence, it has always been my interest and my greatest concern, to give a child – on the basis of the knowledge of the human nature – the courage to learn and to enjoy the togetherness in class. These thoughts and insights encouraged me, and I gladly awaited the first encounter with the child.

#### Paul arrives in the new class

Over the past one and a half years, I have managed to form out of the scratched group of students a positive class community: The children liked learning together, accepted, and helped each other. I knew that everyone would like to help integrating and supporting a new pupil.

The children had already learned how important it is to tell me about their difficulties with each other – being on the playground, in the dressing room of the gym and swimming pool or on the way to school. They had also experienced that their teacher was always ready for a helpful conversation to discuss the conflicts and find a solution to reconciliation. These important discussions helped them to build trust in me and their classmates. Thus, in addition to my own observations, I was always up to date on how the kids were getting along with their new classmate even in my absence.

In advance, we talked in class about Paul, who would join us and how he might feel. All had to think about how they could help him to feel comfortable in the new class soon. The children listed various examples what would help themselves if they were in the same situation: invite Paul to play with them in the break, share the snack with him, comfort each other, let him go first, show him the classrooms or walk home together.

When Paul came to school the first time, I noticed that he showed great interest in school, in learning and in his classmates. Paul is an eager and interest-

**"A troubled child finds its way"**

continued from page 11

ed child. He could hardly wait for the next learning step and already asked further questions, which were not suitable at this moment. In addition, my assumption was confirmed that he had gaps in subject matters, since he had not attended school for a long time. When Paul saw my carefully noted writing as I turned the blackboard in the first lesson he immediately shouted: "I cannot do that!" Obviously Paul was very attentive and wanted to learn quickly. He expressed this repeatedly. He also did not yet know both the word-classes and the multiplication up to 100.

Paul was often very restless. Apparently, he was used to getting up from his seat at any time and without asking, to walk around, to go to the toilet and run to the lavabo. Only with the passing of time, he learned that it is nicer to join his classmates and prepare the school material in time, like all the other children do in the morning, and to start the lesson together. During the lesson, he regularly shouted his answers aloud into the class, as if he were the only one. He also had both legs on his swivel chair and turned around in all cardinal directions. When he had to work in writing, it took him a long time to find the material he needed and to start. Repeatedly he said that he could not solve the tasks. He expressed that he was unable to cope with writing tasks. I was amazed by such statements, as he often liked to participate the oral teaching and worked well when the subject matter was introduced. Since my class was already very well established in independent work, I could work with Paul individually, after I had explained the new learning material. When he started working with my extra support, he kept taking the rubber and erased the numbers, although he had written very beautifully and carefully. He was never satisfied with his work, even though he made little or no mistakes because of my extra help. When he complained that he did not know how to do it, and that he could not do it, I reassured him that it was just because no one had ever shown him. I would explain everything to him, and he would be able to learn the missing subject matter from me. I added that this did not happen overnight, but that we would work on it every day. By the end of the school year, he would catch up and be on the same level as all the other children in the class. Immediately, I realised how Paul calmed down and could work much more concentrated with this confidence. I also told the whole class that they were able to work well independently and that all children have already learned a lot. This helped Paul a lot. Therefore, I was now

able to help him even more, and he would soon catch up thanks to them. I noticed how Paul always liked to come to my desk and was very happy that he could take advantage of my additional help. It was also a helpful experience for the whole class to see that every child is expected to understand the same learning material.

**The classmates' reactions**

Paul always wanted to be the first to claim the time of teaching and to have it longest for himself alone. He wanted to do all the arithmetic problems on the blackboard himself and also commented on topics that did not fit into the lesson. He wanted to be at the centre of attention, and so the other children would hardly have had their turn. Some classmates complained that it annoyed them that Paul had so little consideration for them. In such situations, I told the children that they had already learnt very well to listen, wait, let other children have their turn, and that Paul would learn quickly because they showed him so well how to do all this. I also discussed such situations with Paul and told him that he also had to learn to listen to the other children and to let them have their turn. Gradually Paul began to trust me more and more and felt that my greatest concern was to help him. When he made mistakes in his dealings with the other children, he told me that he wanted to do it differently next time. It was also a great help and relief for him to see that the children did not laugh at each other when mistakes happened.

After a joint excursion, a classmate came to me during the break and told me that it had been difficult in the museum with Paul. He had always pushed her back when she wanted to look at the exhibits. He had always wanted to be the first and foremost and decide for himself where he stood. He had hit her in the stomach with his elbow, saying, "That hurts!" The girl had previously told Paul that he should not always be the first. I discussed with the girl how we might solve this problem. I encouraged her and told her that it was right that she informed me, that it was not right, and I would not allow Paul to punch her in the stomach. I would talk to him about this. She should avoid Paul in another similar situation and look for another good place. Meanwhile, I spoke to Paul, telling him that he had to learn to sometimes make place for his classmates and that it was out of the question for him to assert himself by force. I asked him how he wanted clear up the situation with the girl. He told me that he would apologise to her and assure her he would never do that again. Since I heard nothing more about this incident, I later asked the girl how things had turned out with Paul. She told me that from then on he had always been

very nice to her and that he had never hit her again.

After a ten o' clock break, a girl complained in front of the whole class that Paul had run into several children so fast that they had fallen over. Before the girl had been able to finish what she was saying in peace and quiet, Paul shouted out loud to the class: "They're snitching! Tattletale! That's not true!" When Paul noticed that the girl was supported by others, he began to cry, hiding his face in both hands and looking down at his desk. I calmly explained to Paul how important it was that the class told me about this. Like this I would be able to help him do better next time. At that moment Paul stopped crying, he raised his head and looked at me amazedly and for a long time, as if he had expected a different reaction from me. He stopped denying what he had done and just sat there quietly. His classmates were completely silent and observed closely what was happening. They stopped being indignant at Paul and were ready to shake hands with him. Paul took up a girl's suggestion to run less recklessly and to keep more distance, like the others did. Everyone was satisfied and confident that Paul would learn to keep other children in mind. Why, they had learned it too!

**Paul is getting calmer and confident**

Even in the morning, Paul often came to the classroom uneasily. For example, he did not find his flippers or had to go to the toilet at the last minute or ran – even if all the other children were already sitting at their desks – through the classroom, which I understood as an expression that he did not dare to learn. It always bothered him a lot when he realised he was not doing as well as his classmates. Although Paul came to my class only in the middle of the second semester, it was still possible that during the last quarter he was able to finish the missing series of the multiplication up to 100. Paul also enjoyed learning from me and quickly understood the multiplication tables. At the end of the school year we came to the repetition of the material of the first semester, the plus and minus tasks up to 100. The next morning, Paul came into class quite angrily and as the last, did not greet me, and slammed his unfinished, wrinkled math worksheet on my desk. In addition, he ran through the classroom when all the other children were ready, and wildly threw his slippers around. At that moment, I did not know at all what the reason for this unrest was and what bothered him so much, had I seen that Paul orally eagerly participated in more demanding mathematic-topics such as "dividing with a remainder" – a third-grade topic. Paul learned the new materi-

continued on page 13

**"A troubled child finds its way"**

continued from page 12

al quickly and wanted to solve tasks that were even more demanding.

On the way home, his strong reaction was still concerning me. I deliberated that Paul had gone home with this restlessness and that the weekend was approaching. At home, I calmly looked at his worksheet and noticed that he had not solved a single calculus correctly. Suddenly I realised that he had not been in our class in the first semester. During the repetition, he had realised that he was the only one who did not understand these calculations, yet. I had not thought of that, I was very sorry about that. I decided to call him on Saturday to calm him down as quickly as possible. My goal was to invite Paul to spend half an hour in maths learning school for two or three days over the last two weeks of school to work on the missing material with him alone. When I told Paul this on the phone, he was very happy. He wanted to come immediately and could hardly wait. The mother told me that Paul immediately calmed down and became very confident. We agreed that he could come to me half an hour earlier each afternoon before the beginning of the lessons. He was standing in front of the classroom earlier than agreed, while some of his classmates went to the pool. When calculating with him, I realised that he had not yet learned to add two numbers that overstep the ten. He explained to me how he adds up  $7 + 8$ . He calculated:  $7 + 5 = 13$  and  $+ 3 = 16$ . Since he did not know how to fill up the tens first, he could not solve the calculation  $17 + 5 =$ ,  $27 + 8 =$  and so on. It did not take much until he understood the logical arithmetic. Also in dealing with his classmates, Paul was much calmer by working through his material gaps and was less aggressive. It became more and more important to him to try to do it in a different way and better. He gladly accepted my assistance. At the morning welcome, I helped Paul implementing this nice purpose: "Do you remember your purpose to be nice to the other children?" Paul confirmed to me that he wanted to do it the way we agreed. Then I told him that I would help him, that he should come to me, if he was angry with someone.

**Cooperation with the parents**

After getting to know Paul for several weeks and having several serious shorter and longer conversations with his parents, I invited them to a final discussion at the end of the school year. They gladly accepted my invitation because they wanted to ensure the best possible development for their son and because a trusting cooperation had developed between them and me. They came to the conversation very calmly,

because they had realised at home that Paul used to come home from school quite differently. The mother told me that Paul was happy to go to school and that he also expressed his pleasure in coming to my classes. I described Paul's positive development to his parents. We talked about how to support Paul in his progress at the end of this term and also in the next grade, when he would have new teachers. For me, the particular question was how we could help Paul not to get depressed or give up if he made a mistake. On that point, I gave the parents the following example:

Once, Paul made the mistake of going to lunch one hour early instead of attending physical education, and he was very unhappy about this. When he realised that he had forgotten PE, he hid himself in the far corner of another room. He no longer wanted to eat with the other children; he cried and said, "Now I am going to jump out of the window, if I make such stupid mistakes!" I reassured him by telling him that things like that had happened to many other children, too. Why not go and eat together with the other children now? Paul calmed down and returned to the table.

I asked his parents if they had also noticed this at home that in the case of everyday mishaps, Paul quickly had the feeling of having made a terrible mistake, and that he was even often very nervous and troubled in advance, doubting whether he would do something right. One reason for this could be the fact that he had no brothers and sisters to compare himself with, where he could see every day that they did not get everything right, either. Maybe he only had his parents to compare himself with, and of course they did everything perfectly in his eyes.

I also explained to his parents how near Paul regularly was to despair and to giving up when doing written work and test, how afraid Paul was of his work not being good enough and how quickly he wanted to give up when his performance was mediocre. I told them that he wanted to learn quickly and well and was disappointed if things did not go well from scratch. In those cases he then used to tell me that he definitely did not want to get only a four but at least a five-to-six and that he wanted to show his parents only good grades.

Paul's parents became very thoughtful as they listened to me. They said they were well acquainted with their son's struggles. His mother was able to see the connection between her son's fear of not doing well enough and her behaviour as a mother. She recognised their significant contribution as parents for Paul's pointed emphasis concerning good grades and mistakes.

She also explained that Paul was pursuing a demanding hobby. He was interested in paleontology, always liked to break stones and visited museums with great in-

terest. Therefore she had explained to him the necessity of good grades for studying paleontology. Having only grades four would not be enough. She wanted to show him the importance of learning at an early age as a prerequisite for a challenging job. She had told him it was important to give it all he had, since it is only possible to accumulate knowledge like this if one tries very hard. Now she realised that they as parents had to change something. She was sure that it was too early for Paul to be spurred on to extraordinary achievements. I agreed with her and reaffirmed that she did not have to admonish him to be good. Paul had enough self-motivation. It would have a calming effect on him, if he were allowed to bring home less good grades. I added, "It is not necessary for him to think about what will happen if he only gets a grade four in tests. Paul still has a long time to study for high school. He will learn more calmly if you as parents enjoy his progress at school and are interested in what new things he has learnt. Also you can help Paul by showing certainty and confidence, and you do not have to worry whether he will succeed or not. If Paul is disappointed with a grade, it will be important for him to make the experience that he can get help and continue to learn, based on the benevolence and encouragement of his parents and teacher. After his successful integration into this class, he has already been able to catch up a bit – despite his earlier bad experiences. It is very fortunate that he has been able to keep up his zeal. He deserves to enjoy the coming time together with his parents. Paul would very much like to repeat and consolidate the subject matter of his first semester, which he does not yet master completely, with the aid of individual exercises that I have prepared for him."

Paul's parents were very grateful for this interview and told me that they saw my support for their son as a very positive experience. Earlier on, they had made the experience that school was unilaterally based on results from personality and performance tests carried out as clarification of any behavioral problems and performance weaknesses. They had wanted to help their son by looking for a teacher who could help him with his difficulties and thus enable him to have a positive school development. Now they had seen that Paul had caught up in the class community and with me. This had shown them that there still are teachers with passion. •

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# The rabbits of St. Peter's Island – an obituary

## Martin Luther was mistaken and Jean-Jacques Rousseau cheated

by Heini Hoffmann

*There was a time when big wild rabbit colonies existed on St. Peter's Island in Biel Lake, close to Geneva and Basle, in Ajoie, in Lower Valais and in the Magadino plain. Not anymore, as this wild species is nearly entirely extinct in Switzerland. As far as St. Peter's Island is concerned, the wild rabbit story even has to be rewritten.*

Originally, wild rabbits were spread out over large parts of Europe until a glacial period forced them towards Spain and North West Africa. Later, man helped them conquer the world by artificial propagation i.e. through releases into the wild. Roman warring armies, Portuguese seafarers, Norsemen and later colonisers gradually brought the little hoppers into the countries known to man at the time.

Often, it would be domesticated bunny rabbits that were released and that reverted back to being wild animals rather quickly – in fact, they did so quicker than any other domesticated animal would have been able to. Wildness always dominates the individual breed creations. But unrestricted procreation, e.g. on islands where no natural enemies are present, can lead to irreparable damage to the ecosystem. Australia serves as a prime example of this. Two dozen bunny rabbits that were brought over in 1859, developed into an uncontrollable plague of over 750 million at present.

### This is where Luther was mistaken!

However, the rabbits didn't just cause a stir because of their gigantic procreation, but they were also the cause of etymological confusion. When translating the bible from Hebrew to German, *Martin Luther* erroneously fell victim to a zoological lapse. "Shāphān" was translated to mean bunny rabbit. However, in Hebrew this term signifies "the one who hides" and is attributed to a dassy, a groundhoglike, rabbitcoloured rock dweller that is closely related to hoofed animals and elephants as well as manatees in particular.

1100 B.C., upon their arrival on the Iberian Peninsula, the Phoenicians had happened to discover animals, that when looked at from afar, reminded them of the dassies they knew from their home. That's why they initially called the country "i-shāphān-im" which later was latinized to "Hispania". Thus, "Spain" originally meant "land of dassies". The highlight of this story is that even the Phoenicians got it wrong. The animals they wrongly thought to be dassies, were – unbeknownst to them – wild rabbits. So while Luther translated incorrectly, he termed them zoologically correctly.



*The wild rabbit, the ancestor of all pet rabbits, is smaller than the hare and has shorter ears and is born, in contrast to Meister Lampe, as a nestling. (picture: AWT)*

### There's no "Habbit"!

Wild rabbits as well as hares are not classified as rodents in spite of their rodent teeth. And while a hybrid between a European hare and a snow hare in the overlapping areas is possible (bastards are infertile), it is impossible between hare and rabbit because the genetic differences are too significant. So there are neither "rares" nor "habbits". The domestic rabbit species is only called that way because it was bred to have a very rabbit-like appearance.

And while the hare solitarily lives above ground and ducks – concealed by the colour of his fur – into his trough when sensing danger, wild rabbits live much more socially in colonies and inhabit self-dug caves. Their reputation of enormous fertility precedes them: Every year, the female rabbit gives birth to three or four litters with up to a dozen younglings in a subterranean birthing tube. Helpless nestlings, naked, blind, toothless and deaf. But they develop quickly.

What makes wild rabbits so likeable are – apart from the big dark eyes, the roundish head and the funny clattering – the ability to stand up and beg (when securing during feeding breaks), the long ears and the very special face. It is characterized by the split upper lip and the nasal blinking, a rhythmic retreat of the fur fold covering the nostrils. Or the jolly, hasty chewing movements during the crushing of food, called "nibbling" ("mümmeln"). Evidently, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* succumbed to all of these charm factors as well.

### The Rousseau legend

Born in Geneva in 1712, the philosopher Rousseau ruffled quite a few feathers in politics as well as in church with his new

ideas and thinking. After his escape from France in 1762, he found refuge in Môtiers in the Val-de-Travers, formerly the Prussian Principality of Neuchâtel, because he was no longer welcome in his place of birth. However, in 1765 he was forced to flee from there again.

His next, short stop was (from 12 September to 24 October 1765) St. Peter's Island in Lake Biel, from where he was expelled again by the Bernese Senate, only to return to France via England, where eventually, he died in 1778. The story of him allegedly releasing wild rabbits on his beloved St. Peter's Island has been frequently circulated. However, that is inaccurate. He released domestic rabbits that subsequently then turned feral.

In his time, long before the Jura waters formed a peninsula from St. Peter's Island, it consisted of two islands, the larger (today's) one where he lived, and a smaller one in the area of today's Heidenweg, to which he withdrew frequently. It was on this site that the animals were abandoned, which is why the name Chüngeli Island (Rabbit Island) remained long after the colony had ceased to exist. It was not until the 1980s that Biel hunters on the present peninsula released real rabbits. But one thing after another!

### Return to nature trick

On St. Peter's Island, Jean-Jacques Rousseau – disillusioned by constant persecution – found his inner peace and decided to follow only nature, emotion and the immediate perception of the senses. In his last work "Rêveries du promeneur soli-

continued on page 15

**"The rabbits of ..."**

continued from page 14

taire", the 64 year old described his happiness and regained peace of mind. This love for the dreamy island gave rise to the desire to enliven this microparadise with likeable hoppers.

With the help of the large island's proprietor (who, as owners of poultry and pigeons, were versed in raising small animals), rabbits were brought in from Neuchâtel and released with a proper ceremony. Of course, within a few generations, Rousseau's spotted domestic rabbit colony turned feral again because in freedom, wild animals dominate tame ones, and thus returned to their brown wild colouring. Having mutated into pseudo-rabbits like that, the pet rabbits ("Hus-Chüngeli") later were offered at the Berne "Burgerspital" (retirement home for the Citizen's Community of Berne) banquet as genuine venison...

With his experiment, Rousseau performed an unintended trick in the spirit of "return to nature". What he did with great joy is no longer be compatible with environmental standards concerning nature conservation today. But we don't want to join the chorus of those placing blame retrospectively. In addition, he was not the only one to release animals. It is assumed that quite a few of the current Central European wild rabbit population descended from escaped or abandoned domestic rabbits.

**They were house rabbits!**

Rousseau himself never spoke of wild rabbits, they did not exist in Switzerland at the time. The animals from Neuchâtel could be transported in an open basket while on the ship. Rabbits, however, are skittish escape animals and can only be transported in cages. Rousseau also writes that among the Neuchâtel rabbits, there were "male and female ones". Since wild rabbits do not show any pronounced sex dimorphism, i.e. the female and the male rabbit hardly differ from each other externally, the outer sex organs should have been examined for the determination. They are situated in front of the anus ("Weidloch") and only become visible after a slight pull on the covering skin area, which would have led to a small rodeo trying to pin the wild animals down – and that doesn't fit in with Rousseau.

Pictures from that time also confirm the rabbit theory: As depicted by "L'Embarquement" by *Daniel Lafond*, Rousseau seizes a white (!) rabbit (not entirely correctly) by the collar, which in turn behaves rather docile. The two rabbits in the front left-hand corner of *Sigismond Himely's* acquatint are a very old domestic rabbit breed with plate spotting, the Brabant rabbits which were depicted in pictures as early as in the 16<sup>th</sup> cen-



*The rock hyrax (having short ears and without cleft lip), related to the elephant, and having lead to a humorous confusion with the wild rabbit through Luther's translation of the bible. (picture AWT)*

tury and from which today's rabbit breed called the Dutch descended.

Also, *Gabriel Ludwig Lory's* painting shows that the rabbits in the right corner of the scene are not-so-shy "Hus-Chüngeli" (pet rabbits) in broad daylight. The same goes for another painting by *Daniel Lafond*; here you can see (also at the embarquement on Chüngeli Island) a little boy running towards a white rabbit with black ears with his arms outstretched in order to embrace it. The little animal, at barely a metre's distance and facing him, calmly stays in its place and does not flee in a panic. Ergo: Clearly a tame domestic rabbit! The evidence is overwhelming, although due to artistic freedom, caution is advised when it comes to old paintings and the colour of the animal breeds depicted in them.

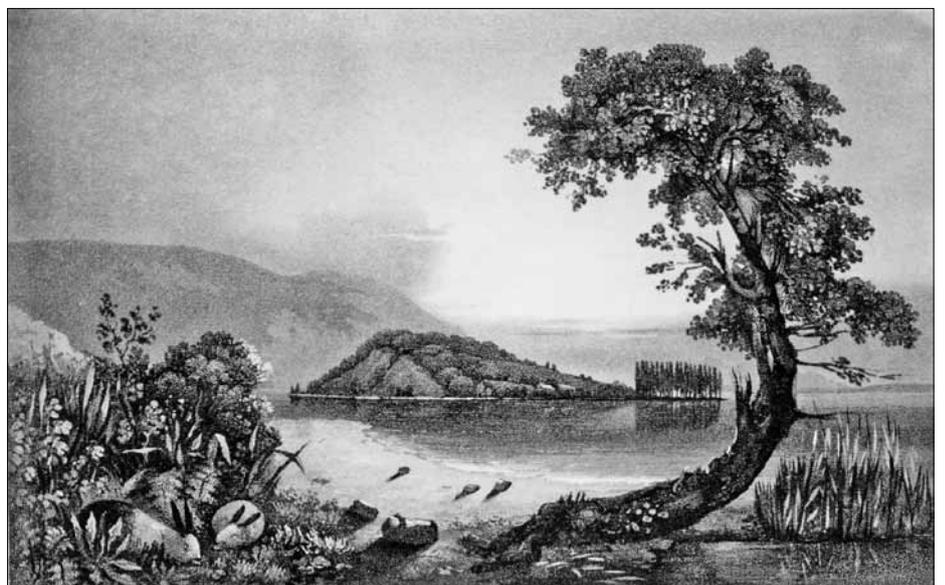
**No wild rabbits until later**

Time leap: In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specialist literature did not know of wild rabbits on Swiss soil. So evidently, Rousseau's rabbit colony didn't sur-

vive very long. Unfortunately, no documents have been found about that or the release of actual hares on St. Peter's Island by "open-minded Biel hunters" in the 1880s so far. It goes without saying that these green skirts released authentic wild rabbits and not domestic ones. Their descendants were scientifically examined in the 1970s and 1980s by wildlife biologist *Charles Huber* of Berne Natural History Museum (cf. *infobox*).

In the 1980s, the St. Peter's Island colony started to decline and in the 1990s it took a turn for the worse. No one, neither the researcher who then turned to other subjects, nor the former gamekeeper *Fritz Maurer* from Müntschemier nor the historian and St. Peter's Island expert *Andres Moser* from Erlach know any details about what happened. As so often in nature, it was probably a multifactorial event that manifested itself almost simultaneously in the other colonies in Switzerland and

continued on page 16



*The acquatint of Sigismond Himely (ca. 1835) "St. Peter's Island, taken from the Island of Rabbits": Front left, two pet rabbits with tabby fur. (picture Basel Art Museum, Copper engraving chamber)*

**"The rabbits of ..."**

continued from page 15

neighbouring countries. At that time, Germany suffered dramatic losses in its wild rabbit population, to the point as having to declare the species as close to extinction.

After having survived for over a hundred years, the rabbit population on St. Peter's Island had definitely died out by the early 1990s, although tourist information boards on the still dreamy peninsula would still advertise the alleged presence of the small pawing diggers years later...

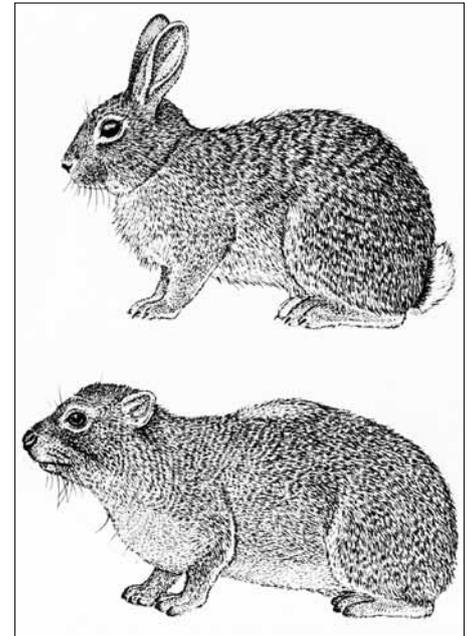
**Sad end without mourning**

Today, wild rabbits have become extinct not only on St. Peter's Island in Lake Biel, but also in the Lower Valais (where they mixed with domestic rabbits), in the Ajoie,

in the Magadino plains and near Geneva and Basle, where they used to spread as far as the suburban gardens. Only close to Geneva, near Bardonnex on the border, there is a shrinking colony, as well as in the central Valais (Sion) that serves as the food source for the eagle owl living there.

The pressure of civilisation, agriculture and people's leisure activities on wild rabbit colonies was increasing. Especially parasites, RHD and myxomatosis viruses and other diseases, inbreeding due to isolation of individual populations, increased fox and bird of prey density as well as stray cats and unattended dogs were the main hazards of the hoppers.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this exodus story was the fact that while the extinction of other species leads to big headlines, political advances and last



*The rock hyrax (having short ears and without cleft lip), related to the elephant, and having lead to a humorous confusion with the wild rabbit through Luther's translation of the bible. (picture AWT)*

**A Rousseau-rabbit replica**

hh. Charles Huber's wild rabbit research results in the rear-view mirror: The best of this species' era (under preservation since 1972) summarised at the end of the 1970's and found on the St. Peter's Island with approximately 600 dens and more than 1,200 animals. It leaves behind passages and tubes, but also gnawing marks on bushes and trees as well as damage from gnawing on cultivated farm plants. Thanks to the reduction-shooting (200 animals) and the introduction of 14 martens a tolerable balance could be established.

One also learned to minimize the damage through gnawing by protecting grapevines and tree trunks with chicken wire or by leaving the branches of fruit trees, pruned in winter, on the ground. This change was also good for the rabbit since it is more strenuous to chew the bark of living trees up to a

height of 30 centimetres. So easy! The killed animals were used by researchers to obtain useful data about the reproduction rates and the age structures. It was once shown how hard nature can be: almost 70 per cent of the young animals did not survive beyond the age of one year. Because of that, reproduction was large-scale.

An interesting detail: in addition to the characteristic colony on the (formerly large) island, there are a couple of less-often frequented dens along the Heidenweg (in the area of the formerly small island), amidst several vacation houses. It is also possible that a pair of pet rabbits have escaped since Charles Huber suddenly discovered tabby animals which after a few generations (the body-colour is dominant!) disappeared again. A Rousseau-replica!

desperate research projects, the wild hoppers quietly bid their farewell without anyone noticing. Does anyone take pity on these animals now? The wild rabbits – and this applies to all former Swiss colonies – were originally released, i.e. they are a "falsification of fauna". Their disappearance, unlike a known and popular or interesting hunting species, did not seem to cause for great mourning. In short: A wild animal species, which was the direct predecessor of one of our farm animal species, silently and quietly says goodbye. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)