

# 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*

## Syria: From proxy war to peace or chaos?

by Prof Dr Eberhard Hamer

The opinion-leading media of the world hailed the uprisings in North Africa, Syria or Ukraine as liberation movements. Meanwhile, however, it has been found that these uprisings did not come from the countries themselves but were brought about, financed and controlled from outside and that it is all a matter of foreign economic or financial interests or – as in Syria or Ukraine – strategic power politics.

What were the interests that brought about the Syrian tragedy?

- Without the destabilisation of Syria, Israel and the Anglo-Saxons would not have dared to venture on Iran respectively they would not have been able to reach Iran safely with missiles and airplanes – even so the US administration appears to have currently abandoned that plan. In this respect, this pre-war era was necessary for the fight of the Americans and the Sunni dictatorships (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) against the Shiite Syria and its ally Iran. For the Shiite supremacy Iran, Syria is the link to its Shiite groups in the Arab world. Without that link Iran's influence in the Arab world would be weakened.
- It is also about gas. So far, an Iranian oil pipeline passes through Syria. Recently natural gas deposits have been found in the southern Mediterranean – both off shore and on land (Kara) on Syrian territory. Qatar has to date exported liquefied natural gas by means of a tanker fleet. If the *Assad* government were eliminated, Qatar would have the option of transporting the “blue fuel” directly across Syrian territory to the Mediterranean coast and thus could double its export volume while preventing export from Iran. Therefore Qatar is funding the uprising in Syria.
- For the United States the control of the oil and gas supplies from the Middle East means the control of Western Europe at the same time and also the weakening of Russia. In this respect, in addition to the geo-strategic motivation for the “corrections by uprisings” in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria there are also decisive economic reasons. It

is about the monopoly (and monopoly prices) for oil and gas.

- The participation of Israel in Syria corresponds to the principle established by the *Netanyahu* government – as by all previous ones – to destabilise all neighbouring countries in order to protect Israel.
- The US is the chief financier of the people's alleged uprising in Syria, directed by the CIA which ensures the worldwide mass propaganda in favour of the “Syrian rebels” and provides them with modern precision weapons and anti-tank missiles, heat vision goggles and sniper rifles and logistically controls the uprising from the sea, with the help of the US Navy. The US and its industry's policy against Syria is also directed against Russia (encirclement) and against the influence of Iran's ally China.
- Russia has both in Syria – a marine and a military base on the Mediterranean. As the Russians were out-manoeuvred in Libya, they do not want to be thrown out again from Syria.
- At the same time the western crusade in Syria has reached the Great Wall of China. China also aims for the resources of the Middle East. Pakistan is already under its influence. To the Taliban in Afghanistan the Chinese already have long-established relations. Iran is their ally, too. The south of Iraq is de facto already controlled by Shiite allies from Iran. By means of Syria China is now trying to get an influence on the Mediterranean coast, as well.
- Just as the US are aiming at encircling Russia and China and pushing them back into their borders (for example by means of the US-operated uprising in the Ukraine and the new Pacific offensive), both the latter countries want – in the case of Syria – to stop the US encirclement for economic, military and geopolitical reasons.

Given these preliminary conditions, the Syrians themselves are only passively involved in the conference on Syria. The masterminds of the Syrian war would have to agree, but there are insurmountable obstacles:

1. The Taliban, revolution fighters and Islamic fanatics, infiltrated to Syria by the US (CIA), as well as the enlisted professional troops of American war companies (*Blackwater* and others), formerly used in the North African countries, can practically not be removed without causing mischief elsewhere. Nobody wants them anymore. So they have to be deployed in order to wear down and destroy Syria. This calls for another war.
  2. The Sunni oil dictatorships (Qatar, Saudi Arabia) do not just have their own oil and gas interests in Syria, but also Islam and ideological supremacy interests that they are unlikely to give up.
  3. Israel does not want peace before destabilisation of Syria will be achieved, also in order to keep clear the way to Iran.
  4. Russia is fighting for its influence in Syria and therefore supports President Assad (Western jargon: “the Assad regime”) as the allied guarantor of its interests.
  5. China only wants peace in Syria if its influence is backed or enlarged – by Assad.
- Is peace possible, given all these interests?

Some of the original war goals of the foreign powers have already been met or changed:

- Israel has achieved its goal of destabilising Syria and Lebanon in the long term and is therefore no longer a partner of the peace conference.
- The US already dread their own mercenaries. They fear that their victory would lead to a new, even more dangerous Islamic system in Syria. They are therefore looking for the exit without losing face.
- Turkey has so far stayed in the background, but subversively helped the insurgents with weapons, military and logistical aid. It would like to increase its influence on Syria, but does not want a radical Islamic state there.

## Whose sarin?

by Seymour M. Hersh

Barack Obama did not tell the whole story this autumn when he tried to make the case that *Bashar al-Assad* was responsible for the chemical weapons attack near Damascus on 21 August. In some instances, he omitted important intelligence, and in others he presented assumptions as facts. Most significant, he failed to acknowledge something known to the US intelligence community: that the Syrian army is not the only party in the country's civil war with access to sarin, the nerve agent that a UN study concluded – without assessing responsibility – had been used in the rocket attack. In the months before the attack, the American intelligence agencies produced a series of highly classified reports, culminating in a formal Operations Order – a planning document that precedes a ground invasion – citing evidence that the al-Nusra Front, a jihadi group affiliated with al-Qaida, had mastered the mechanics of creating sarin and was capable of manufacturing it in quantity. When the attack occurred al-Nusra should have been a suspect, but the administration cherry-picked intelligence to justify a strike against Assad.

In his nationally televised speech about Syria on 10 September, Obama laid the blame for the nerve gas attack on the rebel-held suburb of Eastern Ghouta firmly on Assad's government, and made it clear he was prepared to back up his earlier public warnings that any use of chemical weapons would cross a "red line": "Assad's government gassed to death over a thousand people," he said. "We know the Assad regime was responsible ... And that is why, after careful deliberation, I deter-

mined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike." Obama was going to war to back up a public threat, but he was doing so without knowing for sure who did what in the early morning of 21 August.

### "Obama administration altered the available information"

He cited a list of what appeared to be hard-won evidence of Assad's culpability: "In the days leading up to August 21<sup>st</sup>, we know that Assad's chemical weapons personnel prepared for an attack near an area where they mix sarin gas. They distributed gas masks to their troops. Then they fired rockets from a regime-controlled area into 11 neighbourhoods that the regime has been trying to wipe clear of opposition forces." Obama's certainty was echoed at the time by *Denis McDonough*, his chief of staff, who told the "New York Times": "No one with whom I've spoken doubts the intelligence' directly linking Assad and his regime to the sarin attacks."

But in recent interviews with intelligence and military officers and consultants past and present, I found intense concern, and on occasion anger, over what was repeatedly seen as the deliberate manipulation of intelligence. One high-level intelligence officer, in an email to a colleague, called the administration's assurances of Assad's responsibility a "ruse". The attack "was not the result of the current regime", he wrote. A former senior intelligence official told me that the Obama administration had altered the available in-

formation – in terms of its timing and sequence – to enable the president and his advisers to make intelligence retrieved days after the attack look as if it had been picked up and analysed in real time, as the attack was happening. The distortion, he said, reminded him of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, when the *Johnson* administration reversed the sequence of *National Security Agency* intercepts to justify one of the early bombings of North Vietnam. The same official said there was immense frustration inside the military and intelligence bureaucracy: "The guys are throwing their hands in the air and saying, 'How can we help this guy' – Obama – 'when he and his cronies in the White House make up the intelligence as they go along?'"

### "Administration knew no more than the public"

The complaints focus on what Washington did not have: any advance warning from the assumed source of the attack. The military intelligence community has for years produced a highly classified early morning intelligence summary, known as the Morning Report, for the secretary of defence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; a copy also goes to the national security adviser and the director of national intelligence. The Morning Report includes no political or economic information, but provides a summary of important military events around the world, with all available intelligence about them. A senior intelligence consultant told me that some time after the attack he reviewed the reports for 20 August through 23 August.

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### "Syria: From the proxy war ..."

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The following countries are in favour of a peaceful solution, at least under continuation of the Assad government:

- Russia, because it would thereby keep its base and allies in Syria,
- Iran, because the Shiite axis would remain and Assad would still be there as a bulwark against attacks from Israel,
- China, because it would have more impact on Iran and the Shiite axis through Assad than through Islamic terrorists.

The Islamic terrorists are against a peaceful solution. What other goals they have – apart from the Sunni conquest of power in the fight against the Shiites – is very different depending on the grouping, sometimes unclear, partly also depending on

their funders and employers (Mossad, CIA, Qatar, Saudi Arabia).

Already by a truce the infiltrated fighters would be out of work, so it cannot be in their interest, also given the fact that the resistance of the population in the territories occupied by them would become more powerful. In case they were no longer paid by the US and the Sunni monarchies, they would no longer be able to counter the pressure by the Syrian military, they would have to leave the country again and cause trouble elsewhere.

Even President Assad and the Syrian military might still be uninterested in a truce, because they are currently winning and more and more freeing the country from the terrorists. On the other hand, peace talks with a Syrian citizen group would have the advantage that the 30,000 foreign mercenary soldiers would thereby be isolated, so that Assad can risk

peace with a representation of Syrian groups.

The strategy expected in Geneva for the time being is the following: Yes to peace talks, but not yet to a truce – and over time: Yes to peace, but only amongst Syrians and not with foreign terrorists.

If one asks whether instigating this war by foreign powers has now paid off for them, actually only the advantage of Israel remains (destabilisation). The Americans, the CIA, Qatar and Saudi Arabia will probably lose. For them, at any rate, this war has not been worth while.

After the Americans have prevented Israel's attack on Iran with the help of the Russians and successfully ended the nuclear talks with Iran, a peaceful recovery could begin in this region if it was possible to remove the foreign fighters from Syria and restore peace among the Syrians. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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For two days – 20 and 21 August – there was no mention of Syria. On 22 August the lead item in the Morning Report dealt with Egypt; a subsequent item discussed an internal change in the command structure of one of the rebel groups in Syria. Nothing was noted about the use of nerve gas in Damascus that day. It was not until 23 August that the use of sarin became a dominant issue, although hundreds of photographs and videos of the massacre had gone viral within hours on *YouTube*, *Facebook* and other social media sites. At this point, the administration knew no more than the public.

Obama left Washington early on 21 August for a hectic two-day speaking tour in New York and Pennsylvania; according to the White House press office, he was briefed later that day on the attack, and the growing public and media furor. The lack of any immediate inside intelligence was made clear on 22 August, when *Jen Psaki*, a spokesperson for the State Department, told reporters: "We are unable to conclusively determine [chemical weapons] use. But we are focused every minute of every day since these events happened ... on doing everything possible within our power to nail down the facts." The administration's tone had hardened by 27 August, when *Jay Carney*, Obama's press secretary, told reporters – without providing any specific information – that any suggestions that the Syrian government was not responsible "are as preposterous as suggestions that the attack itself didn't occur".

**"No intelligence about Syrian intentions in the days before the attack"**

The absence of immediate alarm inside the American intelligence community demonstrates that there was no intelligence about Syrian intentions in the days before the attack. And there are at least two ways the US could have known about it in advance: both were touched on in one of the top secret American intelligence documents that have been made public in recent months by *Edward Snowden*, the former NSA contractor.

On 29 August, the "Washington Post" published excerpts from the annual budget for all national intelligence programmes, agency by agency, provided by Snowden. In consultation with the Obama administration, the newspaper chose to publish only a slim portion of the 178-page document, which has a classification higher than top secret, but it summarised and published a section dealing with problem areas. One problem area was the gap in coverage targeting Assad's office. The

document said that the NSA's worldwide electronic eavesdropping facilities had been "able to monitor unencrypted communications among senior military officials at the outset of the civil war there". But it was "a vulnerability that President Bashar al-Assad's forces apparently later recognised". In other words, the NSA no longer had access to the conversations of the top military leadership in Syria, which would have included crucial communications from Assad, such as orders for a nerve gas attack. (In its public statements since 21 August, the Obama administration has never claimed to have specific information connecting Assad himself to the attack.)

**"NRO sensors implanted near all known chemical warfare sites in Syria"**

The "Post" report also provided the first indication of a secret sensor system inside Syria, designed to provide early warning of any change in status of the regime's chemical weapons arsenal. The sensors are monitored by the *National Reconnaissance Office*, the agency that controls all US intelligence satellites in orbit. According to the "Post" summary, the NRO is also assigned "to extract data from sensors placed on the ground" inside Syria. The former senior intelligence official, who had direct knowledge of the programme, told me that NRO sensors have been implanted near all known chemical warfare sites in Syria. They are designed to provide constant monitoring of the movement of chemical warheads stored by the military. But far more important, in terms of early warning, is the sensors' ability to alert US and Israeli intelligence when warheads are being loaded with sarin. (As a neighbouring country, Israel has always been on the alert for changes in the Syrian chemical arsenal, and works closely with American intelligence on early warnings.) A chemical warhead, once loaded with sarin, has a shelf life of a few days or less – the nerve agent begins eroding the rocket almost immediately: it's a use-it-or-lose-it mass killer. "The Syrian army doesn't have three days to prepare for a chemical attack," the former senior intelligence official told me. "We created the sensor system for immediate reaction, like an air raid warning or a fire alarm. You can't have a warning over three days because everyone involved would be dead. It is either right now or you're history. You do not spend three days getting ready to fire nerve gas." The sensors detected no movement in the months and days before 21 August, the former official said. It is of course possible that sarin had been supplied to the Syrian army by other means, but the lack of warning meant that Wash-

ington was unable to monitor the events in Eastern Ghouta as they unfolded.

The sensors had worked in the past, as the Syrian leadership knew all too well. Last December the sensor system picked up signs of what seemed to be sarin production at a chemical weapons depot. It was not immediately clear whether the Syrian army was simulating sarin production as part of an exercise (all militaries constantly carry out such exercises) or actually preparing an attack. At the time, Obama publicly warned Syria that using sarin was "totally unacceptable"; a similar message was also passed by diplomatic means. The event was later determined to be part of a series of exercises, according to the former senior intelligence official: "If what the sensors saw last December was so important that the president had to call and say, 'Knock it off,' why didn't the president issue the same warning three days before the gas attack in August?"

**Critical reporter was not invited**

The NSA would of course monitor Assad's office around the clock if it could, the former official said. Other communications – from various army units in combat throughout Syria – would be far less important, and not analysed in real time. "There are literally thousands of tactical radio frequencies used by field units in Syria for mundane routine communications," he said, "and it would take a huge number of NSA cryptological technicians to listen in – and the useful return would be zilch." But the "chatter" is routinely stored on computers. Once the scale of events on 21 August was understood, the NSA mounted a comprehensive effort to search for any links to the attack, sorting through the full archive of stored communications. A keyword or two would be selected and a filter would be employed to find relevant conversations. "What happened here is that the NSA intelligence weenies started with an event – the use of sarin – and reached to find chatter that might relate," the former official said. "This does not lead to a high confidence assessment, unless you start with high confidence that Bashar Assad ordered it, and began looking for anything that supports that belief." The cherry-picking was similar to the process used to justify the Iraq war.

The White House needed nine days to assemble its case against the Syrian government. On 30 August it invited a select group of Washington journalists (at least one often critical reporter, *Jonathan Landay*, the national security correspondent for *McClatchy Newspapers*, was not invited), and handed them a document carefully labelled as a "government assessment", rather than as an assessment by the intelli-

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gence community. The document laid out what was essentially a political argument to bolster the administration's case against the Assad government. It was, however, more specific than Obama would be later, in his speech on 10 September: American intelligence, it stated, knew that Syria had begun "preparing chemical munitions" three days before the attack. In an aggressive speech later that day, *John Kerry* provided more details. He said that Syria's "chemical weapons personnel were on the ground, in the area, making preparations" by 18 August. "We know that the Syrian regime elements were told to prepare for the attack by putting on gas masks and taking precautions associated with chemical weapons." The government assessment and Kerry's comments made it seem as if the administration had been tracking the sarin attack as it happened. It is this version of events, untrue but unchallenged, that was widely reported at the time.

**The number of deaths varied widely**

An unforeseen reaction came in the form of complaints from the *Free Syrian Army's* leadership and others about the lack of warning. "It's unbelievable they did nothing to warn people or try to stop the regime before the crime," *Razan Zaitouneh*, an opposition member who lived in one of the towns struck by sarin, told *Foreign Policy*. The "Daily Mail" was more blunt: "Intelligence report says US officials knew about nerve-gas attack in Syria three days before it killed over 1400 people – including more than 400 children." (The number of deaths attributable to the attack varied widely, from at least 1429, as initially claimed by the Obama administration, to many fewer. A Syrian human rights group reported 502 deaths; *Médicins sans Frontières* put it at 355; and a French report listed 281 known fatalities. The strikingly precise US total was later reported by the "Wall Street Journal" to have been based not on an actual body count, but on an extrapolation by CIA analysts, who scanned more than a hundred *YouTube* videos from Eastern Ghouta into a computer system and looked for images of the dead. In other words, it was little more than a guess.)

**American press corps ... retraction received scant attention**

Five days later, a spokesman for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence responded to the complaints. A statement to the *Associated Press* said that the intelligence behind the earlier administration assertions was not known at the time of the attack, but recovered only subsequently: "Let's be clear, the United States did

not watch, in real time, as this horrible attack took place. The intelligence community was able to gather and analyse information after the fact and determine that elements of the Assad regime had in fact taken steps to prepare prior to using chemical weapons." But since the American press corps had their story, the retraction received scant attention. On 31 August the "Washington Post", relying on the government assessment, had vividly reported on its front page that American intelligence was able to record "each step" of the Syrian army attack in real time, "from the extensive preparations to the launching of rockets to the after-action assessments by Syrian officials". It did not publish the *AP* corrective, and the White House maintained control of the narrative.

**Obama had come to a hasty judgement**

So when Obama said on 10 September that his administration knew Assad's chemical weapons personnel had prepared the attack in advance, he was basing the statement not on an intercept caught as it happened, but on communications analysed days after 21 August. The former senior intelligence official explained that the hunt for relevant chatter went back to the exercise detected the previous December [2012], in which, as Obama later said to the public, the Syrian army mobilised chemical weapons personnel and distributed gas masks to its troops. The White House's government assessment and Obama's speech were not descriptions of the specific events leading up to the 21 August attack, but an account of the sequence the Syrian military would have followed for any chemical attack. "They put together a back story," the former official said, "and there are lots of different pieces and parts. The template they used was the template that goes back to December [2012]." It is possible, of course, that Obama was unaware that this account was obtained from an analysis of Syrian army protocol for conducting a gas attack, rather than from direct evidence. Either way he had come to a hasty judgment.

**Potential evidence being moved and possibly manipulated**

The press would follow suit. The UN report on 16 September confirming the use of sarin was careful to note that its investigators' access to the attack sites, which came five days after the gassing, had been controlled by rebel forces. "As with other sites," the report warned, "the locations have been well travelled by other individuals prior to the arrival of the mission ... During the time spent at these locations, individuals arrived carrying other suspected munitions indicating that such potential evidence is being moved and possibly manipulated." Still, the "New York

Times" seized on the report, as did American and British officials, and claimed that it provided crucial evidence backing up the administration's assertions. An annex to the UN report reproduced *YouTube* photographs of some recovered munitions, including a rocket that "indicatively matches" the specifics of a 330mm calibre artillery rocket. The "New York Times" wrote that the existence of the rockets essentially proved that the Syrian government was responsible for the attack "because the weapons in question had not been previously documented or reported to be in possession of the insurgency".

**Flight path analyses are "totally nuts"**

*Theodore Postol*, a professor of technology and national security at MIT, reviewed the UN photos with a group of his colleagues and concluded that the large calibre rocket was an improvised munition that was very likely manufactured locally. He told me that it was "something you could produce in a modestly capable machine shop". The rocket in the photos, he added, fails to match the specifications of a similar but smaller rocket known to be in the Syrian arsenal. The "New York Times", again relying on data in the UN report, also analysed the flight path of two of the spent rockets that were believed to have carried sarin, and concluded that the angle of descent "pointed directly" to their being fired from a Syrian army base more than nine kilometres from the landing zone. Postol, who has served as the scientific adviser to the chief of naval operations in the Pentagon, said that the assertions in the "Times" and elsewhere "were not based on actual observations". He concluded that the flight path analyses in particular were, as he put it in an email, "totally nuts" because a thorough study demonstrated that the range of the improvised rockets was "unlikely" to be more than two kilometres. Postol and a colleague, *Richard M. Lloyd*, published an analysis two weeks after 21 August in which they correctly assessed that the rockets involved carried a far greater payload of sarin than previously estimated. The "Times" reported on that analysis at length, describing Postol and Lloyd as "leading weapons experts". The pair's later study about the rockets' flight paths and range, which contradicted previous "Times" reporting, was emailed to the newspaper last week; it has so far gone unreported.

**"White House had no direct evidence of Syrian army or government involvement"**

The White House's misrepresentation of what it knew about the attack, and when,

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was matched by its readiness to ignore intelligence that could undermine the narrative. That information concerned al-Nusra, the Islamist rebel group designated by the US and the UN as a terrorist organisation. Al-Nusra is known to have carried out scores of suicide bombings against Christians and other non-Sunni Muslim sects inside Syria, and to have attacked its nominal ally in the civil war, the secular Free Syrian Army (FSA). Its stated goal is to overthrow the Assad regime and establish sharia law. (On 25 September al-Nusra joined several other Islamist rebel groups in repudiating the FSA and another secular faction, the Syrian National Coalition.)

The flurry of American interest in al-Nusra and sarin stemmed from a series of small-scale chemical weapons attacks in March and April; at the time, the Syrian government and the rebels each insisted the other was responsible. The UN eventually concluded that four chemical attacks had been carried out, but did not assign responsibility. A White House official told the press in late April that the intelligence community had assessed "with varying degrees of confidence" that the Syrian government was responsible for the attacks. Assad had crossed Obama's "red line". The April assessment made headlines, but some significant caveats were lost in translation. The unnamed official conducting the briefing acknowledged that intelligence community assessments "are not alone sufficient". "We want," he said, "to investigate above and beyond those intelligence assessments to gather facts so that we can establish a credible and corroborated set of information that can then inform our decision-making." In other words, the White House had no direct evidence of Syrian army or government involvement, a fact that was only occasionally noted in the press coverage. Obama's tough talk played well with the public and Congress, who view Assad as a ruthless murderer.

Two months later, a White House statement announced a change in the assessment of Syrian culpability and declared that the intelligence community now had "high confidence" that the Assad government was responsible for as many as 150 deaths from attacks with sarin. More headlines were generated and the press was told that Obama, in response to the new intelligence, had ordered an increase in non-lethal aid to the Syrian opposition. But once again there were significant caveats. The new intelligence included a report that Syrian officials had planned and executed the attacks. No specifics were provided, nor were those who provided

the reports identified. The White House statement said that laboratory analysis had confirmed the use of sarin, but also that a positive finding of the nerve agent "does not tell us how or where the individuals were exposed or who was responsible for the dissemination". The White House further declared: "We have no reliable corroborated reporting to indicate that the opposition in Syria has acquired or used chemical weapons." The statement contradicted evidence that at the time was streaming into US intelligence agencies.

**Al-Nusra and its work with sarin**

Already by late May, the senior intelligence consultant told me, the CIA had briefed the Obama administration on al-Nusra and its work with sarin, and had sent alarming reports that another Sunni fundamentalist group active in Syria, al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), also understood the science of producing sarin. At the time, al-Nusra was operating in areas close to Damascus, including Eastern Ghouta. An intelligence document issued in mid-summer dealt extensively with *Ziyaad Tariq Ahmed*, a chemical weapons expert formerly of the Iraqi military, who was said to have moved into Syria and to be operating in Eastern Ghouta. The consultant told me that Tariq had been identified "as an al-Nusra guy with a track record of making mustard gas in Iraq and someone who is implicated in making and using sarin". He is regarded as a high-profile target by the American military.

**"Al-Nusra had the ability to acquire and use sarin"**

On 20 June a four-page top secret cable summarising what had been learned about al-Nusra's nerve gas capabilities was forwarded to *David R. Shedd*, deputy director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. "What Shedd was briefed on was extensive and comprehensive," the consultant said. "It was not a bunch of 'we believe'." He told me that the cable made no assessment as to whether the rebels or the Syrian army had initiated the attacks in March and April, but it did confirm previous reports that al-Nusra had the ability to acquire and use sarin. A sample of the sarin that had been used was also recovered – with the help of an Israeli agent – but, according to the consultant, no further reporting about the sample showed up in cable traffic.

**"The rebel forces were capable of attacking an American force with sarin"**

Independently of these assessments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, assuming that US troops might be ordered into Syria to seize the government's stockpile of chemical agents, called for an all-source analysis of

the potential threat. "The Op Order provides the basis of execution of a military mission, if so ordered," the former senior intelligence official explained. "This includes the possible need to send American soldiers to a Syrian chemical site to defend it against rebel seizure. If the jihadist rebels were going to overrun the site, the assumption is that Assad would not fight us because we were protecting the chemical from the rebels. All Op Orders contain an intelligence threat component. We had technical analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, weapons people, and I & W [indications and warnings] people working on the problem ... They concluded that the rebel forces were capable of attacking an American force with sarin because they were able to produce the lethal gas. The examination relied on signals and human intelligence, as well as the expressed intention and technical capability of the rebels."

There is evidence that during the summer some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were troubled by the prospect of a ground invasion of Syria as well as by Obama's professed desire to give rebel factions non-lethal support. In July, General *Martin Dempsey*, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, provided a gloomy assessment, telling the Senate Armed Services Committee in public testimony that "thousands of special operations forces and other ground forces" would be needed to seize Syria's widely dispersed chemical warfare arsenal, along with "hundreds of aircraft, ships, submarines and other enablers". Pentagon estimates put the number of troops at seventy thousand, in part because US forces would also have to guard the Syrian rocket fleet: accessing large volumes of the chemicals that create sarin without the means to deliver it would be of little value to a rebel force. In a letter to Senator *Carl Levin*, Dempsey cautioned that a decision to grab the Syrian arsenal could have unintended consequences: "We have learned from the past ten years, however, that it is not enough to simply alter the balance of military power without careful consideration of what is necessary in order to preserve a functioning state ... Should the regime's institutions collapse in the absence of a viable opposition, we could inadvertently empower extremists or unleash the very chemical weapons we seek to control."

The CIA declined to comment for this article. Spokesmen for the DIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence said they were not aware of the report to Shedd and, when provided with specific cable markings for the document, said they were unable to find it. *Shawn Turner*, head of public affairs for the ODNI, said that no American intelligence agency,

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including the DIA, "assesses that the al-Nusra Front has succeeded in developing a capacity to manufacture sarin".

**"Al-Nusra Front is ... most effective and is gaining in strength"**

The administration's public affairs officials are not as concerned about al-Nusra's military potential as Shedd has been in his public statements. In late July, he gave an alarming account of al-Nusra's strength at the annual Aspen Security Forum in Colorado. "I count no less than 1200 disparate groups in the opposition," Shedd said, according to a recording of his presentation. "And within the opposition, the al-Nusra Front is ... most effective and is gaining in strength." This, he said, "is of serious concern to us. If left unchecked, I am very concerned that the most radical elements" – he also cited al-Qaida in Iraq – "will take over." The civil war, he went on, "will only grow worse over time ... Unfathomable violence is yet to come." Shedd made no mention of chemical weapons in his talk, but he was not allowed to: the reports his office received were highly classified.

A series of secret dispatches from Syria over the summer reported that members of the FSA were complaining to American intelligence operatives about repeated attacks on their forces by al-Nusra and al-Qaida fighters. The reports, according to the senior intelligence consultant who read them, provided evidence that the FSA is "more worried about the crazies than it is about Assad". The FSA is largely composed of defectors from the Syrian army. The Obama administration, committed to the end of the Assad regime and continued support for the rebels, has sought in its public statements since the attack to downplay the influence of Salafist and Wahhabist factions. In early September, John Kerry dumbfounded a Congressional hearing with a sudden claim that al-Nusra and other Islamist groups were minority players in the Syrian opposition. He later withdrew the claim.

In both its public and private briefings after 21 August, the administration disregarded the available intelligence about al-Nusra's potential access to sarin and continued to claim that the Assad government was in sole possession of chemical weapons. This was the message con-

veyed in the various secret briefings that members of Congress received in the days after the attack, when Obama was seeking support for his planned missile offensive against Syrian military installations. One legislator with more than two decades of experience in military affairs told me that he came away from one such briefing persuaded that "only the Assad government had sarin and the rebels did not." Similarly, following the release of the UN report on 16 September confirming that sarin was used on 21 August, *Samantha Power*, the US ambassador to the UN, told a press conference: "It's very important to note that only the [Assad] regime possesses sarin, and we have no evidence that the opposition possesses sarin."

**"The proposed American missile attack on Syria never won public support"**

It is not known whether the highly classified reporting on al-Nusra was made available to Power's office, but her comment was a reflection of the attitude that swept through the administration. "The immediate assumption was that Assad had done it," the former senior intelligence official told me. "The new director of the CIA, [John] Brennan, jumped to that conclusion ... drives to the White House and says: 'Look at what I've got!' It was all verbal; they just waved the bloody shirt.<sup>1</sup> There was a lot of political pressure to bring Obama to the table to help the rebels, and there was wishful thinking that this [tying Assad to the sarin attack] would force Obama's hand: 'This is the Zimmermann telegram of the Syrian rebellion and now Obama can react.' Wishful thinking by the Samantha Power wing within the administration. Unfortunately, some members of the Joint Chiefs who were alerted that he was going to attack weren't so sure it was a good thing."

**"The administration's distortion of the facts surrounding the sarin attack"**

The proposed American missile attack on Syria never won public support and Obama turned quickly to the UN and the Russian proposal for dismantling the Syrian chemical warfare complex. Any possibility of military action was definitively averted on 26 September when the administration joined Russia in approving a draft UN resolution calling on the Assad government to get rid of its chemical arsenal. Obama's retreat brought re-

lief to many senior military officers. (One high-level special operations adviser told me that the ill-conceived American missile attack on Syrian military airfields and missile emplacements, as initially envisaged by the White House, would have been "like providing close air support for al-Nusra".)

The administration's distortion of the facts surrounding the sarin attack raises an unavoidable question: do we have the whole story of Obama's willingness to walk away from his "red line" threat to bomb Syria? He had claimed to have an iron-clad case but suddenly agreed to take the issue to Congress, and later to accept Assad's offer to relinquish his chemical weapons. It appears possible that at some point he was directly confronted with contradictory information: evidence strong enough to persuade him to cancel his attack plan, and take the criticism sure to come from Republicans.

**"Rebel forces such as al-Nusra obliged to disarm"**

The UN resolution, which was adopted on 27 September by the Security Council, dealt indirectly with the notion that rebel forces such as al-Nusra would also be obliged to disarm: "no party in Syria should use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer [chemical] weapons." The resolution also calls for the immediate notification of the Security Council in the event that any "non-state actors" acquire chemical weapons. No group was cited by name. While the Syrian regime continues the process of eliminating its chemical arsenal, the irony is that, after Assad's stockpile of precursor agents is destroyed, al-Nusra and its Islamist allies could end up as the only faction inside Syria with access to the ingredients that can create sarin, a strategic weapon that would be unlike any other in the war zone. There may be more to negotiate. •

The article was first published in the "London Review of Books" Vol. 35 No. 24, 19 December 2013, pages 9–12.

[www.lrb.co.uk](http://www.lrb.co.uk)

<sup>1</sup> In the history of the United States, "waving the bloody shirt" refers to the practice of politicians making reference to the blood of martyrs or heroes to criticize opponents. Waving the bloody shirt also has been used to define someone who brings up a past injustice or mistreatment in history to justify or cover up an injustice being committed in the present. [translator's note]

# Germany's role in Ukraine?

by Karl Müller

Apparently the German mass media are conducting a campaign against the Government of Ukraine at present and via this campaign another one against the government of Russia. What is really happening in Ukraine, is therefore beyond the knowledge of all those who rely on obtaining their information from the mass media and have to form an opinion on the basis of that "information".

Nonetheless, it is possible to ask a few questions even on the basis of the publicly reported "information", and we do insist having them answered:

1. The German mass media and also the German government are clamoring, the Government of Ukraine should respect the right to peaceful protest. Does the German government rate squatting, blockades, barricades, massive damage to property and the application of brute force among "peaceful protest"? Why are these obvious offenses against the law, which would be punished under criminal law as breaking public and private peace in Germany, not condemned, when it comes to the Ukraine?
2. The "protests" in the capital of Ukraine resemble similar processes, in which – while influence from the outside was exerted – a change of government (regime change) was to be brought about, not on the basis of constitutional rules, but by means of a coup-like "pressure from the street", since a change of power by military coups is no longer en vogue everywhere.<sup>1</sup> *Vitali Klitschko* is a German product, built up by the CDU-near *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*.<sup>2</sup> How does the German government justify its massive violation of

the principle that forbids interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state, codified by the *UN Charter*?

3. Some comments remember – even if they are aiming at something completely different – the fact that a country can as well be forced from the outside into a condition resembling civil war. So it is said in a commentary of the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" of 23 January: "It is true that there is not a civil war in Ukraine, yet. It is also true that every civil war has started in a way somewhat like this. In Syria, the Western diplomacy has resigned at pains to be capable of doing little. This must not happen in the case of Ukraine." From Syria one knows how much the West, including Germany, had played with fire. Can the German government guarantee that there are no similarly sinister plans for Ukraine?
4. Taking into account the present geopolitical and strategic analyzes on the role of Ukraine in world politics, there is ground for the suspicion that the German government does not care about human rights in Ukraine, nor about democracy in Ukraine, nor about the people's welfare in Ukraine. Since the mid-nineties (*Brzezinski*, "The Grand Chessboard"), it is known that Ukraine is to be the USA's and its allies' western spearhead in the fight against Russia. The attempts to "integrate" the Ukraine into EU and NATO are serving this goal. Can the German government credibly argue that these analyzes are not substantial, and that the German government in its policies towards Ukraine and Russia is determined only

by the best intentions, namely by the idea of peaceful and equal coexistence of sovereign states?

The peoples of the Ukraine, Germany and Russia do not want the peoples of their countries to be forced into bloody conflicts. They live on *one* continent where every country needs cooperation with the others. They know what it means when mendacious campaigns play with fire within and between their countries. They know about the myriads of victims when the escalation is taken to the extreme. This year marks the centenary of the beginning of the First World War. Is this not reminder enough for all of Europe's peoples?

And they rightly wonder what purpose it would serve that one media campaign follows the other. Why should they again and again be kept at bay from solving the urgent tasks that are actually pendant in their countries and in Europe? Does the political class in Germany and in the "West" really believe they can divert attention from their own failure with a clamorous media campaign? Would it not be time to take a break? Why is there no honest policy, based on fundamental values?<sup>3</sup> ●

<sup>1</sup> see Wayne Madsen : NATO's Eastern Prize, [www.strategic-culture.org/news/2013/12/16/ukraine-nato-eastern-prize.html](http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2013/12/16/ukraine-nato-eastern-prize.html) from 16.12.2013,

<sup>2</sup> see *Current Concerns*, No. 39 of 27 December 2013

<sup>3</sup> see "Standpoint at the beginning of the year" in: *Current Concerns*, No. 1 of 26 January 2014

# Atlantic partnership or subservience?

by Prof Dr Eberhard Hamer

Since the revelations of *Snowden*, we know that

- Americans widely and extensively spy out our economy for technology and patents, causing 50 billion euro of annual damage according to EU estimates, as well as
- widely and extensively all phone calls, emails and other telecommunications are being captured, monitored and evaluated by the US intelligence NSA,
- on the roof of the American Embassy in Berlin even a special monitoring system is being operated with which the ministries, the “Bundestag” and the Federal Chancellery – all of which within a few 100 meters – are especially monitored and pried,
- around the clock the NSA is tapping especially our leaders in business and politics, including their mobile phones – and the Chancellor – and is therefore better informed on all economic and political decision-making preparations than anyone else in Germany.

After the US administration initially denied the revelations of Snowden, they had to admit – because of gapless evidence in several cases that they are tapping, investigating and completely controlling not only foreign, but also “friendly” governments and the Commission in Brussels.

Instead of a common outcry that would go through the world, through Europe or Germany about this insidious villainy of the American authorities and its government, the United States complained about “the traitor” Snowden. England and France had admitted that they operated like the US, widespread espionage against Germany due to the same Snowden-evidence. Except for small complaints (“don’t do it among friends ...”) German politics practiced mainly silence. Apparently, the German politicians do not dare oppose the occupation forces.

The talks between the German and American intelligence having lasted already several months in which it was to be guaranteed that the Americans would no longer spy on any government members, limit their industrial espionage and inform the German intelligence about their results, are the culmination of the German inadequacy. The talks were futile. The Americans have brusquely rejected all corrections and strictly reserved their right for the total control of German policy, German economy, German media and German society.

German politics is so submissive that despite such total control of the German economy and society through the US they do not even refuse to stop the negotiations on an Atlantic Free Trade Area, which are especially advantageous for the US until the United States would show some insight into the fact of their espionage. Behind closed doors negotiations go according to the specifications of the US space, although now everyone knows that the German and European negotiators are monitored and pried from the NSA, which leads to the situation, that the Americans are sitting at both sides of the negotiating table.

It is a scandal how our ruling elite has tried to dismiss the issue as unimportant. If even a small fraction of such espionage from Asian countries or Russia would have been published, the general outcry across the Atlantic would be a loud one, the waves of protest would have no end. That, however, our government does not seriously reject spying against our economy and our society, is a scam of their oath of office. And that they did not even resist the total espionage on themselves, shows that our government and political elite – as with the “rescue”-debt assumption for the whole of Europe – apparently obey Atlantic commands much more than the interests of their citizens, and their own interests.

What has actually to happen so that our government finally takes up its official duty of defending German interests, our personal freedom and inviolability, our German personality rights?

The NSA espionage affair is the active moral nadir of the United States just as it is the passive moral nadir of our government. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## 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

*Publisher:* Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

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*Address:* Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

*Phone:* +41 (0)44 350 65 50

*Fax:* +41 (0)44 350 65 51

*E-Mail:* CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

*Subscription details:*

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, , Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hongkong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

*Account:* Postscheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

The editors reserve the right to shorten letters to the editor. Letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *Current Concerns*.

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# The historical roots of Swiss direct democracy

## Switzerland as a special case and model of democracy

by Dr René Roca, Research Institute of Direct Democracy, Oberrohrdorf-Staretschwil, Switzerland

### I. Introduction

Various empirical studies in economic sciences that, in addition to economic sub-areas, also address the research in happiness come to an interesting conclusion: The more democratic and federalist a political system is, the happier the people are. This condition is greatly responsible for the economic development of a country, because “the burden of government debt is the smaller the more direct democracy is. Fewer cases of tax evasion occur, because people have a better relationship with their state.”<sup>1</sup>

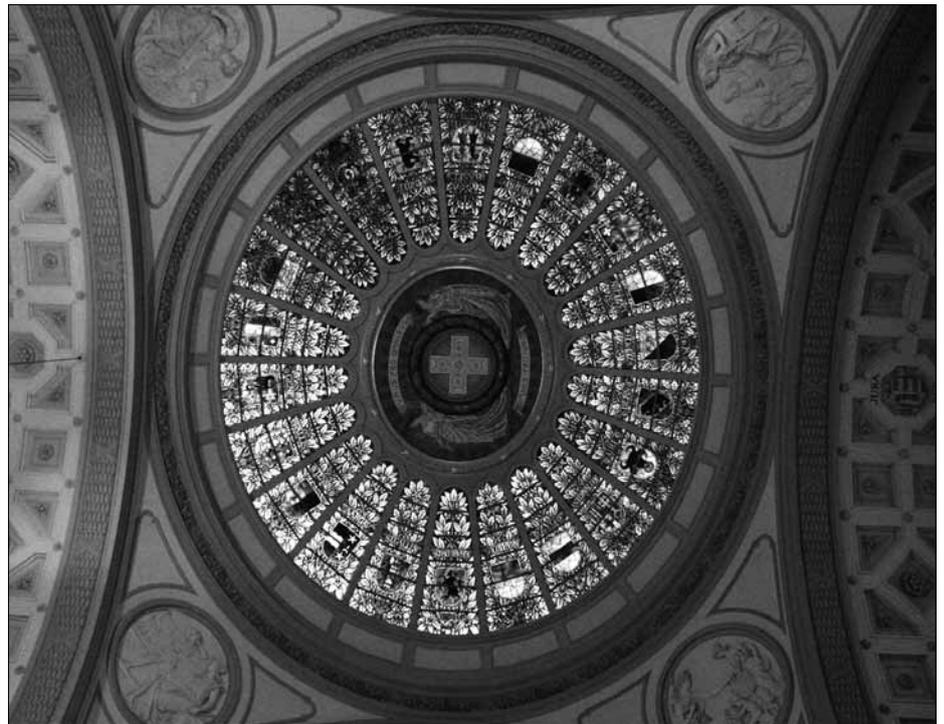
The economists show the relationship between democratic and economic development and in happiness research they take a closer look at the importance of social-ethical factors. Looking at this relationship from a historical perspective, we can say that in Switzerland the introduction of direct democratic instruments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not an obstacle to the industrialization of the country. On the contrary, the elaborated people’s rights ensured that the population supported the industrialization process more vividly and could even influence it. This created a political culture of tolerance and conciliation in Switzerland, of course, not without detours, breaks and setbacks. It was crucial that democracy developed in Switzerland from the bottom up, thus creating a democratic model which became an essential constituent of the political culture, a feature unknown to any other country.<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century direct-democratic systems developed in Switzerland at the cantonal level. Briefly, in the period from 1798 to 1848 Switzerland laid the foundation for the formation and development of direct democracy based on three theoretical elements: on the co-operative principle, the Christian and modern natural law and the idea of the people’s sovereignty.<sup>3</sup>

Placing Swiss direct democracy in a European and international context, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Although from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the processes of change in the political system and the political culture of Switzerland have emanated from partially *different* conditions in the Confederate places (cantons), the results were similar in terms of democratic institutions. In the European context, there are indeed similar initial conditions, but virtually *no comparable political processes*.

2. Similar to England (and also the USA) and for some time France, but in contrast to other European countries, *lib-*



Astrodomo at the Federal Palace in Berne. (picture thk)

*eral representative constitutional systems based on natural law* developed very early in the Swiss cantons in the wake of the French Revolution and Helvetic Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The canton of Ticino was the first to introduce a liberal constitution. In the course of regeneration ten other cantons followed from 1830 on, in which liberal representative constitutions were implemented.<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Swiss confederation, the sovereignty provided the cantons with space for internal reforms which from 1815 on were also promoted by the permanent neutrality recognized by international law. Due to the neutral status there were only isolated foreign attempts to blackmail Switzerland or to force it on a restorative way with the help of reprisals. On the contrary, many political refugees found asylum in Switzerland, who in turn actively supported the Swiss democratization (for example, the *Snell* brothers).

3. The cantonal constitutions have been supplemented since the 1830s in contrast to England and France (individual states in the United States followed not before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), with *direct-democratic instruments*, first with the veto; later they were extended by a mandatory or optional referendum and as such also transferred on to the national level. This created – in addition and together with the development of legislative and constitutional initiative – a democratic model that is unique in Europe and in the world until today.

4. In the historical and geographical area of Switzerland, it was especially the *rural population* as a genuine people’s movement in this process of democratization who constituted and sponsored liberal and direct democratic concepts and claims. The rural people’s movements ultimately implemented direct democracy – also in Baselland. The decisive factor was the temporary connection and/or the mutual stimulation of early socialist, progressive approaches and Catholic conservative ideas that both pursued the same goal in different theoretical ways: to create more direct democracy and thus to realize the political concretization of popular sovereignty. This was in contrast to liberal concepts, which preferred a representative democracy. Thus, a *longue durée* of *political and cooperative culture* was continued, renewed and strengthened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century referring back to the late Middle Ages. We must also consider the cooperative democracy of the “Landsgemeinde”<sup>5</sup> in this context, which met with great interest particularly among the Swiss rural population. The “Volkstage” (cantonal assemblies), carried out in different cantons from 1830 on, were explicitly called “Landsgemeinden”.

The development of direct democracy in Switzerland can only be explained by taking a closer look at the individual cantons. Emanating from the development at the cantonal level it becomes clear why

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the introduction of direct democratic instruments was also successful at the state level.

In the following, the historical roots of direct democracy will first be considered in the national Swiss context, then briefly in the European and finally in the international context.

## II. Cooperatives, natural law and popular sovereignty

### II.1 The cooperative principle in Switzerland

The old Confederation was anything but a unitary republic, but a confederation of compound sovereign places. An important feature of the Swiss statehood was the so-called "decentralization through self-government".<sup>6</sup> The cooperative structure of the communes laid the foundation for the decentralization of the cantons.

In Switzerland, rural communal autonomy and urban republicanism prevailed as a basis of the communal and cooperative civil society until the Helvetic Republic. The communes regulated their common interests within the framework set by the authorities; they were responsible for the security of the commune both in the inside and to the outside, and with the city law or the village statutes they established their own jurisdiction. All these rights were exercised in the cooperative association, i.e. by all members in the same way.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Confederation represented a counter-model to the feudal European political order. Next to the communal autonomy or communal freedom, the "Landsgemeinde-demokratie" had been characterized by the same cooperative principles since the late Middle Ages; however, it was valid for a larger area (several communes), i.e. for a whole (federal) canton.

The "Landsgemeinde" served as a "democratic model" for insurgents and oppositional activists in several conflicts of the Ancien Régime. Although the freedom of fully entitled rural citizens was not considered a natural right but a privilege, in the sense of modern natural law, and as there was no separation of powers, the co-operative democracy of the "Landsgemeinde" was of enormous democratic value for many contemporaries.

The Swiss historian *Adolf Gasser* (1903–1985) highlighted the importance of the economic co-operative principle in a clear and plausible way. According to his findings, the history of Europe was characterized and shaped by the strong contrast of two different ethical principles, namely domination and cooperative. In this manifestation, Gasser states, two worlds were facing each other that were subject to very

different laws of development: the world in which the political system was established from above and the other world in which the structures developed from the bottom up, or in other words: the world of domination and the world of cooperative. Gasser went on to say that we must call the cooperative principle of order – being the foundation of the communal structures built from bottom up – "*community ethics*".<sup>8</sup> Such ethical basis has been tangible in writing for the Old Confederation since the High Middle Ages, for example in so-called "Talbüchern" (books of the valleys).

The historian *Wolfgang von Wartburg* (1914–1997) also stressed that the early roots of the cooperative movement were crucial to the understanding of the Swiss political system and direct democracy: "*These small, natural, self-governing communities have been fertile ground and seminary of Swiss freedom and democracy and they still are today.*"<sup>9</sup>

Most of the cooperatives emanated from medieval meadow regulations or, in other words, from the "medieval common grounds" or marks. There are basically two theories for the origin of the "free mark cooperatives". On the one hand, they are supposed to go back to the conquest of the Germanic peoples in the early Middle Ages, on the other hand it is emphasized that the mark cooperatives were first created in the High and Late Middle Ages as mergers of existing village cooperatives. It is certain that the Frankish kingdom constitution and the feudal system ousted the early medieval order of the free mark cooperatives in many parts of Europe, except for some places such as in the pre-alpine areas of Switzerland, where they have partly continued to exist up to now in the so-called commons cooperatives, Alpine and forest cooperatives.<sup>10</sup>

For Switzerland, the preconditions of settlement history were particularly important. In the Swiss Central Plateau, where the dwellings were concentrated and became villages, the common Mark or Allmend alongside with a house, garden and fields were essential for all villagers.<sup>11</sup> The cities also had a common Mark and enacted a similar legislation. In the hilly Alpine foreland the farms united and formed so-called Allmend cooperatives. In many places of the Alps so-called valley cooperatives were established – on the basis of the valley communities as rural associations.

The cooperatives were of major political significance for the later development of the Confederation. They developed a community-building spirit – a phenomenon that Gasser described as community ethics – without which a nation established by the free will of its people like Switzerland could never have emerged. Therefore the rural or valley cooperatives took over other tasks of the common work besides their traditional ones during the late Middle Ages and in Early Modern Age. Such were the maintenance of roads and bridges or hydraulic engineering, water supply, the building of churches or even the duty to care for the poor. Thus, the rural and valley cooperatives developed slowly into rural and valley communes, the foundation of the future federal state.<sup>12</sup>

### II.2 Jean Bodin's theory of sovereignty

The French political theorist and philosopher *Jean Bodin* (1529/30–1596) is considered the creator of the concept of state sovereignty and as the founder of the modern theory of sovereignty. Bodin's major contribution is the work "*Les six livres*

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Ring in Ibach, Schwyz. Annual meeting of the Oberallmeind corporation, one of the oldest cooperatives in Switzerland. (picture E. Roca)

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de la République" (The six books on the Republic), published in 1576, which is regarded as the first scientific theory of a constitution.<sup>13</sup> He defined his concept of sovereignty as absolute and perpetual power in a state ("*puissance absolue et perpétuelle d'une République*") whose core was the full legislation, which could repeal the old law and create new laws.

Bodin assigned governance that stood above the laws to a specific "owner" – to a prince, the aristocracy or the people – the general power of legislation being this "owner's" most important competence. All other governing rights of the sovereign were derived from it.

For Bodin, the limits of the "sovereignty" were the general and interdenominational "*Loy de Dieu et de nature*" (laws of God and nature), i.e. the divine law and Christian natural law. According to Bodin, these limits represented binding legal barriers to the prevailing sovereignty because a ruler for life was only a ruler in the context of the Christian natural law.<sup>15</sup>

Referring to Aristotle, Bodin defined "democracy" as an antonym of "monarchy" and "aristocracy". The decisive question was who held the sovereignty and how was it applied in practice. Bodin spoke of a democracy, in case the decisions on matters of sovereignty were taken in meetings by majority vote. The majority of male community citizens would have to have access to these meetings. If it was a minority of people who acted as "owner" of the sovereignty, Bodin spoke of an aristocracy. If one man decided alone, he called this monarchy. The sovereign authority always decided in the last instance.

As the only examples of functioning democracies Bodin mentioned certain cantons of the Swiss Confederation. His first important statement was about the sovereignty of the Confederation and its individual parts. For Bodin the confederacy of the Swiss Confederation and its sovereign parts (federal cantons) did basically no longer belong to the German Reich. They were separate and sovereign republics, even though many cantons would even see themselves as members of the Reich.<sup>16</sup> "As an example we have the thirteen Swiss cantons, each of which is sovereign and accepts no princes and monarchs of the world as its sovereign."<sup>17</sup> Hence Switzerland did not make one single republic, but 13 of them and together with the allied cantons there were even 22 republics.

Bodin thus confirmed the de facto secession from the German Empire that had been existing since the Peace of Basel in 1499, and which in 1648 also became a de jure secession under the Peace of West-



Entlebuch Valley. (picture E. Roca)

phalia. He noted further that on the one hand an "aristocratic" and on the other hand a "democratic" political system existed in Switzerland. Bodin labeled all federal cities such as Zurich, Berne, Lucerne, Schaffhausen, Basel, Fribourg, Solothurn and Geneva aristocracies.

Bodin subsumed all places with "Landsgemeinden", including the Grisons, in the second category, i.e. the democratic state: "*In the towns of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, Glarus and Appenzell, which are all pure democracies and – since their population consists of mountain dwellers – are particularly concerned about the self-determination of the people, a public meeting will even be held in addition to the extraordinary cantonal days each year, on the occasion of which almost the entire population aged 14 and over participates. [...] This is especially true for the Grison communes which according to their constitution and administration are as purely democratic as no other state.*"<sup>18</sup>

In his main work Bodin referred to the example of the "Landsgemeinde" communes over and over again and considered the question of how a democratic system was created and what requirements were necessary. He wondered why it had been possible at all that the Confederates established such democracies: "*However, one might argue, did the Confederates not establish a magnificent democracy, ruled themselves for more than 300 years and thereby not only protected themselves from a tyranny, but also expelled the tyrants in their neighboring places?*"<sup>19</sup>

Other reasons that Bodin mentioned were the mentality of the Swiss ("*le naturel du peuple*"), the topography of the country, the expulsion of a large part of the nobility and ethical causes such as equality and moderation: "*The Swiss, it seems, make a more moderate use of their*

*democratic freedom mass than once the Greeks or the peoples of Italy did [...] .*"<sup>20</sup>

For France, however, which then sank back in the throes of civil war, and other European countries, Bodin clearly favored the monarchy as the best form of government.

### II.3 The connectedness of the Christian natural law with modern natural law – the School of Salamanca

Almost at the same time as Bodin, i.e. in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish *School of Salamanca* laid an important foundation to further develop natural law and international law. For Bodin Christian natural law was a clear boundary which the representatives of the School of Salamanca were now expanding. They derived their natural law arguments from a very free and partly new dealing with the theological tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Historical background was the discovery and conquest of South and Central America by the Spaniards and Portuguese, the economic processes of change as well as humanism and the Reformation. They put the traditional concepts of the Roman Catholic Church under increasing pressure at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and required something like a colonial ethics and a new business ethics.<sup>22</sup>

The Spanish jurist and humanist Fernando Vázquez de Menchaca (1512–1569) referred to the tradition of Christian natural law, which had been influenced by Thomas Aquinas. This tradition assumed that divine, perpetually valid rules of law were prevailing above the positive right. At the top was the "*lex aeterna*" by which God was acting, and then came the "*lex divina*" in the second place, which God had directly passed on to the people in his

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writings. Last was the *"lex naturalis"* that God had planted into men, so that they were able to recognize the plan of the world. Thus the Christian natural law already included the idea of the reasonable nature of man<sup>23</sup>, according to Vázquez. This idea was the decisive starting point for the development of secular, modern natural law.

The reference to Thomas Aquinas made it possible for Vázquez and other representatives of the School of Salamanca to take up urgent problems of their time and theoretically connect them with Christian natural law. Although Vázquez was firmly rooted in the scholastic tradition he made this tradition useful for modern natural law, which is based on the concept of original freedom and equality of all people.<sup>24</sup>

The Jesuit *Francisco Suárez* (1548–1617), who mainly taught at the University of Coimbra in Portugal, also influenced the School of Salamanca and to some extent anticipated the idea of "popular sovereignty". In 1612, in his "Treatise on the laws and God, the legislator" Suárez wrote that God was the source of state power (sovereignty) and the "entire community", i.e. the people, were the recipients of natural law and so the source of this power. Contrary to the teaching of divine right Suárez explained that God had never chosen a single person or a particular group of people to be the holder of state power. After receiving the state power the people could exercise this power themselves or voluntarily hand it over to an individual or body. Suárez' derivation of the state from the divine right and from natural law thus regarded the people as the grading and shaping force of the state. In this context, the people would also be assigned a right of resistance.<sup>25</sup>

The description of the fundamentals of *modern natural law* – together with the de-



*Detail from the front facade of the University of Salamanca. (Bild E. Roca)*

velopment of *sovereignty* and the presentation of the *cooperative principle* – constitute the key elements of democratic theory, which was the basis for Enlightenment demands such as the constitution and the rule of law, popular sovereignty and human rights and the separation of powers.

**II.4 Samuel Pufendorf and the "Ecole Romande du droit naturel"**

The German natural law philosopher *Samuel Pufendorf* (1632–1694) started from a purely secular idea of justice and understood natural law as an empirical science. God's law, Pufendorf said, was unknown to man, but the insight into natural law was possible with the help of "ratio" and human reason was the "sole source of knowledge of natural law": *"Natural law thus teaches people how they have to spend this life in a true community with other people."*<sup>26</sup> Pufendorf largely freed natural law from theology, so it should make sense to all rational people, even non-Christians.

Pufendorf with his legal interpretation of a secular natural law and his advocacy

of a uniform international law had a decisive influence on European legal and political philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and became one of the pioneers of the Enlightenment. His emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships and moral categories established a personal view of man and promoted a discussion of values. The topics of popular sovereignty and democracy were included in these debates which in the 18<sup>th</sup> century laid the foundation for the American and French declarations of human rights.<sup>27</sup>

The development of the Confederation gathered momentum in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the influence of the European Enlightenment, which was extensively debated in Switzerland and complemented with our own approaches.<sup>28</sup> In political and legal sciences, enlightened thinkers took up the ideas of the School of Salamanca and of modern natural law according to Pufendorf, which gained particular importance through the Western-Swiss school of nat-

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*The Jesuit Francisco Suarez (1548–1617). Fresco in the Jesuit church of Salamanca. (picture E. Roca)*



*"Landsgemeinde" in Appenzell Inner-Rhodes at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Oil painting by an unknown artist. (picture wikipedia)*

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ural law ("Ecole romande du droit naturel").<sup>29</sup>

This school was the actual mediator between the German and the French Enlightenment. The first representative of the "Ecole Romande" was *Jean Barbeyrac* (1674–1744). He lectured at the Academy of Lausanne and came forward with French translations of Pufendorf and *Grotius*. In 1706, Barbeyrac published an annotated French translation of Samuel Pufendorf's major work, which some years later became the basis for the German translation. He strongly influenced his scholar, *Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui* (1694–1748) who

worked at the Geneva Academy.<sup>30</sup> As late as in 1747, a year before his death, Burlamaqui published his first book in Geneva, entitled "Principes du droit naturel" (principles of natural law). The "Principes du droit politique" (principles of political law) were posthumously published in 1751. Both works were largely taken note of in the French and English-speaking area. In the German-speaking areas they were virtually ignored.

It is interesting for the democracy debate that both Catholic and Reformed scholars (Lutherans as well as Calvinists) dealt intensively with natural law. An important bridge between the Christian denominations was Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who knew the writings of important representatives of the School of Salamanca. Grotius himself laid important foundations for the definition of the modern natural law and international law in his writings. As mentioned above, his writings were translated by Barbeyrac, who, among others, laid thus the foundation for the Romande School of natural law. For Switzerland and the development of direct democracy, this process was significant, since the Ecole Romande was very important for the discussion of modern natural law in Switzerland. Thus, Rousseau in his attempt to understand the idea of popular sovereignty better, referred to Burlamaqui's doctrine of natural law.<sup>31</sup>

### II.5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his idea of popular

#### sovereignty based on natural law

Born in Geneva *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1712–1778)<sup>32</sup> wrote a groundbreaking work on the subject of democracy and sovereignty with his book "Du contrat social

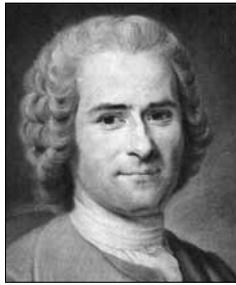
ou principes du droit politique" (1762). The idea of an agreement and the theory of sovereignty were developed in the era of European religious and civil wars. Both conceptual approaches showed a way out of the social and political disruption. These pillars of the modern state theory were taken over by Rousseau; however, he radicalized the concept of sovereignty into a doctrine of popular sovereignty. He thus provided the decisive revolutionary theory on the basis of which the instruments of direct democracy were developed.

In his "Contrat Social" Rousseau added remarks on cooperative democracy in the Confederation and considered Switzerland a republican model. He explicitly listed conditions that in his eyes had to be realized in order to implement his idea of a social contract and popular sovereignty: "First, a very small State, where the people can readily be assembled and where each citizen can with ease know all the rest; secondly, great simplicity of manners, to prevent business from multiplying and raising thorny problems; next, a large measure of equality in rank and fortune, without which equality of rights and authority cannot long subsist; lastly, little or no luxury."<sup>33</sup>

This passage clearly shows that Rousseau's idea of a democratic polity was limited to "autonomous small areas", to a political system that is politically manageable. With the above description he probably meant, without explicitly saying so and apart from his admired ancient democracy, the Swiss Confederation, respectively individual cantons, which were marked by such conditions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Bodin's comments).

Next Rousseau emphasized the importance of the "Ancient Right" and in this context the legal tradition in terms of customary law, as it had been formed during the Ancien Régime in Switzerland: "Why then is so much respect paid to old laws? For this very reason. We must believe that nothing but the excellence of old acts of will can have preserved them so long: if the Sovereign had not recognized them as throughout salutary, it would have revoked them a thousand times."<sup>34</sup>

In many Swiss cantons and communes, the "Landsgemeinde" or communal assembly, and thus the power to independent local legislation within the understanding of the cooperative principle, was the crucial political event. The right autonomously set by a commune in Switzerland was



Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
(picture wikipedia)

the basis for the "old communal freedom". Rousseau described this process in his *Social Contract* as follows: "The Sovereign, having no force other than the legislative power, acts only by means of the laws; and the laws being solely the authentic acts of the general will, the Sovereign cannot act save when the people is assembled. [...] There must be fixed periodical assemblies [...]"<sup>35</sup> Rousseau impressively praised the special case of the Swiss Confederation – in the spirit of Gasser's "community ethics". "When, among the happiest people in the world, bands of peasants are seen regulating affairs of State under an oak, and always acting wisely, can we help scorning the ingenious methods of other nations, which make themselves illustrious and wretched with so much art and mystery?"<sup>36</sup>

At another point Rousseau mentioned the importance of mergers and confederations, referring, no doubt, to the alliance network of the Confederation, which shaped the Swiss Confederation up to the Helvetic Republic. This is an important indication that Rousseau imagined the societal structure from bottom to top: Starting with free communes, constituted on the basis of a social contract and linked with each other, this association developed to a federation and thus characterizes the state-building process. Unfortunately Rousseau did not go into the federalist thought any deeper (except at points in his essay on Poland), but implicitly his ideas result in a relatively clear concept of the "construction principle" of autonomous small areas and state metropolitan areas. Gasser commented on this principle, referring to Rousseau. "Especially the popular sovereignty must be fully and clearly formed in the life circles nearest to the people, in the communes, if it is to be perceived by the population in the general state as a living reality".<sup>37</sup> The State would thus, according to Gasser's interpretation of Rousseau, be a voluntary contractual federation of communes.

Rousseau theoretically took the step from the pre-modern, i.e. the cooperative, to modern democracy and thus contributed fruitfully to the discussion on democracy in Switzerland. His basis was modern natural law with its personal view of man. His revolutionary concept of popular sovereignty, which established a completely new understanding of the state, was the pivotal point in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on which cooperative democracy developed in the cantons with "Landsgemeinde"<sup>38</sup> and direct democratic instruments such as the veto were introduced in some Swiss cantons.<sup>39</sup> In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rural popular movements – particularly in the wake

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of the Democratic Movement of the 1860s – enforced direct democracy in virtually all Swiss cantons. The introduction of the *Referendum* (1874) and the *Constitutional Initiative* (1891) at state level created a political system for Switzerland that is absolutely unique worldwide and a model accordingly. What is the situation like today regarding direct democracy in the rest of Europe and the non-European area?

**III. Direct democracy in a European Context**

Since 1830, an important element for the democratic development in Switzerland as well as in Europe has been the development of a specific culture of assemblies which was taking up older forms of protest. In Switzerland these assemblies were called "Volkstage" (people's days). So in the years 1830/31 "Volkstage" were held in the cantons Thurgau, Aargau, Luzern, Zurich, St. Gallen, Solothurn and Berne. They initiated a phase of "regeneration". Citizens from the cities and the countryside and from diverse political backgrounds met in a casual manner and discussed current political issues. Within the context of these "Landsgemeinden", as they were also called at the time, especially catholic conservatives and early socialists demanded more direct participation. Resulting from this culture of assemblies, popular movements were often formed which developed substantial vigor due to their wide political support. The liberals were opposing demands for more direct democracy because they were just starting to form a new political elite themselves. At most they voted for a representative democracy.<sup>40</sup>

An essentially liberal cause was, however, the freedom of the press which, in combination with the principle of public access to official records, had to be won in tedious struggle in Switzerland and the rest of Europe. In parallel, the establishment of a primary school was an essential topic in the European countries. Thus the education issue received attention as a postulate of enlightenment.

However, next to the USA, as far as European countries are concerned, only England, and temporarily, France, developed a liberal-representative constitutional system. In the other European countries the democratic development was arduous and frequently brutally oppressed. Thus, except for a short period after World War I, the democratic principle asserted itself only after the fall of the Berlin Wall after 1989. Positive examples are the new states in former East Germany which introduced more direct democracy in their state constitutions, trying to strengthen the dem-

ocratic awareness bottom-up. Recently it was Hamburg – of the old states – that drew attention. Several times, Hamburg citizens succeeded in making their main political points by means of initiatives. But several times, the political elites in Germany were able to prevent the reduction of unnecessarily high obstacles or the introduction of direct democratic rights on a federal level.<sup>41</sup>

Slovenia can be recognized as another example. This country that became independent twenty years ago has introduced a wide range of popular rights on the federal and the local level. Practicing direct democracy and developing the political culture connected with it, however, takes time and patience and is often characterized by severe conflicts. As mentioned above, this was not different in Switzerland. Since Slovenia has a competitive and not a concordance system, the current opposing party repeatedly misused direct democracy for making a name for themselves. This is increasingly polarizing the political system. The population can only stop this process if they take politics into their own hands, enriching the political interaction with their own referenda and initiatives (this is increasingly true also for Switzerland). Another complication in Slovenia is certainly that it became a member of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and Brussels's increasing tendencies towards centralization are not exactly fostering the national and sovereign rights of the citizens.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Treaty of Lisbon* the European Union has introduced, in its own wording, the "revolutionary instrument" of a European Citizens' Initiative. With this right, one million citizens from at least one third of the EU member states can initiate legislative action in the Brussels Commission. But the initiative is only a right to apply or to make propositions. The EU Commission has the right to decide what is going to happen. There is no guarantee for a vote in the EU.<sup>43</sup>

Since the successful "Abzocker" (rip-off) initiative the number of voices in the European countries admiring the Swiss political system has grown again. In the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", economists even entitled their article "Mehr Schweiz wagen!" (Dare More Switzerland!) and came to the conclusion that direct democracy in Swiss style would be beneficial also for the EU. The more citizens were able to decide on politics directly and also control it, the state would become leaner and the public debt would decrease.<sup>44</sup>

**IV. Direct democracy in an international context**

In the international context direct democracy is one of the top issues. In Africa,

Asia and Latin America, various countries are trying to test participatory forms of politics following from their own history and culture. In western countries, these developments are little noticed. Three examples may illustrate this development in a nutshell.

In the African country Mali the civil society tried to put the country on a new basis after the colonial period and a period that was characterized by military dictatorships. They wanted to split political power not only horizontally but also vertically. In 2002, the public administration reform was started by considering this purpose. This meant the promotion of a decentralized development from bottom to top with the formation and strengthening of cooperatively working communities. The resulting village citizenship began to break the traditional clan-economy and partly successfully fought corruption. Such a development requires time.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, the promising beginnings in Mali were again destroyed. In March 2012, the military staged a coup, with a resulting increase of internal Mali conflicts. With the military intervention of France in January 2013, Mali sank back to the status of a neo-colonial country, whose democratic development the European countries sacrificed in favor of their geopolitical interests. It is hoped that after the presidential elections the country will be able to follow again its independent democratic way.<sup>46</sup>

In Asia for example, Mongolia aims at establishing direct democracy following the Swiss model. The Mongolian President visited Switzerland several times. On these occasions he informed himself about Swiss direct democracy and federalism. The *Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation* (SDC) supports such concerns and tries to contribute the democratic model of Switzerland to the discussion around the world. This is an important work performed with respect to the global promotion of democracy, and generates the fruitful exchange of ideas and policies between countries.<sup>47</sup>

Today, the Latin American countries are at the top of direct-democratic developments. Bolivia can be presented as an example with a new constitution since 2009. The Constitution was drafted by a directly elected constitutional assembly and subsequently adopted by the population with a constitutional referendum. Never before had such a Constitution been anchored in the population, as citizens were directly involved in drafting it. Important paragraphs for instance relate to the nationalization of mineral resources, the introduction of co-operative business models and the granting of rights to the in-



People's assembly at Uster 1830. (picture wikipedia)

## Curriculum Vitae



Dr René Roca  
(picture ma)

(independent).

From 1985 to 1991 he studied General history, German literature and philosophy at the University of Zurich. In addition he attended classes at the Psychological Teaching and Counseling Center *Friedrich Liebling* because he was very interested in the psychological and political issues being discussed there. He was also one of the founding members of the Association for the Advancement of Psychological Knowledge of Human Nature (VPM), which was founded in 1986 and dissolved in 2002.

Since 1992, he has taught as a secondary school teacher in Lucerne, Zurich and since 2003 in Basel. He concluded his dissertation, "Bernhard Meyer und der lib-

erale Katholizismus der Sonderbundszeit. Religion und Politik in Luzern (1830-1848)" ("Bernhard Meyer and the liberal Catholicism of the time of the "Sonderbund". Religion and politics in Lucerne") with Prof Dr *Carlo Moos* in 2001.

From 2000–2005 together with *Erika Vögeli*, he took over the chief editorial of the then monthly newspaper *Zeit-Fragen* in honorary office, which later appeared weekly.

Until today, he writes numerous articles for our newspaper and continues to support the cooperative *Zeit-Fragen*. He continuously publishes for other newspapers and magazines and furthermore he is a freelancer in the Historical Dictionary of Switzerland (HLS), a fundamental work of Swiss history.

Thanks to a grant from the "Foundation Psychological Teaching and Counseling Center" he was able to realize his habilitation project on the topic "Emergence and development of Swiss direct democracy" and thus laid the foundation for his further research activity in the field of the history of democracy.

In 2006, he founded the "Forum for the Research of Direct Democ-

racy" and in this context, he organized numerous workshops. In this context, he also organized the scientific conference "Ways to Direct Democracy in the Swiss Cantons" in cooperation with the "Center for Democracy Studies" (ZDA) 2010 in Aarau. He published a conference volume with the same title together with Prof Dr *Andreas Auer* in 2011.

In 2012, he published his habilitation treatise entitled "Wenn die Volkssouveränität wirklich eine Wahrheit werden soll ... Die schweizerische direkte Demokratie in Theorie und Praxis – Das Beispiel des Kantons Luzern." ("If the sovereignty of the people is really to become true ... The Swiss direct democracy in theory and practice – The case of the Canton of Lucerne").

In March 2013 the "Forum for the Study of Direct Democracy" has been further developed by him to the "Research Institute of Direct Democracy", which has the purpose to initiate further research in the field of direct democracy and allied topics, such as the cooperative movement, and to conduct presentations and academic conferences on the topic. (see [www.fidd.ch](http://www.fidd.ch))

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digenous population. Furthermore, the introduction of popular rights was codified. According to the constitutional assembly, popular rights should lead to more participation in the shaping of the political community. The promotion of direct democracy is, however, hindered or restricted in practice by the powerful position of the executive, consisting of the President and other institutions. Bolivia's path is certainly still a long one to further reduce the distance between society and state and to increase the citizens' control of political leaders' actions. But in Bolivia and other Latin American countries much has been achieved.<sup>48</sup>

Overall, with these and numerous other examples one can quite confidently speak of a global development of direct democracy. In Western countries we should pay more attention to this development.

### V. Conclusion

The historical experiences of Switzerland show that the introduction of direct democratic instruments requires a lot of time, persistence and perseverance. Meanwhile, direct democracy has become an integral part of Switzerland's political culture. But each generation must appreciate anew the value of this institution and realize that you have to defend it as well. This is the only way to preserve and further develop direct democracy. It is not simply a political instrument that can be used somehow but it requires the necessary sense of proportion and proper respect, certain virtues which must be acquired in one's upbringing and education. Switzerland can be proud of its democratic system and should represent the model of direct democracy on a global scale even in a more offensive approach as well as further encourage such sharing between the countries.

First published: brochure, editor: "Aktion für eine unabhängige und neutrale Schweiz" (Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland, AUNS), 2013.

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# And that's final: Small communes come off best in every respect

## Three Glarus communes are in the red instead in the rose future promised

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

Certainly you remember 7 May 2006: In the "Landsgemeinde" (cantonal assembly) of Glarus a narrow majority decided to merge the 25 political communes of the canton into three major communes. School communes, political communes and "Tagwen" (boroughs) were packed in three large packages without voters in the concerned communes having the opportunity to voice their opinion.

How could it happen that many citizens in the Canton of Glarus were willing to dissolve their communes which they felt closely connected to? And what remains of the promises, by which some politicians tried to make a name for themselves three years after the establishment of the new large formations?

One shouldn't underestimate the importance of precisely those smaller communities as habitats with their people's close relationships and beneficial personal and social effects in today's world with its great economic and human problems. Let's not thoughtlessly give up this basic cornerstone of federalist, direct-democratic and economically powerful Switzerland.

Since 1 January 2011, there are only three communes left in the Canton of Glarus. Entitled "GL 2011: 3 strong communes – a competitive canton" there is an article on the cantonal website, reading: "The Canton of Glarus has radically simplified its communal structures and thus has prepared itself for the challenges of the future."

Even after years of propaganda by advocates of merged regional units, metropolitan areas, nature parks and similar artificial structures it remains in the dark how a canton with a few large communes should be more competitive than one having 25 communes. But despite such striking claims couldn't be reasoned in any way, they are still busily repeated according to the motto "Constant dripping wears away the stone".

### May 2006: Population is led astray

In the Spring of 2006, some busy politicians kept on at the people from Glarus to dissolve their communes. So one could read in the then memorial: "A lot of communal finances are in a precarious situation. In 2000 communal assets amounted still to about 24 million Swiss francs, but a debt of over 6 million francs resulted in 2003." (Memorial for the Assembly of the Canton of Glarus 2006, p. 130) "Lean

### Small-scale approach and direct democracy provide the best conditions regarding location

mw. The Swiss Confederation consists of 26 equal cantons and semi-cantons on a par with each other, comprising about 2,600 communes today. Deploring the smallness of a canton and its communities as a locational disadvantage is disgraceful and is certainly not home-made. In Switzerland there are all sizes of cantons: from the tiny Canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden up to the Canton of Zurich with a population of one million, and every canton has its *raison d'être*. Precisely because of the small-scale structure and tight direct democratic control in the cantons and communes, Switzerland has become one of the world's wealthiest countries. In Switzerland business and industry have

always settled not just in the cities, but across the entire country.

Each Swiss commune has developed throughout the centuries following the cooperative principle and thereby quite naturally cooperated with the neighboring communes for the tasks which were beyond their strengths. In associations of local authorities for the joint management of a particular service two communes established the fire brigade; four villages run a common high school. For very large projects, such as a waste disposal facility or a hospital, smaller communes often join an institution of the nearest town and bear their share. All this works very well in the whole country.

structures, strong communes, healthy finances" were going to fix it according to the Memorial. (p. 131)

It is precisely the mood of the rural and mountain population that is captured here effectively, since we Swiss are accustomed to keep our fiscal balance in order in the communes just as in the families. One gets into debt only in an extreme emergency, and then one settles one's debts as quickly as possible. In direct democracy citizens keep an eye on the communal authorities not to kick over the traces. Today instead of staying with this proven and highly efficient system, some cantonal governments are deceived by foreign ideas that go together like chalk and cheese with the federalist structures of Switzerland. With financial enticements they try to lure the citizens to dissolve their communes and the latter agree with a heavy heart and in the misguided hope of an alleged better "efficiency" of greater communes.

Experience has shown that small communes come off quite well in every respect – humane, social and financial. For a small commune to work well a good mayor is required as well as many citizens who voluntarily take on any duty in the commune, in a commission or a cultural or social institution working as member of a militia.

Who ever wants to replace the militia system with a bureaucratic administrative apparatus and claims that this would be cheaper, is lying. By the way – a centralized state would have the very simplest organizational structure. Let's watch out, that we do not end up there faster as we would like to!

### Good financial situation of the Glarus communes prior to the merger – disillusionment after the merger

The fact is: the financial situation of the communes of Glarus was far better prior to the merger than after. In the Memorial to "Landsgemeinde" of Glarus 2009 we read that the financial situation of the

### There is no doubt about it:

#### Large communes run into greater debts than a small one

mw. If it were true that big communes can control their budget better than small ones thanks to greater "synergy potential":

- Why do cities such as Zurich, Basel, Geneva and Berne have immense debts then?
- Why has the federal debt tripled in recent decades; why have the debts of the cantons doubled while the debts of the Swiss communes have increased only by 30 percent in the same period?

25 communes significantly improved between 2003 and 2007, that they were even in a position to bear the necessary investment by their own funds. (cf. Memorial to the "Landsgemeinde" of Glarus 2009, p. 65) How many cities and states in the world could claim that?

And what about the situation at the end of 2013? "Two and a half years after the merger of the 25 Glarus communes into

**"And that's final: small communities ..."**

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three large communes it is evident: no savings, but red figures." ("Tages-Anzeiger" of 3.9.2013)

"The Glarus population is increasingly losing confidence in politics. Many people are confused and concerned. [...] The new communal structures do not bring (yet) the hoped-for financial benefits, which have been promised to the people long ago. The reorganization takes enormous efforts, time and money. ("Fridolin" of 17.10.2013)

What did the member of the Cantonal Government and President of the Commission *Martin Landolt* say at the 2006 assembly? "The reform of the community structure paves the way for a future with simpler structures, efficient processes and financial savings. [...] The calculations of the energy-saving potential are reasonable, whereas doubt about them are merely alleged." (Protocol of the "Landsgemeinde" of Glarus, 7 May 2006, p. 18)

Is this really so? Of course, each citizen from Glarus, each Valaisan and each citizen from Schaffhausen knows that the simplest structures, the most efficient processes and the lowest costs are realized in the small communes. A communal mayor who exercises his mandate as militia compensated by a few thousand francs a year, in addition to his 80% job in the private sector or in addition to managing his own small business or a tax administrator, who has her/his office in her/his private house and who charges the commune only the rental cost of the room (original quote: "I need a computer anyway") – I'd like to see a "professional" to do better!

And as the common sense has foreseen it, so it happened in the Glarus region: today there is nothing visible of the "potential savings" in the big merger, rather the opposite is the case.

**The cantonal authorities' "Milchbüchlirechnung" (milkman's account)**

As a matter of fact, at the time when the "Landsgemeinde" of 2006 took place the canton's finances were in far less good condition than those of the communes. (Memorial in 2009, p. 65). In this situation the merger ideas of the government of Glarus and the head of the "Landrat" (cantonal parliament) – instilled by federal Berne, fed by foreign countries and worked out by armies of consulting companies which earn a golden thumb with this "Fusionitis" – came in just timely.

The "Milchbüchlirechnung" looked as follows: To begin with, some greater communes (seven? ten? three? or even only one?) should fix the finances of the canton: Thanks to more "efficiency" and "synergies" the communes would be so well off that they could raise the expected increase of the educational and health costs through their own power and thereby relieve cantonal taxation: "The local structure reform might once more clearly improve the financial situation from 2011 on. [...] In addition there may be efficiency gains which will arise with logical use of the savings potential by the structural reform." (Memorial in 2009, p. 66) As a result of this pleasant future vision the canton spent money for the time being: Between 16 and 18 million Swiss francs from the cantonal tax department plus the takeover of the communes' debts. (Memorial in 2009, p. 66) Of course, the canton wants to take this money in again during the years after the merger.

And what does the Canton of Glarus do in 2009 – just in that year after the economic worst case scenario with big brother on the other side of the Atlantic and the not less severe aftershocks thereby caused in most European countries? They lower the taxes so that the Canton of Glarus supposedly should be able to keep up in the

**A good word for the Financial Compensation**

*mw.* Why should smaller and larger, financially weaker and financially stronger communes, cities and rural areas not be able to coexist as it has been practice for centuries in the successful model Switzerland?

The financial compensation, i.e. the support of one commune or of one canton by the other is an expression of the federalist approach and the cooperative principle in our country.

It corresponds with the people's common sense to help their neighbors in need, and also to help the neighboring commune which is less well-off. The desire to provide help, even far beyond the country's borders – as is expressed in the ICRC – emanates from the same approach. This is the foundation, on which Switzerland, its cantons and its communes have come to flourish.

inter-cantonal tax competition! (Memorial, p. 66/67) Well-to-do private individuals and enterprises would pitch their tents in the Canton of Glarus and fill the cantonal and communal tax cashes again ...

The "Landsgemeinde" in 2009 agreed to the cantonal tax reduction; was it clear to every citizen who lifted his hand that the great communes to come would have to raise their local rates in return? "According to the new financial adjustment planned by 2011 *the communes will define their taxes which they need for the fulfilment of their tasks on their own. This strengthens their autonomy and allows the canton to lower its taxes, while the communes must raise theirs to the same extent.*" (Memorial in 2009, p. 67; emphasis by the author)

In plain English: The so-called "strengthening of the local autonomy" of the new great communes consists in the fact that they get new duties imposed on them by the canton which will of course cost some bucks. The taxes which the inhabitants save by the canton's tax reduction they have to fork over in their communes. Respectively, a great deal more, because the asserted savings potential of the local mergers is nothing but smoke and mirrors.

**The bottom line after three years of large communes: Red figures instead of pink visions**

And so it happened: In December 2013, the government of the Canton of Glarus had to realise: The tax reduction of 2009 yielded 10 million Swiss francs less tax money to the communes in 2012. Besides, due to new cantonal laws they had to take over additional costs for education

**The people disturbs**

*mw.* "A project for the communal merger without information procurement, strategy development and implementation, as well as without controlling is hard to imagine nowadays." ("Strategisches Management und direkte Demokratie" by *Urs Bieri*, Member of the Executive Board of the Research Institute gfs Bern, in: *Schweizer Gemeinde* 12/2010). And gfs-representative Bieri continues regretfully: "However, there are limits to the strategic management in communal reforms. Because in contrast to the clear hierarchy of decisions on company level there is an important intervening variable in the political decision-making process: the voters as final decision makers." Therefore, you must work on this "intervening variable", namely the electorate,

so that it then votes "correctly" in the end. Because: The referendum only takes place "at the end of the decision-making" [namely the management planners and authorities, the author] "and thus actually too late" (!!). "Even if this situation is absolutely legitimate from the direct-democratic point of view, it appears unsatisfactory from the perspective of efficient strategic management." This is the revealing attitude of Mr Bieri, the representative of the gfs Research Institute, which produces so-called voting polls on the run meter with our tax money and SRF compulsory license fees and thus influences the voters' opinions. However, the vote result is often "unsatisfactory", namely not in accordance with the prophecy of gfs ...

## Nothing can replace the “militia” system

*mw.* The militia principle is part of our living together and one of the reasons why people are rooted in their community. Here all active citizens know that they are needed, that their personal contributions to the community are important. Why not motivate people for valuable militia activities, instead of denying the small communities their right to live?

Therefore, the two main arguments of the advocates of communal mergers – namely that the smaller communes are said to be overwhelmed financially and personally – fall far short of reality. Quote a former mayor from the Canton of Glarus: “In X all offices are occupied at the moment, we have always found a volunteer for all pub-

lic bodies: for the school board, the local council, the social security office, also the guardianship authority, even though this is a very difficult task and it was therefore not easy to find someone. Incidentally, the population of X has increased by over 40% in the last 20 years, from about 330 to about 500 inhabitants, thanks to active residence marketing undertaken by the local authorities. If a home has stayed vacant over a longer period of time in our village, we talk to the owners and advise them to sell the house. The commune itself has repeatedly acquired houses and sold them to newcomers. In a large commune, this would not be possible because the necessary local knowledge would be missing.

Financially, the borough X is doing well, especially because the Swiss Sponsorship Organization for Mountain Communities has supported us repeatedly in our major investments. We have been able to experience great solidarity to a large extent, although this is unfortunately crumbling today. The solidarity of the sponsorship has always given me the strength to pursue my office. It would be the duty of the Canton to support the assistance given to the communities’ self-help by the sponsorship.”

Does anyone seriously believe that the “professional” management of a large community would make as good a fist of their work as the citizens do in close teamwork with their local council?

### “And that’s final: small communities ...”

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and health care services of about 8.5 million which led to a big deficit of the three communes: “The shortfall in tax receipts and the new extra costs are higher than the savings by the local structure reform.” (“Gemeindefinanzrating 2012”, accompanying letter of governor *Marianne Dürst Benedetti* to the Governing Council from 11 December 2013, p. 5)

And what has the Department of Economic Affairs of the Canton of Glarus

to offer to the overindebted great communes? “In the years to come the communes of Glarus demanding finance-political challenges. It is a matter of doing the splits, i.e. of achieving a well-balanced household in the medium term to stop the reduction of assets and at the same time of protecting the scope of action for future-directed investments without essentially raising the taxes, reducing public service or neglecting the maintenance of the infrastructure. *It lies in the responsibility of every single commune whether it wants to adapt the income (taxes) or/and the ex-*

*penses.*” (“Gemeindefinanzrating 2012”, p. 5; emphasis by the author)

Now we know at least how the local autonomy is “strengthened” by mergers: On the one hand the disintegrated communes lose their autonomy, by stopping to exist. On the other hand the merged great communes must “do the splits” between opposing goals and enjoy the wonderful freedom to decide on how much they want to raise their local tax rates and go down with their public service.

To that end, they would not have needed to merge! •

Letter to  the Editor

## Teach the children about the older generation

Thank you for the excellent and insightful article in your newspaper. With great interest I always read the contributions to pedagogical issues. Given the general flurry of activity around “school”, you help me extraordinarily to concentrate on the essentials of my work as a teacher. In particular, the article “Strengthening the ties between the generations” by Dr *Eliane Gautschi* in the 27 December edition has touched me deeply.

In the past year, severe illness was the reason to have to let my parents be taken care of in a nursing home. Despite the friendly and competent nursing staff, the lack of attention for many residents was perceptible. How did they rejoice over a little interest in their lives and a few kind words. How big was especially the joy in the children. We often took our three children to the nursing home; or they went on their own. On these occasions, they learned to care for the needs and pace of an older

person, to observe precautionary measures in order not to jeopardize the grandparents or other residents, and much more. This way, each of our children had to find a more grown-up access to their grandmother and grandfather, because it was not as it had been before, when the grandparents had still completely attuned to their grandchildren.

All three developed an own way of joyful togetherness which best suited their personal preferences. The youngest for instance made use of the leisure facilities for all residents of the nursing home together with Grandpa. Punctually, he picked up the grandfather in his wheelchair and took him to the basement for Bowling. There, he carried out the important task of bringing back the balls to the people who were of limited physical ability, most of them. Then he would set up the cones again and so on. The seniors were delighted with the freshness and spontaneity which he as a child displayed.

The most beautiful thing was that on their visits our children were glad to experience that they could step back with respect to their own momentary needs in favour of a much bigger happiness by helping grandma and grandpa and making them happy. The intensive time they spent with their grand parents became a gift for the entire family. We had to find our inner peace during our encounter with them in order to be able to fully concentrate on them. This way, all everyday demands remained outside these beautiful moments of togetherness. It is this what remains.

More often I think about how I can bring the older generation emotionally closer to my children in primary school. In this, Dr *Gautschi*’s contribution lent a valuable support to me.

*Sigrid Schiller, Rellingen*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Letter to  the Editor**Cooperation based on “Gemeinschaftsgefühl”  
(social interest) instead of greed for profit**

Dear editors of *Current Concerns*,

We want to express our thanks for the definition of the “Standpoint at the beginning of the year”, which again clarified the basic conditions of our communal life in all facets, and we would like to formulate some of our own thoughts.

One example for the realisation of the values in the sense of the “Standpoint” is the smallholder farming enterprise Hackenberg in the Canton of Thurgau.

It is a model of food sovereignty. It is about preservation and cultivation of plant variety and animal species that have proved themselves in specific regional and climatic circumstances.

How important and highly appreciated this serious research and the achievement and development of this farm’s objectives are is evident in numerous awards for the cultivation resp. the breeding of plants and animals for example. Even visitors from other countries and continents use the opportunity to learn from this example.

This way the Hackenberg-farm exemplifies a forward-looking, decentralized and producer-determined non-industrial food supply the success of which is based on teamwork, engagement and proficiency of many highly dedicated people. Everybody participating in this work experiences its meaning at all levels of constructive human collaboration and living together.

Ever more people are getting aware that the exploitation of nature and the worldwide acquisition and marketing of foodstuffs by global monopolists like *Monsanto*, accomplishes nothing but devastating small enterprises, creating dependences and does neither decrease poverty nor does it ensure the nutrition of the following generations or the survival on this globe.

The survival of mankind will not be secured by greed for profit but by the ability to cooperate on the basis of “Gemeinschaftsgefühl” [what Alfred Adler called social interest, the translator].

It is outrageous that this precious work was destructively undermined and attacked by a person [name is known to the editorial staff] through abuse of trust, lack of open-mindedness, manipulation and the orientation towards the principle of purely economic thinking. Since trust is the basis for peace between mankind such proceedings target the lifeblood of human co-existence and collaboration and are poison for a sustainable and constructive co-operation to the benefit of all.

We are glad that we succeeded in fending off this attack and continuing this pioneering model.

We are particularly grateful to Dr *Buchholz-Kaiser* for the everlasting confrontation with our “Menschenbild” thus aiming at a realisation of the fundamentals of human co-existence laid down in the definition of the standpoint. We are looking forward to proceeding on this path together with her.

*Members of the “Genossenschaft  
Zeit-Fragen”, Berlin*

**“Treating children as if they were ill, only makes them sick”**

I would like to thank your editorial to have published the enlightening report on the rise of learning difficulties and psychological conspicuities by the pediatrician Dr med *Andreas Bau*. The increase of uncontrollable restlessness in children in civilized countries has led to a besetting diagnosis, ADHD (*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*) in recent years. In high percentages such children are drugged with *Ritalin*.

As a practicing pediatrician in Hamburg for many years, Dr Bau followed the development of this widespread drug for 20 years. He writes: “Ritalin has been presented as a major advance, as a kind of silver bullet. [...] A psychiatric diagnosis of this kind means a lifelong heavy burden for many children. The ‘diag-

nosis’ ADHD etc. replaced all previous diagnoses. It was based on an increasing number of ‘symptoms’ almost all of which are to be considered as a normal behavior of children. [...] A solution of childhood problems in the area where they have arisen, namely in the field of education, has been abandoned.”

In this way, Dr Bau also points out towards other diagnoses also made much too early, such as autism and Asberger syndrome that damaged those children by the psychiatrization of their conspicuous behaviour.

Such a voice is urgently needed. The pediatrician rightly denounces that in many individual cases a person is cut off from a healthy mental development and an unburdened growing-up.

As a child and adolescent psychotherapist, I would like to add that such a rightly criticized harmful artificializing of our children can only be countered by a natural closeness between the mother and the infant during the first years of life and thus by the support of the normal family. With his professionally competent paper Dr Bau has prepared the way to take a healthier path. Treating the children as if they were sick, is just what makes them sick; this is what this wise pediatrician is pointing out and he pleads in favor of taking account of the children’s creative potential.

*Christa Meves, Uelzen*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## What children need at school

by Dr phil Alfred Burger, Headmaster

Recently it happens that more and more children are enrolled at our school who, despite their good intelligence, have a relatively large deficit in their education. The basic abilities: reading, writing and arithmetic are missing. They are also lacking self-confidence in learning and they often avoid doing the assigned exercises. Some of them have already received various therapies and support such as speech therapy, psycho-motoric education, ergo therapy without having made noticeable progress. Today it is common that such children, after having received an extensive evaluation, are labelled with diagnoses. On the one hand, such diagnoses are made due to the extra money the schools receive for these 'labelled' children. On the other hand, they are made due to the fact that psychology and pedagogy base themselves on a new American evaluation system.<sup>1</sup> Children whose ways of behaviour fall outside the prescribed norm, receive a name and number and are treated with medication for organic brain disorders which have a deep effect on the developing brain. Up to the 80s of the last century, it was only in exceptional cases that children received psychiatric medication. The European tradition of psychology and pedagogy, rooted in a personal view on human beings, believes that causes of children's developmental disorders lie in the problems of personal relationships whose emotional processes can be improved with pedagogical and psychological means and can be sustainably corrected. Entirely in opposition to that is the utilitarian, economic view of the human being, which have come over from the Anglo-American sphere since the 1980s and have overtaken the Euro-

pean tradition and resorts to treating the child with medication in order to make it function. This has serious consequences for the lifelong paths of our children and their work at school. In *Current Concerns* No. 31/32 from 31.10.2013 I portrayed the example of Alexander and how we work in consideration with the background of a personalist view of the human being: the child is looked upon as a whole person in its environment and its disturbances are seen as part of its personal development. Drawn from this picture are the points on which effective pedagogy works.<sup>2</sup> I would like to pick up on this line of thoughts in the following article.

European pedagogy has a long tradition and is anchored in a personalist concept of the human being. Fundamental impulses were given by the physician and psychologist, Alfred Adler of Vienna, who founded Individual Psychology (see box). In comparison to other depth psychology schools, Alfred Adler connected psychology to pedagogy.<sup>3</sup> According to Adler, the school needs to continue the work of the parents. There, it should compensate for mistakes, that the parents made, due to the complexity of the task of child raising. At his time, the children often suffered from a too strict or a too negligent education and were afraid and mistrustful. At present, this occurs only rarely. Today's mistakes, however, made by the parents are not less serious. Due to false theories, many children suffer the consequences of a more or less pronounced *laissez-faire* child-raising, being spoiled and lacking consequences. Many parents are insecure and don't have the courage to raise (their children); the mere expression

### Individual Psychology

ab. Founded by Alfred Adler, Individual Psychology conceives of the human being as an indivisible personality. Adler considered the human psyche as an organ that in the meaning of an instrument for survival evolves already in the first years of life in a complex process of exchange between the child and attachment figures and which as a character is an answer to the life situation of the respective human being. The person retains his character as target-orientated entity more or less for his whole life. Alfred Adler considers the development of "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" (social interest) as a priority assignment for coping with the tasks of love, community and work. He and his students looked at school as the appropriate place to train social interest among children.

"child-raising" brings parents and teachers under the suspicion of being "authoritarian". The consequences are visible: children are, in their psychological and social development, not sufficiently prepared for life's challenges, are only partially attaining the necessary endurance towards learning and can hardly deal with failure. The strong increase of children with difficulties has basically to do with the fact that we the adults want to do everything for them and make things easier for them. Whoever is always removing all obstacles for the children, doesn't prepare them for the disappointments and failures which all people have to experi-

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Letter to  the Editor

### "Ami go home" – Europe doesn't need false theories from the US

It was with great interest that I read the article by Dr Andreas Bau in *Current Concerns* No 1, published on 14 January 2014.

Although I am not a medical doctor, what was expressed herein by Dr Andreas Bau has always been my utmost feeling, concerning the "psychiatrization" of child behavior. However, as I read in the article, unfortunately there are still many pediatricians, who want to "cure" children from ADHS by the application of *Ritalin*.

As long as our politicians support the (politics) of the USA, private foundations

like *Bertelsmann* (or similar clubs in other countries), the idea of homo oeconomicus, the Swiss teaching Curriculum 21, and the "community school" in Baden-Wuerttemberg, there is still a very long way to the welfare of our children. Furthermore, as long as there are doctors like Dr *Gritz*, who are influenced by the pharmaceutical industry, the change for the better will advance only sluggishly. But it will – and that is good.

So, if I were a schoolchild, I am sure, I would have got *Ritalin* prescribed in order

to prevent my liveliness. But, I am very happy that at that time the USA did not have the influence in Yugoslavia as they have today in Europe. Today, the politicians in Europe simply do not have the courage to oppose against it. There is still somebody missing who dares to say – like *Charles de Gaulle* did, as he said in those days to the Nato "Ami go home".

Dušan Radakovic, Munich

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# The curriculum of convictions

by Heike Schmoll

The draft for the new Baden-Wuerttemberg curriculum for the fifth and sixth classes has created quite a stir, because it addresses different sexual lifestyles. In future, not only homosexuality but also bisexuality, trans-sexuality and inter-sexuality are to play a role in school. It was clear, that especially in Wuerttemberg certain groups with an evangelical background would protest against it. A respective petition was followed by a counter-petition, and the Internet provides the platform to leave some polemical expressions of anger. However, tolerance of all kinds of sexual lifestyles was already laid down in the 2004 education plan of Baden-Wuerttemberg, since, after all, the foreword had come from *Hartmut von Hentig*. Even at that time this was not revolutionary, because in the curricula of other federal countries you already find similarly worded learning goals. However, having taken over almost literally the objectives of relevant stakeholders in the new draft for the education plan, does not show much wisdom in Stuttgart.

Unfortunately because of that, the draft's drawbacks that are at least equally serious might be overlooked. Curricula matching the different types of school, will no longer exist in Baden-Wuerttemberg, only three levels will be distinguished (elementary, middle, advanced), whereby the educational standards set by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education for the different school-leaving qualifications are directive. Just like in all other recent curricula "competencies" are described as teaching and learning objectives. This is already something that must be debated, but all the more so the definition of "attitudes". How, actually, should attitudes and opinions of students be measurable in examinations?

Only for grades five and six a total of 202 attitudes across all subjects are formulated, which is fairly absurd. For the subject German alone thirty attitudes are listed, the first twenty of them concerning almost entirely communication skills or writing, only then followed by developing interest and joy in reading. In mathematics, students are to "perceive" the gathering of evidence as a meaningful and rewarding intellectual challenge. In music lessons, students shall develop "sensitivity to music-relevant copyright and personal rights". What is this? In mathematics lessons, how should a feeling be generated that is commonly shared?

Sensations, until today, have been withdrawn from pedagogical access, and should remain so. Or do we want to clandestinely replace education by conformation? The entire draft for the education plan breathes the spirit of an affirmative concept of education, which, fortunately, has been considered as long-surpassed. It creates the image of a new human being matching the view of the red-green state government in Stuttgart and their State Institute for Educational Development. This is dangerous, because this way educational processes may become genuine indoctrination, that is the description of attitudes and opinions may degenerate into school examinations of attitudes and convictions if it comes to the worst, something that we already experienced during two German dictatorships.

The Protestant religion teachers, quite rightly, have protested against the fact, that religious attitudes in any form are to be made examinable in religious instruction of all things, a subject that definitely does not want to see itself as a missionary event. The Superior Church Council in Stuttgart has therefore instructed the

Education Planning Commission to remove "attitudes and opinions" out of the protestant curriculum. Perhaps, the religion teachers have indeed a particularly keen sense of such spiritual attacks, which cause an intuitive rejection among their pupils, anyway. With their objection they have achieved something. Because religious education would otherwise have been under suspicion of ideology even more than it already is now.

In addition, in the Advisory Board of the Curriculum Commission there have been extremely controversial debates on five guiding principles. Vocational orientation, education for sustainable development, media education, prevention and consumer education are mentioned here. On the one hand, they are to be anchored in the plans for the school subjects on the other hand, they are to be positioned above the learning goals at all levels as overriding topics. In the fifth and sixth classes, media education plays a role for the teaching of German, the "sustainable development" for the geography class. Reading that one can hardly evade the impression that we are dealing with a party program converted into the curriculum rather than with educational objectives. However, the head of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs does no longer want to alter anything about the guiding principles. If at least they were no longer laid down as attitudes and opinions in the final version of the curriculum, much would be gained. Because, in Baden-Wuerttemberg as well, students' attitudes must remain unavailable. •

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(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## "What children need at school"

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ence at some time in their lives. Generally, it is often first noticed at school if a child is prepared enough for life. Here it must learn to fulfil the demands of the teacher which a child normally does with natural curiosity and thirst for knowledge. In order to achieve this the teacher has to be in an affectionate contact with the children and carefully lead them along. However, there is a noticeable change in the paradigm from the lessons in which the teacher is instructing to the lessons which

are labelled self-organised learning (see box p.8). Today's children must try to find their learning path on their own in these lessons. While a few of those well-brought up children find their own way, many others resign, work below the level of their capabilities and lose themselves in unproductive activism, refuse or give up in lack of courage. Here, the mechanism of "Abklärung" (evaluation) is often put into place. Instead of pedagogical means to compensate for the deficits, diagnoses are made and an expensive helping apparatus is constructed which causes children to be failures in school or bring them into special education (programs). Today these

widely used methods encompass the utilitarian human view, in which the individual child is not assisted into an all-round education rather, it (the child) is somehow made to function but only in a particular way. This crassly contradicts our personal idea of a human being, which is embedded in the European educational tradition.

## Professional support instead of pedagogy's capitulation

Alfred Adler and with him a whole row of European educators have recognised the extremely important role of the teach-

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**"What children need at school"**

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er as child raiser and educator. This is as well in opposition to the Anglo-American concept of the teacher as the one who accompanies the child or is the coach which gives the children assignments that they must achieve on their own in individualising lessons. The education at the University is constructed in this manner and young students are no longer trained to instruct the children. According to the popular theory, each child should find its way on his or her own. Whoever does not fulfil the assignment, is freed from the learning goal. This is the downfall of Pedagogy! Especially today the children need teachers who instruct, encourage, challenge them and structure the material.

I recall a girl whose parents brought her to us already during her second year. After the teachers had not said anything over a long period with regard to the situation of the daughter, they invited the parents and confronted them with the fact that their daughter needed an evaluation and that the school's remedial teacher needed to be informed (of the situation). *Maja* could not read any 'snake' sentences (words which are connected without spacing), she could not concentrate enough and she was not good in German. She wrote too little, especially when she was not requested to do so. The parents were very surprised, since they knew their daughter to be very articulate and attentive. Although she went to school gladly, *Maja* had hardly told anything about school at home. Relatives found that she was increasingly apathetic. Therefore they took their daughter out of the school and brought her to us. It was quickly realised that she felt lost at school, in those individualised, self-directed lessons without the direct instruction of the teacher. She had often dreamed and had not worked on anything unless the teacher had addressed her, she said. It was also clear that the teacher didn't correct much of the work and allowed false answers. When the parents spoke to the daughter about this, she said the teacher corrected it as correct and maintained this position. In contrast, we instructed her (*Maja*) exactly in what she needed to do and told her that she must work harder if she wanted to make up for the missing knowledge. Then she began to try harder and soon worked more carefully. Once again, she began to tell about everything that she learned in school. Her parents didn't recognise their child any more, everything had changed. This girl had been missing the direct attention and the encouragement of the teacher. She had begun to settle at a level where her intellectual capabilities were not challenged. However, with the evaluation and the involvement of the remedial teacher,

a wrong path would have been taken and that would have meant downgrading the child considerably.

**Diagnoses****whose consequences offend the child**

"Abklärung" means at the very least, taking a detour in the child's school career which is, from that point on, determined by the remedial teacher, excused from achieving learning goals, special lessons for children with Dyslexia or Dyscalculia etc.. Diagnoses out of these evaluations are found under such titles as: Attention Deficit Syndrome, fine motor disturbances, concentration disorders, perception disorders, memory retention disorders, autistic disturbances, etc.. Multiple choice teacher and parent surveys are a basis for diagnoses, for example symptoms of disorders such as ADHD. After working through the survey, it is apparent that these criteria include behaviour which appear in many children and which could accompany them over a shorter or longer period. Deriving a psychiatric disorder from these findings may be of serious consequences for the child. Instead, the teacher's responsibility is to help the child with pedagogical means and to assist it to reach the level of the class.

**The importance of careful observation**

It is easy to imagine that a teacher, having such a questionnaire in the back of his/her mind, could quickly draw a conclusion and regards all further observation as evidence for the disturbance. One cannot blame anyone who is educated this way, but this is clearly a case of professional blindness. Therefore no one realised that *Maja's* disturbances were due to a subjective viewpoint. While they were very noticeable during the lesson, one didn't notice them when she played with *legos*. This is then termed Specific Developmental Disorders of scholastic skills. In reality, such disturbances circumscribe current symptoms in special situations and are not inherited deficits. The person is an entire being and it's brain's activities are not any different when playing with *legos* as when doing maths. Neurological research pretends to be able to prove such differences. However, all of this is speculation and not proven fact which is being contradicted by new experiments in brain research.<sup>4</sup> How absurd these speculations are, is shown in the increase of these occurrences as if, the genetic make-up of the children would have lately changed. It is interesting that in some European countries, such diagnoses are hardly made while in other countries, such as Switzerland, they are spreading like an epidemic.

**Brain mythology instead of Pedagogy?**

pToday a multiplicity of "specialists" are buzzing around who are trained to fil-

ter out and evaluate children with their psychiatric manuals like ICD and DSM. Thereby they conclude that all the irregularities of a child are caused by organic brain disorders. As *Felix Hasler* shows in his book 'Neuromythology', these are unproven speculations by means of which the pharmaceutical industry and the entire school's support system operate. And this is damaging to many children. Behind that there is a very simple idea of a human as being a sort of machine consisting of a system of feedback control loops. The soul of man and the processes of the psyche are in reality very complex. In order to understand them, very much knowledge as well as learned compassion, are necessary. In this area, the approved personal pedagogical and psychological tradition shows great success. They are totally pushed to the side and forgotten about. It would be important to recall and to draw on them.

**This must not happen:  
children growing lonely while  
learning in a self-organized manner**

This was also demonstrated in our work with *Pedro*, another boy who had come to us in the course of the second class. He had not found his way at school, had less and less enjoyed attending and had become increasingly depressed, as the parents described. A careful analysis of his life story and his family environment enlightened his previous learning biography and provided us with the key to working with him. *Pedro* had come under strong pressure from the very beginning in the first class. At home he had a younger sister who had already overtaken him and even at school he experienced children everywhere who – in his opinion – did everything in a better way. He quickly gave up and lost his enthusiasm for school. When he was sitting alone in front of his weekly schedule tasks, he felt lost without connection to the teacher and the classmates and did not accomplish anything. In addition there was the completely unsystematic structure of the learning material – as now required by the reformers and already implemented in many new textbooks. Tasks are given in full awareness of the fact that many children can not solve them (one wants to find out how they deal with experience), several letters of the alphabet are introduced at a time, the decadic transition is no longer explained. For computations with more than ten, children have to make bundles of five and of one and then count them up or develop their own ways in order to come to a result. In just the same manner they learn to write, everyone should find his or her own way to write letters, and writing in squares or on

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lines is a compulsion per se, which is why they let the children write as they please. One can imagine how this will end. A few will survive more or less unscathed, many will fall by the wayside – as Pedro did.

**Identifying the underlying problems**

In working with Pedro it turned out that he was very intelligent, but put himself under great pressure in order not to make any mistakes and to get everything done as quickly as possible. His writing was illegible, the letters were not practiced properly, the lines had no meaning for him. After the teacher had shown him what purpose the lines actually have, he soon began to produce a more legible and nice handwriting and did everything to make it look as beautiful as possible. He could not read correctly, first, since he had not been taught the correct vocalisation, and, second, because he could not allow himself enough time to read the letters one by one and then to connect them to each other. No sooner had he started with the first, his eyes already wandered to the last letter of the word, and he tried to guess the intermediate part.

Such an attitude always to be fast, which has arisen from the relational interaction with parents and siblings can easily be corrected by a pedagogically trained teacher. We showed Pedro how to learn step by step, that you do not have to solve a worksheet at once, but do one task after the other etc.. We encouraged and instructed him and convinced him that he was up to the task. Carefully guided by the teacher. Pedro soon began to give up his despondency and false posture when learning. The teacher as a model plays an important role in this process. The child draws himself up with his help and be-

**ICD, ICF-CY, DSM**

*ab.* These are classification systems for psychiatric disorders. ICD and ICF-CY were published by WHO; DSM is American. The introduction of ICD10 constituted a paradigm shift – away from a personalist view of the human being which looks at disorders as related to dysfunctions in interpersonal relationships on to a mechanistic American approach that looks at all disorders as related to brain function deficits. With the ICF-CY now, a manual for disorders in children and adolescents has been created. These manuals include a number of symptoms, which result in a diagnosis when they emerge at a certain incidence.

comes increasingly independent and more self-confident. The parents noticed a significant improvement in the mood of their son. Now he loves to get up and looks forward to going to school every day. He shows his parents what he has completed at school and is proud of his good performance. The teacher and the classmates rejoice with him at his progress.

Compared with that, how bloodless does a teacher appear as a "learning facilitator" who is primarily busy with his weekly schedules and the ticking off of any accomplished or non-complished "competencies"! That has little to do with the beautiful teaching profession. Unfortunately, the students are no longer taught the simplest pedagogical and didactic contents at the teacher training colleges today. The "academization" of the teaching profession progresses inexorably, which will bring us a generation of teachers that is not prepared to deal with the actual situation with the children at school.

**Recognizing and averting discouragement**

*Samuel*, who had already been accompanied by a health care educator for two hours a week from the first class onwards, did not make any progress in learning. He was a very cheerful boy who enjoyed going to school and had a lot of contact with his classmates. His life story provided some interesting information about his difficulties at school. His older brother wanted to go to grammar school, both parents were academics, and Samuel was considered a complete failure, who had got stuck at the beginning of the second class in numeracy and language after three years of schooling. The parents were convinced, and even more so after the investigations by various psychologists, to have a son with a genetic defect. That had the effect that they had even less confidence in him. Every day his mother accompanied him, a fourth grader, to school, taking his hand, and picked him up as well – though he lived only half a kilometer away from the school building. At home he received praise for the smallest achievement. After Samuel had been integrated in a small class at our school, his performance improved continuously. We recognized his intelligence, that did not show before, because hardly anyone had ever demanded anything of him. He dared too little and always wanted his teachers to assure him whether a result was right.

Every child has its positive sides, a skillful teacher recognizes them and helps the child to experience success. Gradually the child dares address topics, it has never trusted to do before. After we had helped Samuel to have some experience of success, we began to work on special situations with him, to enable him to succeed

by means of his own thinking. When he had to make lots of paperrolls during a lesson and wrap them with a rubber band, the teacher proposed him to wrap the rubber bands around the wrist to save time and slough off when needed. As soon as he had formed the first one, he straightly ran and asked for the rubber bands. The teacher only replied that he knew the solution himself, meaning that he should switch on his brain and remembered the ligaments around his wrist. Such small experiences are important for obtaining confidence in developing his own thinking skills. The parents also could be convinced to trust and demand more of him. So he became more courageous and self-confident during the course of a year. When he compares himself with others today, he doesn't immediately get the idea that he is less able. He takes on the competition and tries to keep up with the others.

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**Self-directed education – individualized learning**

*ab.* Behind this theory there is the theory of constructivism, which is based on the assumption, that each human being constructs its reality on its own. This is the reason why every human should acquire his knowledge in his own individual way. One emanation of this theory is individualized teaching in which each child decides what, when, if and how it learns something. Therein the teacher is nothing else than a learning guide who provides materials. In such a self-directed education the child decides on its own how it organizes its learning from the very beginning. It is self-evident that most children in such a "teaching" mode get singularized, isolated, discouraged and are not able to develop self-confidence. This way they are prepared to function as a "spoke in the wheel" of the economic system. Certainly this is not about individuality rather about conforming. Actually the theory of constructivism also is the basis for *Milton Friedman's* theory of globalisation. In his system the state is not to control economy, the free market is self-regulated and only a few basic needs of the people are guaranteed by the state. Otherwise it is up to everyone to do with his life as ever he or she likes. Equally, also at school every student can decide what he wants to achieve from the first grade on. School only provides the materials.

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There are other children who, driven by such sentiments of discouragement, might start to reject any attempt to get them cooperating and might therefore be almost unable to be won over for learning. They are avoiding any task wherever possible and confront teachers with very difficult situations. Such behaviour does indeed require quite a different approach.

**Taking care to ensure the teaching profession**

Thus a teacher faces a variety of children, who for quite different reasons are bad, but sometimes even very good learners. The most awarding about the teaching profession is the opportunity to help the highest possible number of children to

achieve some success. What is there more satisfying than getting to understand the different personalities of the individual children and creating a sustainable relationship between teacher and student and thus lead them to success. That is why the teaching profession – as I understand it – belongs to the most beautiful professions at all. Let us take care that this profession will not be reduced to an administrative job, where pre-scribed competences are given as an input into a system of rules and then the teacher examines and ticks the output on pre-stamped questionnaires. To accomplish that a robot or computer would do as well.

**It is high time to resist**

Such a development in our schools would mean a fatal development for the future generation, for the preservation of our di-

rect democracy and the maintainance of our highly-achieving economy. Just remember: 20 years ago a British education minister had to realize that a considerable part of the English youth were "unemployable" after they had left school. Today we are on the brink of taking over exactly those contents of the anglo-saxon system of instruction with the *Curriculum 21*. Should not the parents begin to fight back, as long as there is time to do so? •

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Current Concerns* No 35/36 of 8.12.2013

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Current Concerns* No 31/32 of 31.10.2013

<sup>3</sup> Adler and his students developed experimental schools and a net of educational counselling centers. cf. Handelbauer. *Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Individualpsychologie Alfred Adlers*. Vienna/Salzburg 1984, pp. 167–192

<sup>4</sup> cf. Hasler, F. *Neuromythologie*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 81–176

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