

# Current Concerns

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Extraordinary session of the National Council and the Council of States from 4 – 8 May 2020 on the corona pandemic

## Everything is as it should be according to the Constitution

**“Seizure of power by the Federal Council” is a figment of the imagination**

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

For weeks now, we have been used to members of the Federal Council appearing before the population in media conferences to communicate and justify their decisions as well as the considerations behind them, and to answer questions from the press and (by telephone) from the population. In one newspaper or online medium or another, this was interpreted as the executive branch wanting to “seize power in the state”. In reality, everyone knows that the Swiss parliament had to break off its spring session after two weeks because of health risk.<sup>1</sup> Now it will be able to resume its full legislative role and that, amongst other things, at the Federal Council’s express request. The special session at the begin-

ning of May will be focussing on the corona crisis.

The various committees of the National Council and the Council of States have been busy preparing this session since 6 April. The Council meetings will be held at the “Bernexpo” exhibition centre, because the observance of distance and hygiene measures can be guaranteed there for politicians and Federal Administration staff. All debates in the National Council and the Council of States can be listened to simultaneously or later online (as has been the case for several years now), and they can of course also be read.

The definitive programme will be drawn up by the offices of the two Councils on

1 May and will include all emergency decisions of the Federal Council. All parliamentary committees supported the Federal Council with large majorities and thanked them for their important commitment to the welfare of the country and the population. To supply a political context, *Current Concerns* has also put a number of questions to two National Councillors, belonging to the Social Democrats and the Swiss People’s Party.

Below, some of the most important of the committees’ many proposals and recommendations will be chosen as examples.<sup>2</sup> In the extraordinary session, the majori-

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## In times of crisis the nation states are needed, the EU has no solutions

Interview with National Councillor Yvette Estermann, SVP Lucerne



Yvette Estermann  
(picture ma)

*Current Concerns:* Ms National Councillor Estermann, what do you consider to be the most important questions that Parliament will have to address in the coming extraordinary session?

Yvette Estermann: We have scheduled the session to discuss business related to corona. It is mainly a debate on the measures and financial business that we will be dealing with.

*It probably won’t be a big problem to reach an agreement, will it?*

There won’t usually be any left-right blocks, because certain questions concern everyone. I think the financial proposals will be accepted. Everyone has acknowledged that the problems exist and that help is needed, but that will not stop

many politicians from talking about it. It is also right that Parliament should resume its function.

*You are a member of the CC (Control Committee) of the National Council. How does the CC perform its tasks in the current situation?*

We have already held one meeting and three Federal Councillors, including the Federal President, were present and answered our questions. And they have really answered everything we wanted to know. So, the CC has started its work on corona, but it remains a big issue. For me, the most important thing is to draw the conclusion from the whole crisis afterwards: What went well, what went less? We cannot change what has happened, but we can offer a good decision guidance for the future. It is important that we take precautions for the future, so that if something similar or worse one day comes along, we are better prepared than now.

*Direct democracy is currently practically at a standstill. The May referendum on the SVP’s limitation initiative will not take place. Is that rather good for you or not?*

I have always done well in my life when I have said what’s done is done. The glass is half full, not half-empty, we see it as a chance. We have seen how we have been abandoned by our so-called friends around us, how goods that we had ordered and paid for have been blocked. That should make people think. So, I am not entirely unhappy that the vote has been postponed.

The corona crisis has shown that in the end every state looks after itself and that the EU has no solutions, quite the contrary. The nation states wanted to apply their own solutions. In Brussels it was only afterwards that people followed suit and talked a lot. What the EU real-

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# “One pretends that with a rapid opening all economic hardships are gone”

Interview with National Councillor Jacqueline Badran, SP Zurich



Jacqueline Badran  
(picture ma)

*Current Concerns: Ms National Councillor Badran, what do you consider to be the most important issues that Parliament will have to tackle in the coming extraordinary session?*

Jacqueline Badran: If one is committed to the goal of preserving structures, jobs and livelihood, then the first step should be to fill the gaps in economic policy measures. If we want to prevent mass bankruptcies and mass indebtedness of the small shops and restaurants, a significant rent waiver for the time of the lockdown must be decided. In addition, corrections to short-time work and an increase in compensation for holders and persons similar to holders from CHF 3,320 to the EO-level (income replacement regulations) of CHF 5,880 are required. Otherwise we cannot speak of livelihood security. It is also essential to fill the gaps for the self-employed indirectly affected.

*You are a member of the EATC (Economic Affairs and Taxation Committee) of the National Council. The majority of your commission is in favour of three mo-*

*tions which urge a faster resumption of business activities than is foreseen by the Federal Council. You and other commissioners of the SP and the Greens did not support these three motions. Why not?*

The background to these demands is not to help small businesses, but to avoid future tax increases for corporations. The commission majority wants people to be brought out of short-time work so as to prevent the federal government's mountain of debt from growing any further. The debts of today are the taxes of tomorrow. This is a legitimate argument, but it should not be disguised as “commercial assistance”. You pretend that with a quick opening all economic problems are gone. However, it is of little help to the businesses because they will make significantly less turnover in the future than before the closure, simply because of the distance rules. In a hairdresser's, where otherwise three people work, only one person can work in future. In the retail trade, except perhaps for seasonal products, sales are significantly lower, especially if schools do not open at the same time. Who goes shopping when the children are at home? Austria and Sweden show the same scene: open, but empty shops. The same applies to the food serving industry. So, the revenues will not be able to cover the costs

incurred. That is why I am in favour of openings being based solely on the requirements of pandemic control and certainly not on a politically arbitrary date.

*Could the fundamental experiences with corona also be an occasion to think about how we are going to live together in our country and in our world in the future?*

Yes, I had and have that hope. But it has also been dampened. Politicians and the media suggest that opening up the market is a gradual “return to normality”. That should be the non-word of the year. What is happening now is the opposite of normality. We need completely new approaches and a change in consumer behaviour. Shopping at the local clothing boutique instead of *Zalando*, at the nearby bookstore instead of *Amazon*, that would be helpful now and in the future. Otherwise, we'll be at the end of our filigree structures anyway, and global chains will take over everything: the optics business, the restaurant, the hairdressing salon. In short: thinking and acting in regional economic cycles would now be necessary, and this should become the new normal.

*Thank you, Ms National Councillor Badran, and good luck in the session.* •

## “In times of crisis ...”

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ly cannot do is to find solutions in times of crisis. You saw that in the refugee crisis, you see that now in the corona crisis, and the financial crisis they could not overcome anyway. People should start to know that the EU is a construct that is not viable. Particularly in crises, it is

not suited to managing them and acting quickly.

*Could the far-reaching experiences with Corona also be an occasion to think about how we want to live together in our country and in our world in the future?*

Yes, we have now seen that globalisation brings not only advantages but also dis-

advantages, and how important it is that self-sufficiency is once again given priority in Switzerland. Whether it is about medicines and medical supplies or even food, we should be concerned with what we want in the future.

*Thank you, Ms National Councillor Estermann, and all the best for the coming session.* •

## “Everything is as it should be ...”

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ty as well as the minority representatives of the individual committees will submit their proposals and their reasons to the respective plenary sessions of the Council.

### Commissions will propose approval of billion-dollar supplementary credits and of army mission

The most important business of the session is the approval of a whole bundle of supplementary credits to the 2020 budget

as a result of the corona pandemic, which the Federal Council will submit to parliament.<sup>3</sup> The Finance Committee of the National Council (FC-N) “mostly unanimously or with large majorities requests the National Council [...] to approve the corona credits requested by the Federal Council. With this request it follows the proposals of the co-reporting committees SECC, SSHC and EATC.<sup>4</sup> (This means that a great majority in the National Council committees responsible for science/education/culture, health and economics also support the measures taken by the Federal Council). In its press re-

lease it (the finance committee FC-N) lists and presents in detail a total of over CHF 15 billion in supplementary credits to the 2020 budget, as well as CHF 40 billion in bridging loans guaranteed by the Confederation. On 28 April, the Finance Committee of the Council of States endorsed these decisions. Both Finance Committees also adopted two motions, according to which the duration of the loans for SMEs will be extended from five to eight years (Motion 20.3152) and the interest

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rate will remain at 0.0 per cent even after the first year (Motion 20.3153).<sup>5</sup>

Incidentally, a parliamentary representation was already involved in the corona loans announced by the Federal Council in March/April: The Finance Delegation of the Federal Assembly (FinDel)<sup>6</sup> granted advances on the loans on several occasions (see the FinDel media releases of 23 March, 8 April and 15 April 2020). At the meetings of the two Finance Committees, a FinDel member attended and reported.

The National Council and the Council of States will also decide on the military mission which the Federal Council approved on 16 March and which is time-limited until the end of June. In response to urgent requests from several cantons, the Federal Council has deployed several thousand members of the army (max. 8,000), including 3,000 medical soldiers. At the cantons' request, these are deployed in hospitals and logistics, but also to reinforce the Border Guard at national borders and airports. According to Art.185, paragraph 4 of the Federal Constitution, the Federal Council “may mobilise the armed forces in cases of emergency. Where it mobilises more than 4,000 members of the armed forces for active service or where the deployment of such troops is expected to last for more than three weeks, the Federal Assembly must be convened without delay.”

This is what the Federal Council has done. On 30 April, the Security Policy Committee of the Council of States (SPC-S) unanimously requested “approval of the Armed Forces Assistance Service in the context of measures to combat the Covid 19 pandemic” (20,035). It expresses its gratitude for this deployment to those responsible and to the members of the armed forces.”<sup>7</sup>

**COVID-19-Health policy: expansion of testing as well as sufficient supply of protective material**

The most important proposals of the two Social Security and Health Committees (SSHC) for the special session:<sup>8</sup>

- Acquisition of medical supplies and medication for the treatment of COVID-19: The supplementary credits granted by the Federal Council are supported by a large majority of the SSHC of both Councils.
- “Increasing the security of supply with medicines and vaccines”: Motion 20.3166 (Press release SSHC-S of 30 April 2020)
- “Towards a risk-based prevention and crisis strategy for communicable diseases”: Motion 20.3165 /20.3162 (Press

“Shopping at the local clothing boutique instead of Zalando, at the nearby bookstore instead of Amazon, that would be helpful now and in the future. Otherwise, we’ll be at the end of our filigree structures anyway, and global chains will take over everything: the optics business, the restaurant, the hairdressing salon.” (National Councilor *Jacqueline Badran*)

release SSHC-N of 29 April 2020 and SSHC-S of 30 April 2020)

- More testing: Both committees recommend to the Federal Council to make infection tests accessible to all and antibody tests to groups representative of society as a whole, as soon as possible.
- Epidemic protection material for companies: The SSHC of the National Council requires the Confederation to ensure the availability of sufficient protection material.
- Transparency of health care costs: The SSHC of the Council of States unanimously decided to “submit a postulate in order to instruct the Federal Council to prepare a report on the impact of the pandemic on health care costs and the payers (Confederation, cantons, insurers and insured persons)”.

We look forward to the Federal Council's current responses to these proposals.

**Economic policy:  
What lessons for the future?**

The Economic Affairs and Taxation Committee of the Council of States (EATC-S) by way of a postulate requests a Federal Council report on the economic consequences of the corona crisis and lessons drawn for the future:<sup>9</sup>

“1. What economic effects (GDP, employment, specific industries, tax revenues, etc.) has the corona crisis already had and is likely to have?

2. What economic impact have the ordered measures had and are likely to have?

3. How did the Federal Council balance the health policy benefits and the economic damage likely to result from these measures, and how is it currently weighing them?

4. Which additional short-term measures or changes to measures is the Federal Council considering?

5. What medium and long-term lessons should Switzerland, the Federal Council and parliament draw from the crisis?

In other words, the EATC-S demands a comprehensive analysis of the Federal Council; questions 4 and 5 on the necessary measures and lessons for the future are particularly important. The question of self-sufficiency is on the agenda – not only with regard to sufficient protective masks and medical equipment. For ex-

ample, the closure of smaller rural hospitals in favour of a few large hospitals in the cities must be thoroughly reconsidered: humans and their health must come first; such a thing cannot be tackled with pure cost-benefit considerations. It is also clear yet again that in a crisis, every state must first look after its own population, and this also applies to security of supply in terms of food and energy (see also National Councilors *Yvette Estermann* and *Jacqueline Badran* in their interviews on p. 1 and p. 2).

**Economic Committee of the National Council pushes for faster opening of businesses and public institutions – with some dissenting votes**

In its press release of 22 April, the EATC-N acknowledges “that the Federal Council has given priority to health and epidemiological considerations in its decisions of 16 April 2020 on the gradual reopening of public facilities”. But now the normalisation of economic life must move forward. To this end, the committee has submitted three motions to the Council.<sup>10</sup>

- Motion 20.3136 “Restoration of the federal system of competences as well as a functioning economy and society”: In principle, the Committee demands that starting 11 May practically all publicly accessible facilities should be allowed to reopen and smaller events and associations' activities should be permitted again – subject to the observance of distance and hygiene measures. Persons belonging to risk groups would have to be “specially protected against infection”.
- Motion 20.3134 “Stage-by-stage lifting of the standstill in the catering industry”: This was decided by the Federal Council on 29.4, under many-voiced pressure.
- Motion 20.3133 “Smart Restart”: Sectors which will, for health policy reasons, still be unable to open their businesses after 11 May, should be able to offer certain activities.

In short, therefore, all economic activities should be resumed as quickly as possible, taking into account the epidemiological situation.

## “Everything is as it should be ...”

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On 29 April, the Council of States EATC supported the last two motions, but rejected the first (opening of practically all institutions and smaller events) by 9 votes to 4: “The majority of the committee considers this to be a significant relaxation of the measures in force, which would probably lead to a renewed spread of the epidemic resulting in a fatal setback for the economy”.<sup>11</sup>

The parliamentarians’ concern about the state of the economy is understandable. But should not concern for people’s health come first? What are we going to do if, as a result of a too rapidly undertaken “normalisation”, the number of people infected and the number of deaths suddenly rises sharply?

It is interesting to note that all three motions were rejected in the National Council by the committee members of the Social Democrats and the Greens. (For their reasons see the interview with National Councillor Jacqueline Badran, Social Democrats, Zurich on p. 2)

### Legal basis for contact tracing apps and resumption of citizens’ political participation

The National Council’s Political Institutions Committee (PIC-N) has with a large majority adopted a motion (20.3144) calling for a legal basis for contact tracing apps. The “COVID19 proximity tracing app” developed by the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne is to be used as of 11 May.

“It traces back who was in contact with a person tested positive for the new coronavirus and informs the persons concerned that they may have become infected.” The law is intended to regulate transparency and data protection, as well as to ensure that use of the app is voluntary.<sup>12</sup>

Direct democratic rights: On 20 March, the Federal Council issued an ordinance stipulating that deadlines for the submission of popular initiatives and referendums be suspended from 21 March to 31 May. Moreover, collection of signatures would not be allowed during this period.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the referendum of 17 May was cancelled. On 29 April, the Federal Council decided that signatures could be collected again as of 1 June and that five federal proposals would be put to the vote on the following regular voting Sunday, 27 September: Limitation initiative, hunting act, tax deduction for third-party child care costs, purchase of new fighter jets as well as paternity leave (more details to follow later).

“Yes, we have now seen that globalisation brings not only advantages but also disadvantages, and how important it is that self-sufficiency is once again given priority in Switzerland. Whether it is about medicines and medical supplies or even food, we should be concerned with what we want in the future.” (National Councillor *Yvette Estermann*)

### Resumption of the regular overall supervision by the Control Committees (CC)

On 23 April, the CC-N held a debate with Federal Councillors *Sommaruga*, *Berset* and *Parmelin* on the management of the corona crisis. In its press release, it stated: “It is important that parliamentary superintendence is exercised in an appropriate manner, even in times of crisis, in order to preserve the institutional balance. As the body responsible for assessing the management of the Federal Council and the Federal Administration, the CCs have a central role to play in this respect”.<sup>14</sup> (See also the interview with National Councillor *Yvette Estermann* on p. 1)

### Conclusion

A brief assessment of the situation from a constitutional and democratic perspective: The democratic structure in the Swiss federal state remains in force, so that the rule of law endures even in times of crisis. Everything else can be solved if these foundations are in right good order. •

<sup>1</sup> See “Swiss Parliament wants to have a say – Special session from 4 to 8 May 2020 at the ‘Bernexpo’”, *Current Concerns* from 21 April 2020

<sup>2</sup> The latest media releases from the parliamentary committees can be found (in German, French an

Italian) at <https://www.parlament.ch/de/services/suche-news>

<sup>3</sup> The most important measures were presented in *Current Concerns* of 21 April under the title “When it comes right down to it, you sit together and solve the problems”.

<sup>4</sup> “Strong approval by the Finance Committee [of the National Council] for the Federal Council’s corona loans”. FC-N *press release* of 25 April 2020

<sup>5</sup> “Broad approval by the Finance Committee [of the Council of States] for the Federal Council’s corona loans”. FC-S *press release* of 28 April 2020

<sup>6</sup> The Finance Delegation is responsible for the detailed examination and supervision of the entire financial budget. It is made up of three members of the National Council and three members of the Council of States, each of whom belongs to the Finance Committee of his or her respective Council.

<sup>7</sup> “Clear support for the Armed Forces Assistance Service”. Media release SPC-S of 30 April 2020. Similar to the reaction of the National Council’s SPC, according to *press release* of 30 April 2020

<sup>8</sup> “Federal government is to massively expand tests for coronavirus”. Press release SSHC-N of 18 April 2020. “Transparency of pandemic-related health care costs required”. *press release* SSHC-S of 21 April 2020

<sup>9</sup> “Corona crisis: New recommendations of the EATC-S to the Federal Council”. *press release* of 21. April 2020

<sup>10</sup> “EATC-N pleads for a rapid resumption of economic and social life”. *press release* of 22 April 2020

<sup>11</sup> “EATC-S demands perspectives for the resumption of economic activity and social life”. *press release* of 29 April 2020

<sup>12</sup> “Coronavirus: Use of contact tracing app only with legal basis.” Press release PIC-N of 23 April 2020

<sup>13</sup> Ordinance of 20 March 2020 on the standstill of deadlines for federal referendums

<sup>14</sup> “Corona crisis: CC-N holds first discussions with Federal President and heads of the FDHA and EAER”. *press release* of 23 April 2020

## Glossary: Parliamentary Committees

Committees are groups formed from a set number of members of parliament. They discuss the items of business before these are debated in the chamber, and they also make their own proposals. The National Council (N) has 12 standing committees, and the Council of States (S) has 11. The two chambers of parliament also have some joint committees.

The following committees are mentioned in the article:

SSHC-S, SSHC-N: *Social Security and Health Committees*

SPC-S, SPC-N: *Security Policy Committees*

PIC-S, PIC-N: *Political Institutions Committees*

EATC-S, EATC-N: *Economic Affairs and Taxation Committees*

SECC-S, SECC-N: *Science, Education and Culture Committee*

FC-S, FC-N: *Finance Committees*

CC-S, CC-N: *Control Committees*

FinDel: *Finance Delegation* (see footnote 6 below)

Footnote 6

The Finance Delegation is responsible for the detailed examination and supervision of the entire financial budget. It is made up of three members of the National Council and three members of the Council of States, each of whom belongs to the Finance Committee of his or her respective Council.

# Provisions for protection against COVID-19 in the sights of political and economic objectives

## The renewed polarisation provokes thoughtfulness

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Right at the outset in his book “Krieg. Durch fremde Hände”(War. By others’ hands), Russian politician and writer of books *Nikolaj Starikov* asks the question: “What is at the core of world politics?” (Translation of all quotes by Current Concerns). Immediately he also gives an answer: “The control over resources; a control that one would like to exercise oneself and prevent one’s opponent from exercising. At all times, in all forms of society, on all continents and within [all] geographical borders, this is all that matters. This is what politicians fight for, this is what diplomats and the military, engineers and intelligence agents work for.” Further down he elucidates: “The competition between states and blocs of states – that is the true core of world politics. The purpose of the actions of top politicians is to dominate the planet by controlling resources and expanding their sphere of influence to the maximum. The struggle for securing the top position and for the expansion of influence takes place between states and blocs of states in all spheres of existence. Economy, culture, military, ideology – all these are fields in which every victory immediately leads to an advantage in this sweeping rat race.” And he says once again on page 61 of the book: „The struggle between states and civilisations is [the] meaning of history. All human history is about the desire of the one to defeat the other.”

### Is political life nothing but a power struggle?

Nikolaj Starikov is an author who writes things that others only think. Do they not? Do not many people think that life as a whole, but above all political life, is a constant power struggle, in which it is always a question of being on top or down below, about victory or defeat? All politicians’ speeches about law and humanity, about human dignity and equality are basically just one of the many ways they use for concealing their true intentions – the pursuit of resources, which are basically defined as scarce, and the power needed to secure ownership.

It is therefore hardly surprising that, even in times of corona, which have now been ongoing for a few months, there are people who do not see that anything is different, who treat all statements of “powerful people” with the greatest mistrust, and who want to prove with all their arts of argumentation that these “powerful people” are not even this time concerned with

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“We notice that the debate on the pandemic is more and more degenerating into political polarisation; this poses a serious problem. Here, once more, one may well ask: *cui bono?*”

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the protection of health and life, but with quite different aims: Power expansion of the party oligarchy, disenfranchisement of the citizens, impoverishment of the masses, redistribution from bottom to top, from the middle class to the big corporations, a fascist dictatorship to secure the rule of finance capital etc., etc., etc.,....

### Corona pandemic under the wheel of political polarisation?

Six weeks ago, when practically all the countries of the world – not least because of the experiences made by China – were gradually adopting their far-reaching measures to contain the corona pandemic, such voices carried little weight. The alarming images and reports from Wuhan, Bergamo, Madrid and New York, for example, were a source of great consternation. Politicians declared protecting health and life to be a priority, and this corresponded to a deep inner need of almost all people.

However, since economic interests have been more strongly affected, the voices painting an economic collapse on the wall have gained significantly in weight and understandable concerns from the general public have become louder, the government measures taken to date to contain the corona pandemic have also come under the wheel of political polarisation.

In fact, there are increasing voices that expressly welcome the politicisation and polarisation of the issue. “Now actions must become political again“ was the headline of the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*“ on 24 April 2020, for example.

Certainly it is right to constantly review the measures taken to date to contain the corona pandemic and to readjust them again and again, and that is what those responsible are doing, unless the impression given is deceptive. For example, on 29 April and 30 April, the Federal Council made a new readjustment for Switzerland, and so did the Federal Government and the heads of state governments in Germany. But a number of “critics” seem to want more. And it seems that there is once again an alliance of influential economic interests and of the circles mentioned above, both of whom are fun-

damentally “critical” of our states. So it is not a question of left or right. As an alliance, these forces have a politically significant weight. You can see it in Switzerland, Austria and also in Germany.

### What concept of man?

Here it must now be noted that the worldview and the image of man of the above quoted Nikolaj Starikov can also lead astray. On the surface, his theses seem to be correct, for the history of state power politics, especially in foreign policy, can be viewed in this light. This needs no further explanation. But on closer inspection they are not correct after all, because they exclude the social nature of man, of every human being. How thin is the ice of one’s own well-being if it does not also include the general well-being, the *bonum commune*? Where does a policy lead that follows Starikov’s theses alone? He calls upon his own country, Russia to “enter the international political arena with a sober mind” in an inevitable fight (against the USA and its allies) which he regards as inevitable. To what end? “To prevail.” (Emphasis by the editors) The spiral of violence and counter-violence, of ever new wars, ever new human catastrophes, will certainly not be able to be ended like this. Theses like Starikov’s are the reflection of a problem of mankind. But does mankind want to stop there for all eternity?

*Even 75 years after the end of the Second World War our world is still far away from being a peaceful world. So there are reasons enough to think about all this.*

The individual psychologist *Alfred Adler* recognised the problem 100 years ago and addressed it!; in theory and practice he also developed solutions by giving priority to prevention, early on, in the growing up of the human being – and these findings apply until today, even though they still receive too little attention.

In addition: A look at the history of mankind shows that – instead of all still highly problematic points and all setbacks – real progress has been achieved in the political conditions: in the general legal development, in the course of constitu-

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tional development of states and, through international law, also in international relations.

**Perhaps this time  
the chancellor is right**

Also the German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* in her government statement on the Corona-Pandemic before the German Bundestag on April 23rd said things that you should not shrug of straightaway as an expression of power politics.

A week earlier, the heads of government of the federal states together with the Chancellor took decisions to loosen the existing „Shutdown“ („Lockdown“). The Chancellor has now told the Bundestag: „I go along with the resolutions, the federal and state governments decided on Wednesday last week with full conviction. But their implementation since then has given me cause for concern. It seems very brisk in parts, not to say too brisk. [...] Let us not squander what we have achieved and risk a setback! It would be a pity if we were punished by hasty hope in the end. Let us all remain wise and cautious on the way to the next phase of the pandemic. This is a long haul, and we must not run out of vigor and air too soon.“ (Translation Current Concerns)

It is understandable that most people would like to see the restrictions associated with measures against the corona pandemic lifted. It is also true that it must be possible to verify the sense and appropriateness of every restriction in a comprehensible manner - from the point of view of protecting health and life, but also in a broader sense, for example legally. It is also correct and important to correct when civil liberties have been disproportionately restricted.

But can that justify calling into question the previous measures for the containment of the corona pandemic so radically, how this is partly done?

**A breach of law and  
of the constitution is not allowed**

In this context, it is important to emphasise that all measures to combat the corona pandemic must be within the law. Therefore, the use of the term “state of exception” in the context of the Corona pandemic is misleading ... and moreover, it leads in a completely wrong direction when associated with the probably best-known theoretician of the concept of state of exception, the German expert for constitutional law and temporary supporter of the Nation-

al Socialists *Carl Schmitt*. The corona pandemic is not a “state of exception” in the sense of a situation beyond the constitutional order. Constitutions of free democratic constitutional states are not just created for “fair-weather”. They should also apply to exceptional situations. Breaches of the constitution by the state and its organs are not acceptable even in such an exceptional situation. This is a challenge for every country concerned.

Article 2, paragraph 2 of the German constitution formulates the “right to life and physical integrity” to be valid for everyone living in Germany. This is the direct result of the concept of the inviolability of human dignity and its worthiness of protection and furthermore, of the commitment to inalienable human rights; for life is fundamental if we want to exercise human rights. Protection of health and life has constitutional status.

**What does freedom mean?**

Article 2, paragraph 1 of the German constitution also recognises the “right to free development of his personality” for everyone living in Germany. This does not mean, however, that everyone can do what he or she wants. The Federal Constitutional Court pointed out on a very early stage that this right is to be understood within the framework of the social nature of the human being. Accordingly, the same sentence that formulates this fundamental right continues as follows: “...insofar as he does not violate the rights of others or offend against the constitutional order or the moral law”.

All rights and freedoms are subject to restrictions, including those rights that are now temporarily restricted by governmental measures to contain the corona pandemic. However, it is also true that “the substance of a fundamental right must never be compromised”.

Since the implementation of measures to contain the corona epidemic in Germany, which restrict a number of fundamental rights, there has been a controversy on the constitutionality of the measures adopted.<sup>2</sup> In detail, the challenging issues must be thoroughly discussed by jurisprudence – if possible in such a way that these discussions are understandable to all citizens – and judged by the competent courts. Final rulings by the Federal Constitutional Court on these issues have not been issued, yet. The court has rejected previous applications for interim measures for the most part<sup>3</sup>, two applications concerning freedom of association (demonstrations and church services) have so far been granted (as of 29 April 2020).

**The primacy of law also applies  
to the international community**

The primacy of law also applies to the international community. Here, it is important to respect existing international law, as formulated above all in the Charter of the United Nations and in the two binding International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right of peoples to self-determination and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state also applies in times of the corona pandemic. The WHO cannot decree a single concept to all states and to all peoples. Concepts suitable for free democratic social welfare state based on the constitutional rule of law may not be equally suitable for all states. What is appropriate must be decided on the spot, and it is to be hoped that the peoples will not be bothered with top-down programmes, but that governments, parliaments and peoples together seek viable ways forward.

**But we as citizens ...**

But we as citizens of countries like Switzerland, Austria or Germany are also called upon to examine ourselves. How seriously do we still take the dangers posed by the corona virus? Do we strictly comply with basic protective regulations such as distance rules and hygiene recommendations? ...

But we may ask ourselves further questions. Are there patterns of thinking and behaviour in our own lives that have contributed to the worldwide spread of the virus? Does it really make sense to keep on living as we did before the pandemic? ...

We notice that the debate on the pandemic is more and more degenerating into political polarisation; this poses a serious problem. Here, once more, one may well ask: *cui bono*? •

<sup>1</sup> cf. “Corona – Ethics, reason ... and psychology”; in: *Current Concerns* No. 7 from 13 April 2020, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> Anyone who enters the terms “German constitution” and “Corona” into a search engine can get an idea of this controversy.

<sup>3</sup> A press release of the Federal Constitutional Court of 8 April 2020 (“Unsuccessful emergency applications in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic”, *press release* No. 23/2020) on a court decision from 7 April 2020 states: The consequences of the state protective measures are “serious, but not unacceptable to the extent required. It does not appear unbearable to temporarily postpone them [the civil liberties claimed] in order to allow the greatest possible protection of life and health, which the state is in principle obliged to do under the constitution. Compared with the dangers to life and limb, the restrictions on personal freedom [subject to a time limit] are less severe”. (Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Will truth out?

### Ruanda colloquium in the French Senate

by Peter Küpfer

On March 6th, 2020, an event took place during one of the colloquiums routinely held in the French Senate that will presumably have some repercussions. Listed as one of the crucial and controversial issues concerning the French state, a complex of recent history was on the agenda which has never been brought to light: what really happened during the genocide in Ruanda in 1994 and the accusations made against the French government in this regard. Eyewitnesses, high-ranking officials of the French government at that time and authors debunked many of the allegations referring to the facts and documents available in archives today.

But the colloquium was remarkable for yet another reason: For the first time on this occasion the official France voiced interpretations of the tragic events of 1994 which differ from the official Rwandan government version. The Rwandan tragedy has been viewed as a genocide of the Tutsi minority by the Hutu majority according to the "official" version which was never questioned by the mainstream media.

Critics and eyewitnesses on the other hand have emphasized for many years that this biased version as propagated by the Kagame government leaves out important historical events. The current Rwandan government of autocrat Paul Kagame claims the genocide as their legacy. Almost one million Rwandans were killed back then, most of them massacred by fanatic hordes in the streets.

Details never mentioned in the mainstream media but only by courageous eyewitnesses have been confirmed with overwhelming evidence by now. The colloquium at the French senate offered them a platform to bear witness to their research and conclusions thereof in public. The event could spark the urgently needed change and broadening of perspective towards a more differentiated view.

The facts presented at the colloquium may be summarized as follows: Before and after the bloody three months from April to June 1994 there were other systematic killing sprees with thousands of victims in Ruanda, but this time committed by the Tutsi guerrilla organisation "Rwandan Patriotic Front" which had regained absolute control of the country under the command of their general Paul Kagame, who has been the officially unchallenged Rwandan dictator ever since, backed by the West, who has secured his autocratic



regime after the unlawful war of aggression against the constitutional Rwandan government of national consensus. This casts disturbing doubts on a government which claims to have ended the Rwandan genocide at last and paints a picture of themselves as the victims.

Challenging this narrative a number of prominent witnesses and historians testified at the French senate: Rwanda went through several genocides in 1994, not just one. Almost nobody in the international community knows anything about the first genocide of the Tutsi against the Hutu civilian population committed in the months before and after their violent coup d'état – again the principle is, we know only what our media present to us. What they chose to ignore will go mostly unnoticed by the public. This became apparent again on this March 6th, 2020. The colloquium also debunked the Rwandan accusation against France as an alleged accomplice of Hutus militias who had supposedly armed them and had therefore some responsibility for the Rwandan genocide.

#### Suppressed Truths

The colloquium as such had been under severe attack before it even started, mainly from the Rwandan Tutsi minority government still lead by dictator Paul Kagame. The eye witnesses and authors emphasized in the colloquium that Kagame has reason to fear that historical truth will out (see section "Eerie 'peacemaker'", p. 9) In his bloody war against the government of national consensus under *Habyarimana*, which lasted from 1990 – 1994, the RPF under Kagame eventually regained absolute control of Rwanda. In this process they attacked the fleeing remnants of the Rwandan army viciously and arrested officials, intellectuals, journalists and politicians of the former party coalition government after their victory, most of them being accused to have supported the genocide in the weeks and months prior to the RPF coup (under Kagame). The dangerously blurred term "génocidaire" (genocide perpetrator) had been coined. All voices

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critical of them have been silenced with this attribute by the Kagame government since they regained power.

**"Model state" with flaws**

At least from a Western perspective, the tiny state of Rwanda seems to do everything right so that it has been called a "modern" African model state by Western powers and many politicians ever since the Rwandan ethnic Tutsi minority (about 10% of the Rwandan population) had re-established their absolute one party dictatorship under Paul Kagame in Kigali after 4 years of civil war in summer 1994. Before it was testified about in the colloquium, only a few (who had insisted on checking historical facts) had been aware that thousands of former Rwandan military personnel, journalists, politicians, artists and intellectuals have languished in horrible prison cells since 1994, when they had been convicted to be "génocidaires" (genocide perpetrators) in turbo-trials; that only one party – the one of dictator Paul Kagame – is always in power or that any criticism is decried as "racism".

To voice these issues in public in Rwanda amounts to suicide. One example is the fate of the Rwandan singer and poet *Kizito Mihigo*, who had been well-known world-wide and supposedly hanged himself in his cell after he had been critical of the regime. His closest friends doubt that narrative and accuse the regime to have murdered him. Former Rwandan ambassador of the democratically elected previous government *Jean-Marie Vianney Ndagijima*, who lives in France now in political exile, stated at the colloquium: "The death of Kizito Mihigos is another example for the intolerance of the regime at Kigali." Even more important are the statements about a second Rwandan genocide, the existence of which had been officially ignored up to now, perpetrated by those who view themselves only in the victims' role to this day: "The troops of the Rwandan Patriotic Front have massacred 40 000 people between July and September of 1994. Was that no genocide?"

Those killed after the RPF coup had primarily been Hutu or moderate Tutsi who had promoted reconciliation between the two ethnic groups during the years of the Rwandan civil war.

**Damning evidence**

Two especially brave authors gave evidence about the two sides of the painful recent history of Rwanda at the meeting, based on the results of their own research of many years. One of them is *Charles Onana*, journalist and writer with Cameroon roots who had emigrated to Canada where he got a university degree and PhD in history. He had searched American, African and UN archives for publicly available content and had interviewed people such as judges who knew about but were no longer in the possession of relevant written evidence. His books are densely packed with facts about the Rwandan tragedy and illustrate the crime against humanity and other severe criminal acts, he names not only those on the ground but also figures who planned and concealed atrocities. This author contradicts the official version in some crucial points which by now have been endorsed by numerous eyewitnesses and researchers. Those can be summarised as follows:

All agree that the assassination of then sitting president Juvénal Habyarimana, who had been democratically elected and aimed for reconciliation, had triggered the butchery first in Kigali and later in the whole country on April 6th, 1994. His presidential airplane had been hit and downed by a surface-to-air missile when landing at Kigali airport. Apart from the Rwandan president the commander in chief of the Rwandan army and other high-ranking Rwandan officers had been in the plane as well as sitting president of Burundi Cyprien Ntaryamira and the French crew. All of them died in the professionally conducted assassination.

Those responsible have never been identified, detailed indictment documents were composed but archived. In the same night, within hours after the news of the assassination of Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana (a Hutu, who had pursued a policy of reconciliation of all ethnic groups even during the civil war) had been aired, the premeditated killing sprees of Hutu extremists (the infamous Interahamwe) were launched and reached apocalyptic proportions in the next days and weeks. Onana presents a convincing chain of factual evidence in his books which allows but one conclusion: the perpetrators of this assassination who have never been brought to justice were a special force unit of the RPF, under direct command of Kagame's chief of staff, if not him personally. If that is the case, and a lot of hints point in that direction, then the currently sitting president of Rwanda himself has triggered the genocide of

**Corona and Africa: the health crisis is already an economic crisis**

*pk.* The urgent appeal by *Tedros Ghebreyesus*, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), was reproduced in detail and commented on in the French-speaking media (press conference from 18 March 2020). Political observers have been pointing out for some time that the health systems of many African countries are overstretched. Some therefore consider the new threat from the Covid 19 virus to be a "ticking time bomb that threatens the entire continent". The Director-General of the WHO agrees with these warnings.

Ghebreyesus qualifies the virus as a threat to humanity. Literally, the director of the World Health Organization said that "the African states could be afflicted by an unprecedented health disaster". Besides the lack of prophylactic and medical equipment, such as masks or breathing apparatus, the existing realities in many African cities also pose major problems for effective prophylaxis. They are social, but also economic in nature. In this context, experts mention close housing conditions and the general closeness of contacts in African everyday life. In many areas the food supply is already precarious. The closure of industrial plants that had already taken place exacerbated unemployment. The official figures of those affected by Corona (they indicate surprisingly few infect-

ed persons at the moment) are doubted by experts. Others draw attention to the increasing lack of water due to global warming: "We are supposed to wash our hands diligently – but we have no water", says a medical nurse in a hospital in Zimbabwe. In view of the economic conditions and the poor economic forecasts for Africa in particular, financial experts consider a debt cut and interest deferrals to be urgently needed for many African countries. In an interview published in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (29.4.2020), the director of the Tropical Institute of the University of Basel, *Christian Lengler*, regrets that the broad-based action planned for 2020 to prevent the persistent hostage of Africa, malaria, cannot now be carried out as planned due to financial constraints. If the prophylactic action by means of the broad propagation and provision of mosquito nets does not take effect, malaria diseases could also rise sharply in the near future. If hospital beds in emergency departments become scarce as a result of an increase in corona patients, the health system of the affected countries will be additionally threatened. The fact that the population in many African countries does not trust their authorities and therefore does not follow the prophylactic instructions regarding corona infections or does so only with little consistency has a negative effect.



**"Will truth out?"**

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the members of his own fellow Tutsi ethnic group.

Because the experienced mercenary general and former Rwandan head of intelligence had been informed in detail about what was going on during the end phase "his" war to regain power in the Rwandan capital Kigali. He knew exactly what would happen after such an assassination: the Hutu would accuse the Tutsi (The RPF had been the most uncompromising opponent of Habyarimana's policy of reconciliation in all the years of war!) and immediately start the butchery which had long been premeditated and prepared for. This turned out to be the case and despite that – or should one say: especially for that reason? – he triggered it.

**Perpetrators going free**

A second relentless and courageous researcher shedding light on the dark truths is the Canadian author *Judy Rever*. She, too, presented her findings at the colloquium. A journalist specialised in African affairs, she has worked for *Radio France International* and *Agence France Press* and has published a widely acknowledged book about the debated events one year ago. Its title: "In Praise of Blood. The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front". In this publication the Africa specialist digs deep into Charles Onana's ground-breaking work and extends it to include the still totally obscure but equally disturbing narrative of what

many witnesses accuse the RPF to have perpetrated before and after regaining power in Rwanda: that they had systematically liquidated Hutu civilians in mass executions in Rwandan regions "liberated" by them, beginning in the first years of the war, thereby mongering fear and hate in Rwanda. The events of the genocide against the Tutsi had been shaped by these emotions which may serve as a partial explanation (not to be mistaken as exoneration!).

Even more drastically: from her research of eyewitness accounts and documents of serious Congolese human rights groups as well as numerous detailed (without consequences!) UN reports, Judy Rever draws the conclusion: Already during the blitz war which *Laurent Désiré Kabila* and his AFDL started in November 1996 with the occupation of Goma, Bukavu and the entire Kivu (Eastern province of the Democratic Republic of Congo), it was in fact Kagame, "expert" in modern jungle warfare, who was the military leader on behalf of the Rwandan government – in a war against Congo, which resulted in the overthrow of *Mobutu* one year later. Rever discloses that large units of this alliance misleadingly referred to as "rebels" had been manned by militarily experienced Rwandan former RPF troops, apart from American aides and officers from Uganda. This army did not only shell the refugee camps around Goma and Bukavu, where hundreds of thousands of Hutu had fled in panic after the coup of the Tutsi in 1994, they also systematically drove the sur-

vivors into the jungle by the thousands, chased and liquidated them, and the perpetrators who are now important figures in Congo (such as father and son Kabila, but also *Jame Kabarébé*, whom they had been appointed as Congolese army chief of staff, a close friend and political mentor of *Joseph Kabila*) were never brought to justice for these crimes against humanity. The UN high commissioner for refugees estimated that hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees had been killed. All court trials against those responsible for this additional crime against humanity, many of whom are now high-ranking officials of the sitting Congolese and Rwandan governments, have come to nothing.

A reader who had lived in Burundi for a long time and had followed the events in Rwanda closely appraised Judy Rever's book with the following remarks:

"Neither the author nor anybody else doubts that there had been a cruel genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. But Rever illustrates how Kagame's invasion of Rwanda in 1990 and the massacres of Hutu's committed by his RPF in the North of the country have destabilized the country and created an atmosphere of hate and fear among the Hutu. Was Kagame unaware that the invasion and later the downing of president Habyarimana's airplane on April 6th, 1994 (perpetrated by the RPF as evidence indicates) was bound to end in an eruption of violence? [...] The horrible genocide against the Tutsi was followed by an ethnic cleansing and cruel massacres of the RPF against the Hutus, later including the ones who had fled to Zaïre (today Democratic republic of Congo), by far exceeding the mere dissolution of the Interahamwe structures, which would have been understandable. The total number of Hutu victims may possibly be not much lower than that of the genocide against the Tutsis. Kagame's self-proclaimed image as the noble saviour of Rwanda urgently needs correction. This book needed to be written." (*Walter Leuchs*, 9.4.2019, on the website of the publisher) •

related Literature:

Onana, Charles. *Ces tueurs tutsi. Au coeur de la tragédie congolaise*, Paris, 2009 (Ed. DUBOIRIS), only French, out of print at the moment

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**Eerie "peace-maker"**

*pk.* Paul Kagame, the current President of Rwanda, for whom Western governments like to roll out the red carpet (except France, where he risks being tried as a war criminal), grew up in Uganda like many sons of influential Tutsi families.

When the state of post-colonial Rwanda was founded in 1962 (with its now republican constitution), they saw no chance for their centuries-long minority elite rule and went into exile in Uganda. Like many exiled second-generation Tutsis in Uganda, young Paul Kagame joined the Ugandan army early on and became the vice director of Yoweri Museveni's secret service. Museveni is the sole ruler of Uganda, also courted by the United States and Great Britain, who like his "pupil" Kagame came to the top

of the state through the use of arms. In the early years of the „Civil War“ (it was actually a Ugandan-backed war of reconquest by the exiled former Tutsi elite), Kagame attended an American Elite military school, trained as a dreaded guerrilla fighter and was sent back to the front in the Ugandan-Rwandan border area. There he immediately put himself at the head of the guerrilla army "Rwandan Patriotic Front" (RPF) that had meanwhile been founded to recapture the Tutsi power in Rwanda, which then sowed fear and terror. Many experts consider Kagame to be the brain, the originator and the main person responsible for the plane attack of April 6, 1994, which triggered the bloodshed of the following weeks and months.

# NATO in arms to “fight coronavirus”

by Manlio Dinucci



Manlio Dinucci  
(picture ma)

The 30 NATO foreign ministers met on April 2 by videoconference, and instructed US general *Tod Wolters*, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, to “coordinate the necessary military support to fight

the coronavirus crisis”.

He is the same general who declared in the United States Senate on February 25 „nuclear forces are supporting every US military operation in Europe“ and „I am a fan of a flexible first-use policy“ of nuclear weapons, that is nuclear attack by surprise<sup>1</sup>.

General Wolters is the supreme commander of NATO as head of the United States European Command. He is therefore part of the Pentagon’s chain of command, which has absolute priority. Its strict rules are confirmed by a recent episode: the aircraft carrier Roosevelt commander, *Brett Crozier*, was removed from command because he violated military secrecy by urging aid sending, faced with the spread of the coronavirus on board.

To “fight coronavirus crisis”, General Wolters has “fast-track paths through Europe’s airspace for military flights”, while civilian flights have almost disappeared.

Fast-track paths are also used by the US strategic bombers B2-Spirit for nuclear attack: on March 20, they took off from

Fairford in England, together with Norwegian F-16 fighters, they flew to the Arctic towards Russian territory. In this way – General *Basham*, deputy commander of the US Air Force in Europe – explains “we can promptly and effectively respond to threats in the region, demonstrating our determination to bring our fighting power everywhere in the world”.

While NATO is committed to „fighting coronavirus“ in Europe, two of the major European Allies, France and Great Britain, sent their warships to the Caribbean.

The amphibious assault ship *Dixmund* sailed on April 3 from Toulon to French Guiana for what President Macron calls “an unprecedented military operation”. called „Resilience“, in the framework of the “war to coronavirus”<sup>2</sup>.

*Dixmund* can perform the secondary function of hospital ship with 69 beds and 7 for intensive care. The primary role of this large ship, 200 m long and with a flight deck of 5000 m<sup>2</sup>, is that of amphibious assault: approaching the enemy coast, it attacks with dozens of helicopters and landing crafts transporting troops and armored vehicles.

Similar characteristics, albeit on a smaller scale, has the British ship RFA *Argus*, which sailed on April 2 to British Guyana<sup>3</sup>.

The two European ships will take position in the same Caribbean waters near Venezuela, where the war fleet is arriving – with the most modern coastal combat ships (also built by Italian Leonardo Company for US Navy) and thousands of

marines – sent by President *Trump* officially to stop drug trafficking.

He accuses Venezuelan President *Maduro* of “taking advantage of the coronavirus crisis to increase the drug trafficking, he finances his narco-state with”. The purpose of the operation, supported by NATO, is to strengthen the embargo tightening to economically strangle Venezuela (a country with the largest oil reserves in the world), whose situation is aggravated by the coronavirus that has started to spread.

The aim is to depose regularly elected President *Maduro* (on whose head the US has placed a \$ 15 million bounty) and to establish a government that will bring the country into the sphere of US domination<sup>4</sup>. It cannot be excluded that an incident could be caused as a pretext for the invasion of Venezuela. The coronavirus crisis creates favorable international conditions for an operation of this type, perhaps presented as “humanitarian”. •

(Translation Jean Toschi Marazzani Visconti)

Source: Il Manifesto (Italy); [www.voltairenet.org/article209678.html](http://www.voltairenet.org/article209678.html) from 10 April 2020

<sup>1</sup> “Le Docteur Folamour veille sur notre santé”, par Manlio Dinucci, Traduction Marie-Ange Patrizio, Il Manifesto (Italie), Réseau Voltaire, 27 march 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “Départ du porte-hélicoptères Dixmude vers la zone Antilles-Guyane”, *AFP*, 3 avril 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “RFA Argus sails for the Caribbean today ready to provide medical support if needed”, Save the Royal Navy, 2 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> “Pentagon refuses to kidnap Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro”, *Voltaire Network*, 6 April 2020.

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# Brexit – Back to sovereignty

Interview with Brian Denny, trade unionist from Great Britain



Brian Denny  
(picture rupture)

*The large British trade union confederation, the TUC, had spoken out against Brexit, but a large part of the membership was in favour. Brian Denny, a trade unionist in the RMT (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, with more than 80,000 members, particularly in the transport sector), takes stock.*

*Ruptures: With the corona crisis, the United Kingdom is facing its first crisis after Brexit. Is this situation being handled differently from how it would have been if the country had been a member of the European Union?*

**Brian Denny:** Brexit is a process of regaining sovereignty and independence. And in this context, the epidemic reinforces the United Kingdom's decision: it is clear that only the nation state is able to deal with this situation and organise itself in the crisis. The European Union is doing nothing because there is nothing it can do about it. Even Emmanuel Macron should recognise this. More and more Europe, more and more globalisation, fewer and fewer borders, in full awareness, one bears the full burden of any crisis by depriving oneself of the indispensable instruments for dealing with it.

*The UK government is releasing considerable financial resources to limit the impact of the pandemic. Would this have been possible before Brexit?*

The effect is psychological rather than budgetary or legal: we know that these decisions are national and therefore we are only accountable to ourselves in this situation. This is evident specifically in the Corona crisis, but even more generally at the level where the decisions for expansionary fiscal policy are taken. The government's plan seems to be to develop the economy by allocating the necessary public resources. This is the opposite of the austerity idea on which the EU insists and, more generally, of globalisation.

*Isn't it surprising that the Conservative Party, which has so far been guided by unbridled economic liberalism, is putting such a policy into action?*

It's not that surprising. Throughout their history, the Tories have sometimes shown great pragmatism and a real understanding of the situation. This pragmatism and sense of reality has now also been demonstrated in the case of Brexit: EU supporters within the Tory party have now

made it clear that the matter is closed for them – for example, the former Deputy Prime Minister under John Major, Michael Heseltine, who was one of the sharpest opponents of Brexit among the Conservatives. The people voted, and the tide has turned. You really have to be a Social Democrat to make the opposite of that ...

*In fact, this is not the attitude of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party ...*

Part of the very divided Labour Party declares that its new goal is the early return of the United Kingdom to the European Union, preferably tomorrow. That would be laughable if it were not so dramatic. These analyses are crude and extremely simplistic, they show resignation and are inappropriate. They are characteristic of a way of thinking that is ten years behind the times!

*Is it not painful for a trade unionist like you to make such a statement, which is more favourable to the Conservatives than to the Labour Party?*

Brexit has overcome the right-left cleavage from the beginning. It was always clear that we were in a major sovereignty issue that went beyond the usual positions on the political chessboard. The national interest took precedence in this issue.

*But don't you fear a difficult awakening if the government, in order to be politically successful, creates the conditions for extensive deregulation, especially of the London financial centre, without any control?*

This phenomenon of extreme liberalisation of financial activities unfortunately existed even before the Brexit in the City. The European Union has done nothing to prevent this phenomenon ... And it is indeed globalisation, which appeals so much to the social democrats – Anthony Blair was a brilliant example of this – that carries within it the idea of this unlimited and limitless expansion of financial capitalism.

*Even at the price of black money?*

In the context of globalisation, you cannot defend yourself against dirty money, it produces and spreads it. From this point of view, a strong sovereignty will prove to be much more effective. Of course, Brexit is not the solution for everything. It is a process, and it will be what we make of it. Let me add that Singapore, which is often seen as an example of deregulation, benefits from massive state intervention, contrary to popular belief. The EU also has a free trade agreement with this country.

*How is this expansive financial policy of the conservatives with massive investments, for example in public transport, experienced within the unions?*

Trade unions are not political parties. They must represent the interests of the employees. In some ways it is easier for us, it forces us to be much more pragmatic than political parties. We therefore welcome the decisions, particularly the announcement of the development of rail and bus networks. These investments are essential and nobody in the trade unions is against them. We even believe that we need to go further and that we are still too closely involved in European politics, especially in the rail sector. The link must be broken. We are in the process of regaining the leeway for a policy in favour of public transport. We must go further.

*Meaning ...?*

The UK was at the forefront of rail deregulation and privatisation in the 1980s and 1990s. The subsequent major disruptions to operations led to the reappropriation of certain lines by the public authorities: this was the case in 2018 for the London North-east Railway and the East Coast Line (linking London to Edinburgh). This opens up new perspectives.

*Ironically, companies like Eurostar could benefit from Brexit in the wake of the Corona crisis.*

This is a good example, Eurostar will need strong public support to survive the crisis. This public intervention will be all the easier in a UK driven by the Brexit mentality. We now have a greater ability to respond. The private sector will also benefit from our regained sovereignty, contrary to the views of the proponents of globalisation and the European Union.

*Among these EU supporters is the TUC, the major British trade union federation. How do the trade union leaders who were somehow surprised by the popular vote react?*

The TUC has always supported the EU project, largely without a mandate from union members. Today it is very silent, as millions of members, the basis of the trade unions, have clearly voted in favour of the country leaving the EU. The leadership is now approaching the new situation with a certain realism, but is reluctant to accept withdrawal from the EU. The apparatus is obviously not enthusiastic about the opportunity presented by Brexit ...

Source: *Ruptures* from 8 April 2020; interview by Julien Lessors

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# “It is about putting our economy on a healthy footing for the long term”

by Nicole Duprat\*, France

Nature reclaims its space and the curfew benefits the animals. We could see in different places around the globe how the plant world is recovering and getting closer, and we were often speechless.

- Dolphins swim in the Calanques (local bays) of Marseille and on the coast of Cagliari in Sardinia.
- In Venice, in the Serenissima, the water is clear again because the big ships of mass tourism have disappeared. The inhabitants of the city of the Doges could enjoy numerous swarms of fish.
- Hinds went for a walk in a city in Poland.
- In Chile, a puma ventures onto the streets.
- On the sidewalks of Paris waddling mallards can be found next to joggers.
- Through Lhanduno, in the south of Wales, a flock of beautiful goats is walking.
- To the great delight of the children, deer, which probably didn't pull Santa's sleigh, immediately made the greenery of the residential areas their breakfast table.
- In Milan, a swan has even ventured into the city centre.

The curfew has brought animals and plants back to rest, and people have more time and take their time to observe nature. The city dwellers have rediscovered the song of birds. But the birds are not more numerous, you just hear them more. Forgotten the penetrating noise of the horns! With the calm, the song thrush and the robin return to the streets and delight us every morning with their song.

The declining road and air traffic leads to less air pollution. In the capital cities, noise pollution has been reduced by 90% in some traffic arteries. Animals are recovering from the noise that humans normally make. The same applies to plants. The unmown lawn sprouts, and bumblebees, bees and butterflies can collect nectar untroubledly.

## Hymne à la Vie – Hymn to life

Et les humains demeurèrent chez eux  
Ils se mirent à lire, à jardiner, à réfléchir  
Dans l'incertitude de demain  
Ils comprirent enfin ce que signifie  
Apprécier l'instant présent  
Peu à peu les publicités vantant  
Des produits dont ils n'avaient guère  
besoin  
Leur semblèrent bien vides  
Ils commencèrent à distinguer  
L'essentiel de l'accessoire  
A relativiser leur condition  
Ils prirent conscience de leur besoin  
des autres  
Du sens du mot Humanité  
Et à voir combien ils étaient fragiles  
Ils n'étaient pas en train  
De survivre mais bien de vivre  
Ils venaient de recevoir un présent  
merveilleux  
Et précieux : on leur avait donné  
du temps  
Et la Terre les trouva digne d'elle  
Et elle commença à respirer

Nicole Duprat

And suddenly people stayed at home  
Started to read, tended the gardens,  
also contemplated  
Faced with the uncertainty of tomorrow.  
Did they finally understand the treasures  
of the  
The moment we are given today...  
Gradually faded also  
The glamour of advertisements praising  
all this  
What they didn't need and so they  
started  
To see what was essential and what was  
accessory  
Questioning their conditions  
Now, sharper came out that they  
needed the other  
What it means, the word humanity  
Even how vulnerable they were  
It wasn't just about surviving anymore  
but rather to live  
A gift had been given to them  
Wonderfully precious:  
They had time...  
And the earth deemed them worthy  
And breathed again.

Nicole Duprat

(Translation Current Concerns)

People who are not fortunate enough to live in the country realise how much they miss nature.

Being in the fresh air has become a pleasure again since the acrid smell of polluted air has disappeared. Nor have we ever had such a clear sky. The pollution has clearly decreased.

If there is one lesson we can learn from this situation (the curfew) in terms of ecological problems, it is that it only takes a few days for nature to reclaim its right - if given the opportunity.

This breeze of fresh air for fauna, flora, for our lungs and the climate must lead us to behave more reasonably.

This also means that the dream of respectful interaction in a common habitat

cannot be reduced to the simple equation that fewer people means more animals. A radical new beginning must be made in dealing with this.

Once this crisis has been overcome, it is important that we understand that it is not about reducing air pollution for a short period of time. No, it is about putting our economy on a healthy footing for the long term. •

\* Nicole Duprat (\*1955), after her university studies (law and international relations) at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Aix-en-Provence, has worked as a teacher for many years. Today she lives in Vallabrègues, a basket making village near Avignon. She is a regular contributor to *Horizons et débats*, the French edition of *Zeit-Fragen*.

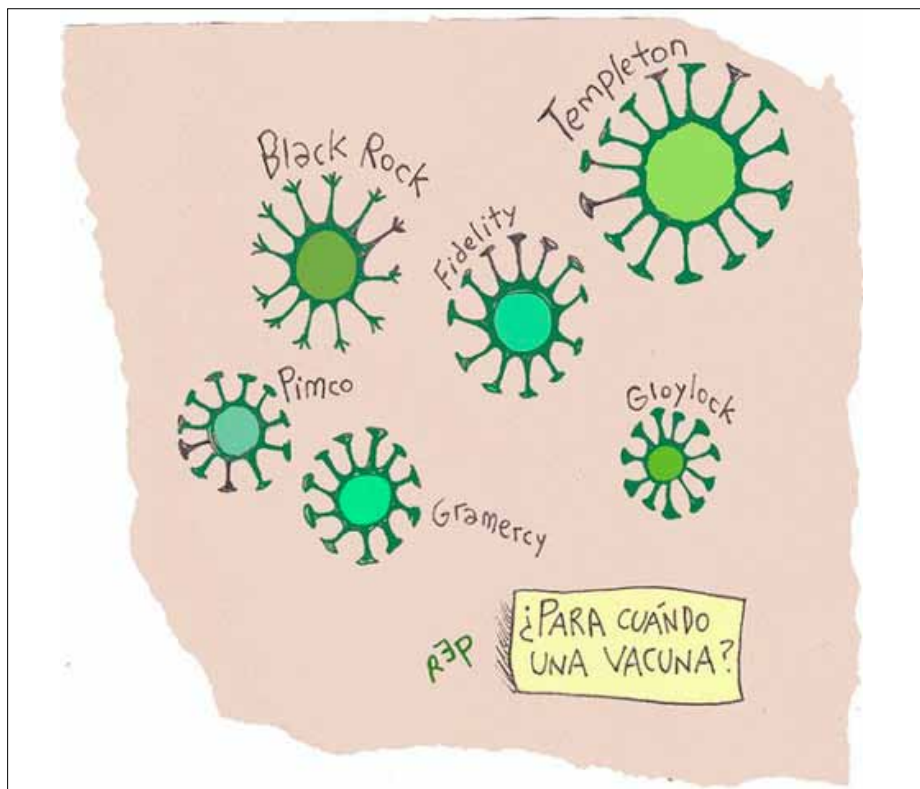
## Argentina wants debt renegotiation

gl. Once again, Argentina is on the verge of national bankruptcy. On 22 April 2020, 503 million USD were due and the country was unable to pay them. Even before the corona crisis, Argentina's foreign debt at the end of 2019 was around 280 billion USD, or 92% of GDP.

During its four-year term since 2015, the neoliberal government of *Mauricio Macri* had increased the debt by around 100 billion US dollars. The IMF has also granted Argentina the largest loan ever granted to a country: 57 billion US dollars. However, instead of investments, only speculative capital came into the country, benefiting from extremely high interest rates of over 70%. During this period, the population became impoverished once again and unemployment rose sharply.

Following the outbreak of the corona epidemic, the left-liberal government of *Alberto Fernández*, who has been in office since mid-December last year, set up an aid programme worth some USD 10 billion. It is intended to finance investments in infrastructure, cheap business loans, an increase in child benefits for poor families and an increase in the minimum pension. The 700 billion pesos printed by the central bank in March increased the money supply by around 35% in one month.

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The cartoon appeared in the Argentine newspaper "Página 12" on 26 April 2020. The text at the bottom right is translated: "And when will there be a vaccine?" The viral plague of the Argentine economy: The investment fund and capital companies mentioned here, all of them very large, belong to the Committee of Private Creditors of Argentine Public Debt (ACC), which rejected the government's offer to reschedule debt as insufficient. (picture "Página 12")

## 10-point programme for the economic transition

by Alfredo Serrano Mancilla, Guillermo Oglietti und Nicolás Oliva

gl. In the Argentinean newspaper *Página 12*, in view of the economic crisis, a proposal is presented on how to strengthen the economy of Argentina (and other Latin American countries).

In order to strengthen the economy in Latin America in the face of the pandemic, public health, wage and income policy (wages and transfers), financial policy (the role of state-owned banks and stronger and better lending to SMEs) and regulatory policy (regulation of prices and monopolies) are as urgent as necessary. They are being pursued with varying degrees of emphasis by all countries in the region and are not yet sufficient to prepare the Latin American economy for the future challenge of recovery.

The aim of this decalogue is to point out the main economic policy measures needed to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, complementing those already in place. We cannot afford to stand idly by on macroeconomic issues in this "interim period". We must therefore take immediate measures that will have a mitigating and cushioning ef-

fect and that will protect us from hostile behaviour that may arise in this context. At the same time, they should serve as a basis for strengthening the Latin American economies in the face of major challenges. Here are the 10 proposals:

- Cancellation of Latin American and Caribbean external debt to multilateral organisations and rescheduling of debt to private creditors with a two-year extension.
- Partial suspension of profit remittances, capital controls to prevent currency outflows.
- New quota policy and regulation of imports of luxury goods for the next six months.
- Regulation of the bond markets to prevent speculation and usurious profits.
- A fixed exchange rate regime that immunises economies against speculative capital movements, strengthens domestic currencies and avoids major devaluation shocks.
- Ban on the credit default swaps (CDS) market for six months.

- Suspension of all chapters of the TRIPS (Trade Law and Intellectual Property Rights) treaties relating to health and pharmaceuticals for one year.
- Creation of a solidarity tax on assets in excess of USD 500,000.
- Call for the issue of Special Drawing Rights to the International Monetary Fund, to be distributed among countries according to the severity of the economic crisis and to remain in force until countries return to GDP growth.
- In the financial system, setting a maximum difference between asset and liability interest rates of 5 per cent for six months.

The old neoliberal Washington consensus has failed in countless places and on countless occasions. In face of that, it is time to find alternative approaches to avoid another failure, both in managing the pandemic and in economic recovery.

Source: *Página 12* from 26 April 2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

**"Argentina wants debt renegotiation"**

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On 17 April the government presented foreign creditors with a proposal to restructure the debt, which for the first time is also strongly supported by the IMF. Being one of Argentina's largest creditors, the IMF also has an interest in receiving at least part of the loan. The government's

proposal provides for a very low debt cut of 5.4%, but in return for a drastic interest rate cut of 62% (the average interest rate is to be 2.33%) and a grace period of 3 years. The terms of the bonds are also to be extended. Creditors will have 20 days to comment.

Already on the following day, various investors criticised the proposal, demanding a correction. The Argentine govern-

ment is therefore now planning to introduce a special wealth tax for rich people with assets of more than 3 million USD, which is intended to raise between 2.3 and 3.8 billion USD to finance measures against the corona crisis. •

Sources: *Neues Deutschland* from 14 April 2020, *Página 12* from 17 and 18 April 2020, *amerika21* from 3 February 2020

Letter to  the Editor

## What one can learn from Fridtjof Nansen for the help against COVID-19

"In the advanced economies of the world, compassion should be a sufficient motivation to support a multilateral approach" wrote *Joseph E. Stiglitz* in *Current Concerns* No 8 of 28 April 2020. "World leaders must unite against COVID-19." He calls for economic support for developing and emerging countries which are and will be more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic than the Western world because of global economic interdependence. I find *Josef E. Stiglitz's* broad view refreshing – as he recognises the misery of the pandemic not only from the internal perspective of his country. Every individual and every state is affected by the economic and social distortions of the crisis.

Time and again, courageous people have spoken out in the wake of catastrophes in order to support the people in their misery – hunger, displacement, loss of their neighbours. After the First World War, Nobel Peace Prize winner *Fridtjof Nansen* was a model of humaneness in the way he was committed to helping people. On behalf of the League of Nations, he returned approximately half a million prisoners from the Soviet Union to their home countries. However, he was refused financial support for starvation aid to Soviet Russia by the states of the League of Nations. Nevertheless, with many private donations, he and others succeeded in saving many people from starvation. It is impressive that *Fridtjof Nansen* provided immediate quick, but he also always wanted to secure the lives of the people in the long run. Free prisoners and also secure their

independence in the future. Avert death by starvation and initiate the improvement of living conditions for later.

*Fridtjof Nansen* helped people of different religions and nationalities. One of his guiding principles was: "Charity is the only true Realpolitik."

In *Joseph E. Stiglitz's Current Concerns* portrays this compassion and this charity for the whole world. States often focus on economic action for their own country. But even before corona an economically strong, dominant West and indebted, exploited developing and emerging countries existed. Before corona, however, there were also attempts to put humanity before, not alongside the economy. *Joseph E. Stiglitz* mentions an attempt to refinance sovereign debt at the UN General Assembly in 2015 which unfortunately failed because of lack of "the necessary approval of the most important creditor countries".

Compassion is needed, not only during the pandemic, but also in the continued development towards a humane world. "You, your family, your class, your nation are but tiny parts of a greater whole. The world forgets this all too often," *Fridtjof Nansen* told students.

The roads to solidarity, which many fellow human beings are pursuing today, were presented in the last issues of *Current Concerns*. The calm tone is welcome.

*Margret Kleine-Pauli, Zurich*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Current Concerns

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# Hilde Domin – Poetess of the Nevertheless

## On the book by Ilka Scheidgen about a great humanist

by Susanne Wiesinger

The poet *Hilde Domin*, born in 1909, grew up in Cologne as Hilde Löwenstein, daughter of her Jewish parents *Löwenstein*. Her father was a lawyer and her mother a singer. Her mother performed her artistic activities only once in public. She devoted herself, as was customary at the time, as a woman to the upbringing of her two children and the household. Hilde had a younger brother and the relationship between the siblings is described as harmonious.

### Atmosphere in the parental home reason for her basic trust

Hilde Löwenstein later described the atmosphere in her parents' house as the reason for her basic trust, her confidence in people and her good and optimistic view of humanity. These qualities distinguished her from many other exiled poets, most of whom never returned to Germany.

In retrospect, Hilde Domin praised the fact that as a child she "(was allowed) to even tell the truth" and that her father told her about his court cases on long walks and seriously listened to her opinions. He took her to the theatre, to swimming and museums and discussed her school essays with her.

Hilde attended the Humanistic Girls' High School *Merlo-Mevissen* in the old town of Cologne. She could study and choose her own subjects and even switch from law to economics, sociology and philosophy. There were many subjects of which at the time the young student expected to change the world, as Ilka Scheidgen, the biographer of Hilde Domin writes (Scheidgen, p. 20).

### Exile in the Dominican Republic

As a social democrat with political sensitivity, she suspected that the Nazis would gain power in Germany. In her environment, this earned her the nickname "Cassandra". In 1932 she went into exile in Italy with her friend and later husband, the archaeology student *Erwin Walter Palm*, and from there to England. In 1940, they escaped internment there on the grounds of their German citizenship by undertaking a six-week risky sea voyage to the Dominican Republic in order to go into exile. No money or engineering diploma was required for entry there.

They arrived at a "wooden landing stage which led into the middle of a sugar field". "Here we were in a sugar field, where the sugar canes were bigger than we." (Scheidgen, p. 59) Nobody was expecting them. With a vehicle they arrived

in the capital and built up a common life as intellectuals. Erwin W. Palm as professor for the history of architecture in the Dominican Republic, Hilde as his advisor, translator and copywriter. Besides she earned some money for her living as a language teacher (Scheidgen, pp. 62).

### Continuing interest in everything new in the unknown land

It is impressive to see the great curiosity and continuing interest with which they encountered the new in the unknown country and how they soon gathered a circle of friends, exiled Spaniards, South Americans and artists from other countries. They got used to the fact that sometimes a snake stuck its head out of the bookshelf or termites eroded the books (Scheidgen, p. 68).

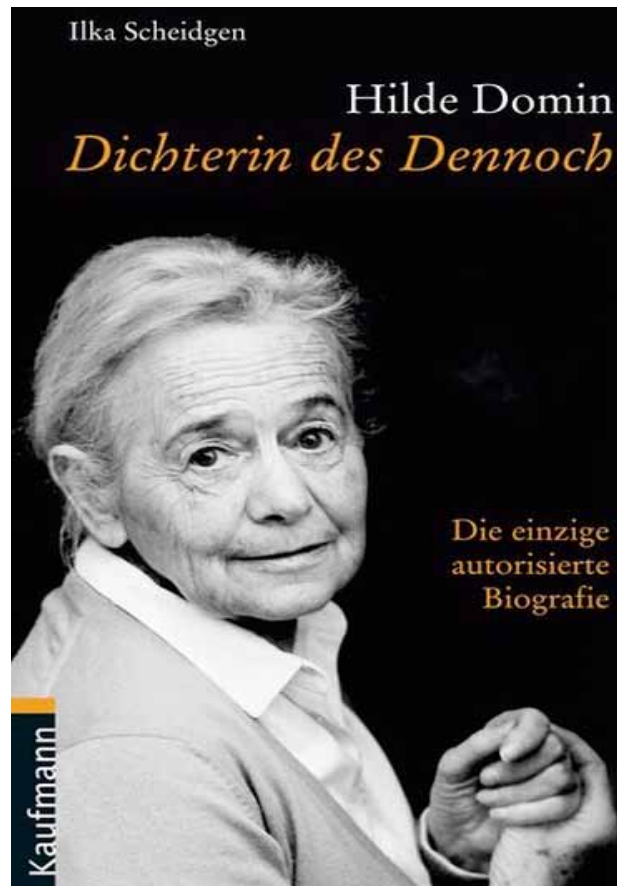
Hilde Palm vigorously supported her husband's professorship for a long time and put her own plans on hold. In 1954, Hilde Domin was shaken by the unexpected death of her mother – as a result of a shock caused by the German authorities upon withdrawal of the American passport. This loss of "My July leaves/My wind shelter/My mother" hit Hilde Domin

so hard that she fell into a major life crisis. By resorting to poetry and making reality liveable again through poetry, she escaped the psychic abyss that lay ahead of her and literally returned to life. Her self-discovery as a woman had to lead to arguments with her husband. When she showed him her first poem, he slammed the apartment door and she said to herself that it probably was a successful poem (Scheidgen, p. 78).

### Life as a poet, criticism of the Frankfurt School

Ilka Scheidgen's "only authorised biography" entitled "Hilde Domin, poetess of the Nevertheless" vividly and comprehensibly describes the poet's life, her exile and her return to Germany in 1955 and knowledgeably discusses her theoretical approaches, poetry and writing practice. The prose writings were written in the course of her confrontation with *Adorno*, *Marcuse* and Marxists such as *Lukacs* and others. In her poetics lectures at the university in Frankfurt (!), she contrasted the 68generation's claim of the "death of literature" and the "reactionary of po-

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**"Hilde Domin – Poetess of ..."**

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etry", that was despised, with her conviction of the power of poetry (Scheidgen, p. 202, p. 186). As a result of her upbringing and her attitude to life, her aim was "to strengthen the courage to live: to set a nevertheless against the fatal 'no-future' panic" (Scheidgen, S. 202).

**To strengthen courage to face live, defence of human dignity**

"In the very first reading Hilde Domin presented her belief in a positive and saving function of the poem, in as much as she had written the programmatic verses

*'This is our freedom  
calling the proper names  
fearless  
with the little voice'*

as a starting point for further reflection." (Scheidgen, p. 202/203)

Her main concern as a Jewess who experienced in an exemplary way how a human being becomes a victim from one moment to the other "condemned to helplessness" (Scheidgen, p. 167), was the defence of human dignity, "the undeletable without which life is meaningless" (Domin, quotes after Scheidgen, p. 167).

In connection with the student revolts in the 1968s and their "rehabilitation of intolerance" Hilde Domin lamented that "with the suspicion of tolerance and trust, language became suspicious, too, right down to the grammar.

It was declared a means of deception, of overreaching, in short, the 'language of the ruling class'. The discussions, the demand of the hour, were hateful and degenerated into terror of opinion. Criticism slipped into a ghostly crusaderism, which was completely in the abstract. Voluntarily and without coercion from above, the intellectuals created for themselves a quasi-totalitarian climate. (Domin, quoted after Scheidgen, p. 171)

**Do not grow weary**

Do not grow weary  
but gently  
to the wonder  
as if a bird should light  
hold out your hand.

*Hilde Domin*

**Commitment to peace and criticism of nuclear armament**

In response to the pressing question of war or peace in a Germany armed with nuclear weapons in the 1970s and 1980s, Hilde Domin wrote the poem "Abel aufstehen" (Abel arise), which she considers her most important poem. In this poem with a utopian character, the poetess makes it possible for Cain to get a second chance, "where he can say Yes, I am here, I, your brother". It is a plea for brotherly and sisterly humanity (Scheidgen, p. 164).

**Abel arise**

*Abel arise  
it must be played again  
daily it must be played again  
daily the answer must lie ahead  
the answer yes must be made possible  
if you don't arise Abel  
how shall the answer  
the only significant answer  
how shall it ever change  
we can close all churches  
abolish all law books  
in all the languages of the globe  
if only you rise  
at make it unspoken  
the first false answer  
to the only question  
that counts  
arise  
so that Cain says  
so that he may say  
I am your keeper  
Brother  
how could I not be your keeper  
[...]*

*(Translation: Agnes Stein)*

**True naming and love**

According to Scheidgen, there are "two main commandments for Hilde Domin: the true naming and love, love as a reversal of Cain's words: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'" (Scheidgen, p. 164) With the first main commandment she opposes the wrong naming, for example "pro-

tective custody" for prison or "special treatment" for murder, and refers to the Chinese philosopher Confucius: "If the language is not right, what is said is not what is meant, the works do not come into being; if the works do not come into being, justice does not come into being; if justice does not come into being, the people do not know where to put their hands and feet. Therefore, one must not tolerate arbitrariness in words. That is all that matters. (Confucius, quoted after Scheidgen, p. 151)"

**Poems, good for school lessons**

Since Hilde Domin's poems are easy to understand, they are well suited as a basis for interpretation in German lessons. In all types of schools, from high school to elementary school, students find pleasure in recasting poems like the following:

*"Abel fight  
Abel, fight for your brother  
and defeat his violence  
go against his envy  
erase the mark on his forehead.  
Abel, get up!  
erase the mark on our foreheads."*

*(Florian Kruse,  
quoted after Scheidgen, p. 196)*

Hilde Domin many a time read at schools in front of her grandchild generation and found enthusiastic readers of all ages.

When Marcel Reich-Ranicki undertook to bring the poem back to life by means of a forum in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" (*Frankfurt Anthology*), as adversary to the 68generation who disdained the poem and defamed it as "reactionary", Hilde Domin made poems available for the column in the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" since 1974.

Hilde Domin is characterised by her "tremendous courage to face life", her basic trust. In the course of publishing her poems, she acquired her artist's name as a reminiscence of the Dominican Republic, that took her in for 12 years. The primal trust was based on the experience of a generous, non-coercive parental home and on the experience that a new beginning in Germany was possible (Scheidgen, p. 194).

This courage to face life appeals to the readers and especially to young readers; in addition, the always up-to-date content of the poems which were written during confrontation with their own time. Hilde Domin's claim was to realise that life and work of a poet do not contradict each other and in this she succeeded.

*(Translation Current Concerns)*