

# Current Concerns

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## Covid-19 is a medical problem

### Plea for more objectivity, for cooperation and less ideology

Interview by Nicole Köster, *SWR 1 Leute*, with Prof. Dr med. Dr. h.c. Paul R. Vogt



Paul Robert Vogt (picture PRV)

Nicole Köster: Professor Paul Vogt, good morning.

Paul Vogt: Good morning.

Welcome to “SWR 1 Leute”. You are a heart surgeon from Zurich, so you travelled across the border last night [4 May 2020]. A brief question: What about the border controls?

No problem, ten minutes’ traffic jam, but as you had sent me a confirmation, there was no problem.

So everything went smoothly. But of course many people have concerns for when the borders will be open again, especially the citizens who live there. The politicians, on the other hand, are calling for a faster opening of the borders. Did you notice any feelings in that respect?

I think that a lifting of the lockdown is inevitable – the economy aside, nobody wants to go on like that. It is actually pretty clear that people want to visit their acquaintances, their relatives, their family members. The question is how to do that and what data we have. Can we use scientific data to predict what will happen? And actually I do not think so. We

do not know exactly what will happen in the next six, twelve, eighteen, twenty-four weeks. We need a gradual lifting of the lockdown, and then we just have to monitor what happens.

This not knowing is a big problem. You have tried to bring some order into this jungle and you are also “a concerned citizen”. In fact, under this title, under this heading, you published a guest commentary in a Swiss newspaper, the *Mittelländische Zeitung*. What happened after this article appeared?

That is a small publishing house, so that was published online; they have a maximum of maybe a few thousand clicks per day. And then they were clicked on, I think 750 thousand times in 48 hours. Then I sent two manuscripts and an interview on the first manuscript, and this was clicked on 2.5 million times in Switzerland and about 2 million times in Russian-speaking countries. I was then asked for a Spanish translation, a French translation, a Bulgarian translation, etc. and even a Chinese translation. So we delivered this too, afterwards, via my colleagues.

And in your article you expressed some criticism. What is your main criticism?

I think that if we had paid more attention and had learned something from what happened in Asia, in China, in Taiwan, in South Korea, and if we had been a bit more prepared, the pandemic would probably not have afflicted Switzerland to such an extent, probably a lockdown would not have been necessary, there would have been fewer human victims, and I think there would also have been fewer economic and financial difficulties, which are only now gradually becoming apparent.

But, as you have just said yourself, it is precisely this lack of knowledge that is such a major problem. When did you first hear about the outbreak of a dangerous new type of Sars virus?

From September onwards, I was actually continuously working in Tashkent, in Uzbekistan. We are setting up a children’s heart surgery there.

You have established a foundation.

Yes, I have. My Uzbek and Russian colleagues, who do not speak much English – I set up a library for them for heart surgery etc. – asked me in January if I could tell them something about what was going on in China. I went through the literature and looked for what was available and came across a publication by Peng Zhou from Wuhan, a virologist who presented an epidemiological study of corona viruses in bats in China in March 2019.

When I had read this paper, everything was pretty clear to me. This pandemic was predicted there, a new corona virus would soon sweep across the world; it was not possible to say exactly when, but very soon, and the hot spot was also not known exactly, but it would probably be in China. That was also explained in detail.

You say that the corona pandemic has been announced at least eight times since 2003. What about the previous announcements, were they not to be taken seriously?

I cannot say for sure, either. We have seen various pandemics “field-tested”. One is Sars<sup>1</sup> and Mers<sup>2</sup>, the two epidemics, I would say. After 2004 there were no more Sars diseases in China, which means the virus had been eradicated, which is an important message. I know that the German Bundestag simulated a corona pandemic in Germany in 2012, and in 2016 there was *Exercise Cygnus*, which simulated an influenza pandemic in London. There the result was that the NHS [National Health Service] would collapse. And that report was then withheld from the population as “classified”. There are also pandemic leaflets, guidelines that Switzerland published in 2018 – it is difficult to explain why there has been no reaction. There is this “Event 201” by Bill Gates, in which a corona pandemic was discussed worldwide at the end of 2019. There are many film excerpts on the Internet – you can read them – treating up to the economic consequences of a pandemic. And then, of course, there is the scientific work of Peng Zhou, who predicts all of this.

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*And then you came to the conclusion: It is due to a kind of Western arrogance. How are we to understand that?*

Well, I think that if you look at the commentary columns, for example, the media reports in Switzerland, too, but especially the commentary columns, they show me a bit of the atmosphere and the mood. There it says, one way or the other: "All Chinese lie", and "you cannot believe anything the Taiwanese say", "Singapore is a family dictatorship, you cannot believe anything there either". That's just a bad attitude. If, for example, China informed the WHO on 31 December 2019 – and the Chinese have installed a monitoring system for atypical pneumonia, which has been compared with that in Holland in 2017 and which works very well, this has been confirmed – and then the WHO gives, I would say, a worldwide pandemic alarm on 30 January 2020 and different countries take different precautions, you cannot close your eyes; I think you have to look at what happens and what these countries do.

*But there is also the criticism that was voiced last weekend by the five secret services: That the beginning of the pandemic was also covered up in China.*

"If I ask my colleagues or if I myself look back over 30 or 40 years: We have never seen such a great number of patients with such serious respiratory problems, where the disease attacks all the organs. In other words, this virus attacks the brain, the heart, the kidneys, the liver, the intestines and, of course, also the lungs. Never before in such numbers. We have never seen so many nurses and also the doctors fall ill in the same way as the patients they care for – despite protective measures – and then die."

No, I think the way I understand it, at first they thought it was Sars. First they had to find out that it was a new virus. It looks to me as if the Chinese are now doing research on the Corona virus in Wuhan, then a virus gets out, and then they say: "We won't say anything". But the fact is that this research on Corona viruses is a worldwide research. There are publications about it that anyone can read: in 2015, a research group in North Carolina, Jefferson, Arkansas, Harvard, together with Wuhan, together with a Swiss institute, in Bellinzona, produced a paper on how they synthetically manipulated Sars Corona viruses. Then the *National Institute of Health* in America imposed a moratorium claiming it was too dangerous to do research on Mers and Sars viruses. And this moratorium was lifted in

2017. This research is international. And also the research of *Shi Zheng-Li*, which is now of course the focus of attention in Wuhan, was supported by the Americans with millions of dollars all the way. There were foreign researchers in Wuhan; the laboratory was co-built by the French. This is not something local in Wuhan. The whole world of research was involved in the Corona research.

*So that would now mean that the criticism that the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is currently voicing is also directed at his own country's research. It is this bashing that you are ultimately criticising, because it is not getting us anywhere. So what are the ideas behind the question: How can we arrive at solutions?*

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- B) Honoured Medallist of Vasily P. Kolesov Medal, Pavlov State Medical University, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 2017 Senior Consultant + Managing Director, Department of Cardiac Surgery, University Hospital Zurich, Switzerland
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- B) Deputy Chairman, Ukrainian Children's Cardiac Center, Kyiv, Ukraine
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- 2014 Founding of IntelliStent® Ltd., Nidwalden + Swiss International Medical Group Ltd., Feusisberg, Switzerland
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*There is certainly a great deal of experience in this area, especially in science.* At the moment, there are actually two opinions: It was a laboratory virus or it was not. The active virologist community in the world, they published a paper in the Lancet, "Support of China" and of their colleagues. They are virologists from nine countries, all working at the cutting edge, and they clearly said, "This is a natural virus, it comes from nature". For me that is the virological-medical scientific message. The other is politics, and in principle you have to weigh up now: Do you now believe these Five Eyes [alliance of the secret services of the five countries USA, Great Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand]? The first thing that comes to my mind is Iraq. Or do I believe the scientific community? And I believe the scientific community here, because I do not believe that all the active world-class virologists together are cheating the world.

*How did the virus come into existence? There is much speculation about that question. We have just talked about the fact that there are 27 leading virologists from nine countries who say that there is no possibility that it was created synthetically. However, at the end of your article, you ask this question again: how did the virus come into existence in the first place? So what do we know, what do we not know?*

If you ask the leading virologists and show them the genome of the Covid virus, with those Sars corona viruses that have been experimented on – worldwide, it must be said – then they agree that these two genomes are so different that the virus does not come out of the laboratory. It is well known from 20 years of research that there are apparently thousands of different corona viruses; new ones are discovered every day, and that they can be transmitted to humans. There is a part of the population, people who live near such clusters of bats with corona viruses on them, and they have antibodies against corona viruses. And it is the diversity of genomes that tells virologists that this is a natural event, as they do happen. These viruses are all sitting on these bats – the rabies virus comes from there, the Ebola virus comes from there, and various other viruses all sit on the bats. And I actually trust what the leading virologists say: If they all agree that this is natural, then I think that is so.

*Then you dealt chronologically with many points, which are also being claimed at the moment. Let us take the first point, where it says: "This is very similar to a kind of flu."*

**Health and economy**

"In the public debate on the further course of action in the fight against the corona pandemic, the interests of health protection are often presented as being in conflict with the interests of the economy. This does not do justice to the problem-situation. If premature relaxation of restrictions led to a second wave of infection, the confidence of consumers and investors would be damaged. Many companies would have to shut down their business activities again regardless of government regulations, and the costs would be considerable. Conversely, however, an extension of the restrictions would also lead to health problems in other areas.

The aim should therefore be to make the further fight against the pandemic sustainable and to reconcile economic and health objectives in the best possible way".

*Source: Dorn, Florian; Khailaie; Sahamodin; Stöckli, Marc; Binder, Sebastian; Lange, Berit; Peichl, Andreas; Vanella, Patrizio; Wollmershäuser, Timo; Fuest; Clemens and Meyer-Herrmann, Michael: "The common interest of health and economy: A scenario receipt/recipe for stopping the Corona Pandemic. A joint-study of the ifo Institution (ifo) and the Helmholtz Center for infection research", Munich, 13 May 2020; scd-2020-digital-06-ifo-helmholtz-wirtschaft-gesundheit-corona\_1.pdf*

(Translation Current Concerns)

In my opinion, this became apparent very early on and then, as time went by, it became increasingly clear, that it was not. Of course, for the 80 to 85 per cent who have a cold for perhaps two or three days, it is a normal flu. But for the patients who are hospitalised and go to the intensive care units, the situation is completely different. If I ask my colleagues or if I myself look back over 30 or 40 years: We have never seen such a great number of patients with such serious respiratory problems, where the disease attacks all the organs. In other words, this virus attacks the brain, the heart, the kidneys, the liver, the intestines and, of course, also the lungs. Never before in such numbers. We have never seen so many nurses and also the doctors fall ill in the same way as the patients they care for – despite protective measures – and then die. There is now a study from England where over 100 carers – nurses and doctors – have also died of Covid-19. I do not remember us at the front, the people at the front, in the intensive care units, ever experiencing such a situation. And my colleagues cannot remember anything like it either. That is the one thing. The second is that it is slowly becoming apparent that there are completely different pathomechanisms; in other words, the virus leaves traces on the lungs that look as if the body is rejecting its own lungs – with the corresponding long-term consequences. In other words, it stems from the disease itself; it is a disease that we have not yet seen regarding the pathomechanism.

*A question that also arises time and again is: Should there be more autopsies?*

Of course the Italians have performed autopsies; there are also autopsy studies from America. There are histological, immuno-histochemical studies, and the picture is slowly coming together. It really is a clinical picture that we have never known in this way, yes, one must almost say in this most insidious way.

*What about the pre-existing conditions, which are so frequently mentioned?*

These so-called secondary diagnoses: I mean, if there are a hundred people in a room, and I do a whole-body MR and the complete laboratory investigation and examination of these hundred people, then I can tell you that 80 per cent will go away with three diagnoses. That is a bit like the "insanity" in modern medicine; that is one thing. The second is: If you look at the frequency of high blood pressure, diabetes etc. in comparison to the normal population of Covid patients, there are no big differences. And: I think having a so-called diagnosis does not mean that you are ill at all. That is the big difference today. It is the merit of medicine that today, even if you have two or three secondary diagnoses and many more – and we operate on patients like this – you can reach an old age with a good quality of life without any problems with such secondary diagnoses. I do not see why things should suddenly be completely different when it comes to Covid-19. From my point of view, this is a complete exaggeration concerning such secondary diagnoses.

*Different scenarios are conceivable if the virus cannot be eliminated. Let us sift through two of them. What scientists are assuming is that this virus will not disappear. So what is our best option? And what is the worst-case scenario?*

The best would have been, of course, the ambition to destroy the virus. That is the Chinese strategy. They succeeded with Sars. The Western Europeans, including Switzerland, never really had that ambition.

*Why did they not have that ambition?*

I cannot really explain why not. I mean, that is actually what you should do according to the pandemic theory: You

# Politics during crisis – crisis in politics?

## Direct democracy as an instrument to handle crises

by Dr rer. publ. Werner Wüthrich

*There is good reason, why medical issues are still in the centre of the debate around the corona crisis. But more and more politicians and commentators voice their concerns about the time after the pandemic and wonder how the economic problems and debts will be managed and which societal changes we will have to face. They compare the current situation with historical crises such as the world economic crisis of the 1930s.*

There are troubling statements: The IMF warned against “times which could become as bad as the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s”. The outgoing president of the European Central Bank, *Mario Draghi*, published an article in the “Financial Times”. In order to preserve employment and in view of the already high debts of many states he suggests to “use the money printing machine” or rather its electronic equivalent, just like one would do during a war:

“Wars – the most relevant precedent – were financed by increase in public debt. During First World War, in Italy and Germany between 6 and 15 per cent of war spending in real terms was financed from taxes. In Austria-Hungary, Russia and France, none of the continuing costs of the war paid out of taxes.” (“The Financial Times” from 25 March 2020).

### Breaking taboos

In the Swiss newspaper “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” of 11 April 2020, the financial commentator *Peter A. Fischer* wrote: “Just before Easter the British Central Bank made the surprising announcement that they would authorise the government to request money of any amount. This measure was meant to make sure the markets keep functioning. The *Bank of England* emphasizes this loan was to be repaid in total at some time. This means that for the first time in this crisis a Western central bank broke the taboo of directly financing the state.” Fischer calls this move a taboo being broken. Relying on the money printing machine becomes more and more acceptable. There is nothing new about this kind of politics, though.

“Money gluts”, in connection with soaring debts, has been around for decades – even in “good” times. The US FED and the European ECB for instance may not directly supply money to their governments, but they spend billions to buy their debts (the Treasuries in the US, for instance) and pay with the money printing machine. – Even prior to the pandemic this kind of monetary politics was both

common and controversial practice because the EU treaties prohibit such financing of states. *Mario Draghi* had announced at the beginning of the crisis that the ECB would spend 750 billion Euro to buy state debts from European governments – more than ever before.

### Constitutional Court of Germany: Casting doubts on the legitimacy of the ECB’s monetary policies

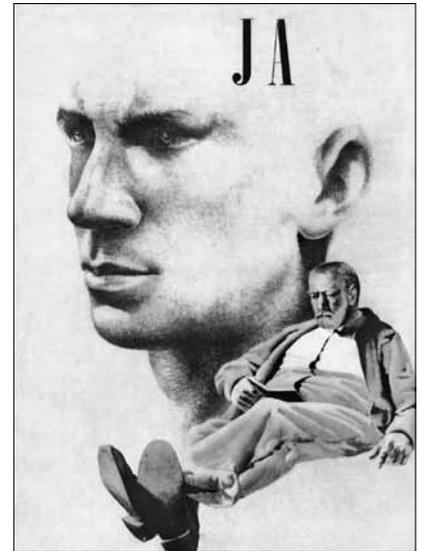
The Federal Constitutional Court of Germany (Bundesverfassungsgericht) has ruled on 5 May 2020 that the ECB’s policy to buy European government bonds was against the German constitution and prohibited the German Central Bank to participate in this programme, unless the ECB council could plausibly demonstrate within three months that the ECB’s monetary policy aims were in proportion to the associated risks (losses for private bank customers, risks of real estate or stock bubbles, low interest loans for non-viable enterprises etc.). The sentence is related to ECB government bond purchasing programmes predating the corona crisis. The constitutional judges in Karlsruhe have thereby challenged the European Constitutional Court for the first time, the highest court in the European Union, which had legitimised this practice. (see press release number 32 of 5 May 2020; see also the journal “*Finanz und Wirtschaft*” of 9 May 2020).

### War as a justification

*Mario Draghi* claims that his policies were justified because it had happened before, in war financing. This automatically raises the question, how today’s arms race and wars are financed. In view of the ever rising amounts of debts of the war waging countries, most notably the USA, the likely answer would be: probably in the same way as during First World War. Well – if the Central Bank money printing machines are already busy financing wars and arms races, the additional “corona crisis” might tip the balance of the global monetary system. There are historical precedents for this, too. – The virus has already succeeded in stopping the huge military drills of the NATO countries which had been planned to take place along the Russian border in recent weeks.

### The political alternative

Switzerland has always pursued a monetary policy of good housekeeping and continues to do so. There are enough reserves available which need to be replenished after the crisis. From this position I argue against the IMF



*Voting poster for the introduction of compulsory AHV (National oldage and survivors insurance) in 1947. (picture Hans Erni)*

and *Mario Draghi* and refer to an example from Swiss history.

The way Switzerland dealt with the economic depression of the 1930s differed from that of most other countries. Government and parliament kept close contact with the citizens who participated in the measures to counter the crisis using their rights of direct democracy. Many people thought about strategies how problems could be solved, and difficulties be eased or overcome. In hindsight it is not surprising that these years were a heyday of direct democracy in many respects. Numerous referendums helped to strengthen a spirit of cooperation among the people and the will to find constructive solutions to the problems.

### Policy of the “good house-keeper”

The policies of the Swiss government in the 1930s has been referred to by commentators as “policy of the good house-keeper”. Government made sure to make ends meet with their tax income even in those difficult times and avoid debts as much as possible. The famous economist *John Maynard Keynes* suggested exactly the opposite. Government and parliament had to rescue banks and the textile industry, had to support small businesses and the farmers – all of that with plummeting revenues. How did they pull off this feat? Several referendums showed the direction and they are worth being reviewed here.

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**People's participation unites**

When tax revenues started to plummet in 1933, the government had initially planned to reduce the wages of federal employees. Both Social Democrats and trade-unions collected more than 300,000 signatures in a short time – ten times as many as required for a referendum. More than 80% of the electorate did vote. The plans of the government were rejected by 55%.

In 1935 the trade-unions again collected more than 300,000 signatures for their crisis initiative in only three months which was meant to counter the economic crisis with new laws, rules and programmes – similar to the US president *Franklin D. Roosevelt's* New Deal which was financed by debts and the money printing machine. The initiative contained a controversial sentence, though: For at least 5 years no referendum was to be allowed on the subject. This was probably the main reason, why this popular crisis initiative was rejected by a large margin of 58% despite economic hardship. However, with 42% its approval rate was quite high, and it did influence the politics in the years to come.

Liberty, democracy, and people's rights were valuable. All together five people's initiatives were launched in the 1930s all of which aimed at putting limits to the emergency legislation (see "Emergency Law and democracy" on page 11).

In 1935 another people's initiative was voted on which aimed to establish an economic corporate state model like the one introduced in Austria at the same time. The 600 professional associations which existed then were supposed to form seven branches ("Kammern") and elect an economic council. A clear majority of voters said "No".

However, there was a consensus in 1935 that the liberal economic constitution of 1874 had to be revised. Parliament composed a draft which was ready to be voted on by 1939 (only after the war the vote took place). It maintained economic liberty but provided for many exceptions from it. Strikingly it contained elements from both people's initiatives rejected earlier: For instance the federal government was to be invested with the authority to neglect "the principle of freedom of trade and commerce if necessary" (a phrase from the crisis initiative) while countering a crisis and also the authority to declare decisions of professional and branch associations to be common binding law (from the initiative "For an economic corporate state model").

**Alternatives to the welfare state: private initiative and self-help**

At the same time parliament revised the legislation for cooperatives and many new cooperatives were founded, dedicating themselves

to self-help, private initiative, and autonomy. One example for a special cooperative founded at that time shall be described in more detail: "Farmers' supportive banks" were established in seven cantons. These agricultural cooperatives were in fact not run by farmers. In the Canton of Zurich the cantonal bank, other banks and rich private investors helped farmers overwhelmed by debt who found nobody else to support them. Noteworthy, too, is the *WIR cooperative*, which was founded by 16 small business owners in 1933. They created an economic circle and issued their own cooperative money, called the WIR. It has served not only for making payments among the members but also for interest free loans with WIR money created by the central office. It worked – and continues to do so to this day. Over the years more than 60,000 small businesses have participated (a quarter of all small and medium-sized businesses). In its heyday the central office offered interest-free loans for more than 2 billion Swiss francs in WIR (1 WIR-Franc = 1 Swiss franc). The WIR-Bank of today has developed from the former co-operative. To this day it offers loans both in WIR and in Swiss francs.

A similar example from Austria can be mentioned. In Wörgl, the municipal president *Unterguggenberger* issued municipal money as a complementary currency in 1932/33, in order to reinvigorate economic life of the town and to finance infrastructure maintenance projects. He succeeded in convincing his fellow citizens of the idea and they supported it. It worked, too, but only until the *Austrian National Bank* and the government in Vienna prohibited it after some months. The insisted on the state monopoly to issue money – unlike the WIR cooperative who not only were granted concession by the federal government but also received a bank license.

**Continuous fight against unemployment**

Discussion about the best way to fight unemployment continued after the vote on the crisis initiative. Switzerland kept maintaining the gold standard for quite some time. In 1936 the Swiss franc was devalued by 30%. The Social Democrats launched another people's initiative with 280,000 signatures in 1937, under the "National job creation programme", which they suggested should be financed by reserve assets of the national bank. However, in 1938 the German army marched into Austria and Federal Councillor *Minger* emphasised in the national defense: "To this day an isolated attack against us by a great power was unthinkable, but now we have to take such an attack into consideration as a possible scenario and should be aware that in such a case we would stand on our own." Parliament drafted an amendment to the initiative and assigned 400 mil-

lion francs, half of which was spent on job creation and the other half to buy fighter jets. The Social democrats agreed to withdraw their initiative and the people voted on the amended version of the parliament on 4 June 1939. It was accepted by an impressive 70%. Only a few weeks later the Second World War began.

**How successful had this unusual concept been to fight the economic crisis?**

Like people in all other countries the Swiss were mostly concerned about employment in the 1930s. The unemployment number rose in Switzerland from about 13,000 to 93,000 in the years prior to 1936. This was equivalent to an unemployment rate of 6% (only 2% in women) and declined again after 1936. This was much less as compared with most other European countries and the USA, the latter experiencing an increase to more than 20%, like Germany, from the beginning of the crisis (see *Halbeisen* 2012, p. 138).

Most federal budgets were in the black. In 1939 – before the war – the federation had a debt of only 1.5 billion francs, which was – considering the value of the currency at the time – much less than most other countries (*Halbeisen* 2012, p. 1106). The country was consolidated internally and well-prepared for the much more difficult times ahead. So, a different approach was possible, contrary to what most economists suggested then and still suggest today. During the Second World War debts could no longer be avoided. They rose to about 100% of the gross national product. Less than 4% of the debt was financed by a loan from the central bank – much less than during the First World War (*Halbeisen* 2012, p. 1108). Luckily for Switzerland, almost no fighting activities took place in the country.

These events illustrate how countries may differ in their political culture and in their budgeting. The same is true today – even within the euro zone (a fact which will be crucial for the future of the euro). The money printing machine – in the way and proportion Draghi suggests – is certainly no solution.

**Heyday of direct democracy during the crisis**

Strikingly, direct democracy saw a heyday during the great economic depression of all times. At no time before or after had so many signatures been collected for peoples' initiatives. Voter turnout was above 80 per cent on several occasions. Even during the war the debates continued: in 1943 – the year of the battle at Stalingrad – three peoples' initiatives about economic issues were started and two about social ones. Many citizens started to contemplate about "time after" and

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how Switzerland could be turned into a better place. The Social Democrats drafted their programme "New Switzerland". This included the people's initiative "economic reform and the rights of labour". It called for a "more systematic and planned" economic policy and suggested key branches such as big banks and assurance companies should be taken over by the state and run as a public service.

The SP was not alone. The entrepreneur *Gottlieb Duttweiler* (founder of Migros, today the biggest retail company and the biggest employer in Switzerland) had a vision, too: He transformed his stock corporation into a cooperative in 1943 and gave every customer a share as a gift. At the same time his political party, the *Landesring* (National circle), started a people's initiative with the title "Right to work". Duttweiler wanted to strengthen economic freedom and at the same time connect it with more ethical volition. "Social capital" was his battle-cry. The young farmers became active as well and started the people's initiative



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"Ground is not for gambling". Their message was that agricultural ground should belong to the farmers who groom. But there was more: Again in 1943, the *merchant's association* started a people's initiative on pensions, which paved the way to the national old age and survivors' insurance in 1948 which operates to this day. The *Catholic conservative association KKV* started their peoples' initiative "For the protection of families" in the same year. It put many aspects of family policies on the right track – to this day. Financial support for families with children was improved, the pension scheme was made more just and more equal, an insurance for mothers was initiated (subject to many more peoples' initiatives in the years to come) and a lot more. That way an atmosphere of departure was created before the war had even officially ended.

### The people pave the way towards the future

Between 1946 and 1949 numerous initiatives were voted on – firstly, about the new economic constitution (which parliament had drafted before the war). It passed and remains valid to this day. Several other initiatives from the war years were voted on. These were referendums about crucial economic and social questions. Most of them were rejected. But all of them would later influence politics in one way or another. In 1949 and 1951 there were three referendums about the Swiss franc – one about the gold backing and a peoples' initiative of the liberal socialists. All referendums put things on tracks and created necessary conditions for the social market economy in which we live today. Another remarkable vote took place about the peoples' initiative "return to direct democracy" which passed in 1949. Thereby emergency legislation was democratised. Parliament has been authorised to make urgent decisions on the federal level ever since. But within a year these decisions have to be legitimised by referendums – facultative or obligatory ones. (see "Emergency law and democracy" p. 11, for more details).

As explained above, direct democracy had its heyday during the biggest crisis. For many initiatives and referendums more than 300,000 signatures were submitted and voter turnout often was higher than

80%. Such figures have never again been achieved to this day, although the population has doubled in size since then. Cooperation between government, parliament and the people worked perfectly. Politics reflected the will of the citizens, who often differed in their political opinions just like in other countries. But the referendums had a unifying effect – despite all differences – and had a big impact so that the great difficulties could be overcome. It is certainly worthwhile to look at the significance of direct democracy for crisis management and for a liberal economic order in more detail. I encourage readers to study my book "Economy and direct democracy in Switzerland" (*Wirtschaft und direkte Demokratie in der Schweiz*) which was recently published by *Zeit-Fragen*.

### And what about today?

While there are still good enough reasons why medical issues around the pandemic are in the forefront, debates about political ways out of the crisis have already started. Many questions about the "time after" are open – not only about economic and financial consequences. *Ueli Maurer* (minister of finance in the federal government) has voiced his concerns ("*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*" of 29 April 2020). And Swiss National Bank president *Thomas Jordan* had to announce a loss of 38 billion francs in the first three months of the year due to turbulences at the global stock markets.

The events of the 1930s may not resemble the current ones exactly, conditions are different. But the examples from our Swiss history are encouraging because they illustrate how direct democracy has stood the ground especially during crisis and may contribute to a new atmosphere of departure and considerations "how to make Switzerland a better place". It is certainly worthwhile to continue cultivating direct democracy. Our grand- and great-grandparents have left a precious heritage to us. •

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# Germany should strengthen the equity capital of healthy businesses

Professor Dr Eberhard Hamer, Hanover



Eberhard Hamer  
(picture ma)

*cc. The following article takes a trenchantly critical look at the fiscal and financial measures that have been adopted and implemented in Germany in response to the corona pandemic. It is an intrinsic factor of a democracy*

*that the effectiveness and appropriateness of these measures must also be discussed publicly, and certainly controversially.*

This can help to ensure that all those responsible – and this includes us citizens – can form a clearer picture and make appropriate step by step decisions.

Germany is on the verge of a collapse of its economy and of many companies – depending on how long and to what extent the government maintains the enforced lockdown. The government has had an “aid package” of 156 billion euros approved in the Bundestag and believes that with this, it will be able to prevent the worst from happening. Unfortunately, however, it has used an unsuitable means at the wrong time and in an unsuitable manner.

The recession has been overdue for more than a decade. In economic terms, a recession serves to correct misallocations and overcapacities (bubbles), so – like winter for nature – it is a process of recovery for the economy, in order to reduce and so regress the financial bubble, the debt bubble, the stock market bubble or the real estate bubble.

Politicians have artificially prevented such a recovery process for 20 years. If they stop the start of a correction now, this is because they want to preserve the harmful bubbles and with these also unprofitable companies and overcapacities.

The federal government started its cash injection too early and thus used it in a detrimental way. The funds will fizzle out uselessly in a mere delay of the downturn. If the money were, on the other hand, to be used later, when the economic mistakes have been sweated out, it could contribute to the recovery; but this is not possible at the present time. Thus the EUR 156 billion aid package is being spent too early and therefore ineffectively. To make matters worse, the government also intends to misuse the money:

- The bulk of the aid package is again to go to the large corporations, even

though they account for only 2% of our businesses, hide their profits mainly in tax havens and over 70% of them are in foreign hands. So the German government once again wants to subsidise dividends to international capital at the German expense. Such aid is a superfluous gift to big business at the expense of all German citizens and taxpayers.

- The approximately 1.3 million standalone self-employed will be given 9,000 euros each – practically “Hartz-IV for the self-employed”. This in no way saves them from the big sieve of the market in the coming downturn, where the market will decide whether they survive self-employed or not. In practical terms, the state has thus introduced “Hartz IV for all”, the preliminary stage of the future “unconditional basic income” for all.
- Small businesses with up to 10 employees will receive a subsidy of 15,000 euros. That is the cost of three employees for one month. What is the point of this? It is not a rescue, but again only a delay of the coming market selection due to the recession.
- Who comes off the worst with this “rescue package” is the mass of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They are only offered loans, and these would increase their burden instead of reducing it. Even now, personnel companies have to pay 7% higher taxes than corporations, and of all company sizes and types, they are unfairly ripped off by having to pay the highest taxes. The loans on offer thus only delay the demise of the over-indebted companies, which will have to file for bankruptcy in the recession anyway. Good companies do not benefit from higher indebtedness, but rather from more equity capital, i.e. the “capacity building” in the form of self-financing that SME research has always called for. That is to say, the stronger the companies are financed with equity capital, the better they will survive the recession.

No other country has made such good experiences with equity capital assistance as we have. Ludwig Erhard brought about the economic miracle by considering only dividends as “profit”, i.e. by only imposing a tax on what was taken out of the business. If, on the other hand, internal surpluses were reinvested and reused for jobs, this internal use of capital was not taxed. Such “tax exemption of the profit remaining in the company” allowed companies

to grow by their own efforts, to create jobs and to bring about the German economic miracle.

After the death of *Ludwig Erhard*, the big banks ensured that not only the distributed profit, but also every calculated internal surplus and even the entrepreneur’s salary had to be taxed as profit. Since then, we have had debt financing and equity capital problems of small and medium-sized enterprises.

According to estimates by SME research, the change in the concept of profit would result in tax losses of 45 to 55 billion euros in the first three to four years – i.e. during the crisis – which is less than one third of the federal government’s rescue package. This would therefore not only be possible, but also more useful from a fiscal point of view (letting companies keep their profits instead of first taxing them and then giving them back parts of their taxes as loans) and – as the economic miracle has shown – also the most successful intervention.

If the definition of profit as distributed profits were to be reintroduced, this would lead to the following results:

- The most profitable businesses would become capable of also growing the most.
- Turnover would be used to finance higher investments, more jobs and more growth instead of taxes.
- The equity ratios of our companies would grow out of the danger zone again and companies be prepared for the crisis with equity capital.
- The determination of profits, which is now too complicated for tax purposes, would be simplified, so as to no longer depend on the amount of depreciation, the rates of offsetting, the complicated internal company processes, but only on the easily ascertainable distributed profit.
- The national distributions would have to be determined and taxed also for international groups of companies, so that they could no longer, by means of transfer prices, flee to tax havens with their profits.
- The subsidies could be cancelled (approx. 50 billion euros) – 90% of which go to the large corporations anyway.

If anything, now is the right time for the imminent correction of the concept of profit.

The political resistance to this change has so far always come from the big banks – which are now themselves in respiratory distress and preoccupied with themselves –

# Emergency law and democracy

ww. The term emergency law is often used in comments and media reports on the corona virus – as an instrument to cope with extraordinary situations as we are experiencing right now. But in the Federal Constitution this term does not exist at all. A conceptual clarification is therefore necessary. The legal basis of the emergency law nowadays is regulated in Article 165, 173 and 185 of the Federal Constitution.

## Police emergency law according to Article 173 and 185 of the Federal Constitution

Articles 173 and 185 of the Federal Constitution contain a general police clause. Both the National Council and Council of States as the legislative as well as the Federal Council as the executive authority can take measures for quick remedial action in “exceptional circumstances” as in “serious disturbances of the public order”. A pandemic is undoubtedly one of them. This clause is not new. It is already in the Federal Constitution of 1874. But the measures and programmes taken must be within the framework of the con-

## “Germany should strengthen ...”

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and from the ranks of the Social Democrats and the Left, which demonise any amount of entrepreneurial profit in any case, even at subsistence level. But their resistance should be appeased by the nationwide short-time work allowance and the “Hartz IV for self-employed persons” – both of which are a transition to the “unconditional basic income”, which they want.

*So instead of pointlessly spending the largest amount of additional debt in our post-war history on corporate and social gifts, the government should use it to strengthen the equity capital of those businesses which are healthy, as that is the only measure that would not hinder but rather promote the process of recovery from recession and at the same time strengthen the healthy businesses for the period after the crisis.*

Middle class research and some middle class associations (BVMW\*, BDS\*\* and others) have been demanding this economic miracle measure for over 50 years! •

\* The *Bundesverband mittelständische Wirtschaft* (Federal Association of the Self-employed, BVMW) is a sector-neutral representation of the interests of medium-sized businesses in Germany and represents small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed persons.

\*\* The *Bundesverband der Selbständigen* (Federal Association of the Self-employed, BDS) is a cross-industry, nationwide association with headquarters in Berlin.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Awakening begins in the mind. Will there be an atmosphere of departure or even a heyday of direct democracy – as it was the case during the difficult times of the 1930s and of the Second World War? [...] We can support the coming awakening by refocussing on the foundations of our state system and also by drawing on the experiences of previous generations.”

stitution and the legal system. The general clause does not allow new laws.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the Federal Council and the Parliament playing together in this frame: As there was no time for debates and parliamentary decisions – the councils had broken off their session – the Federal Council on 13 March issued with the COVID-19 Regulation numerous provisions and extensive support programmes. After that this happened repeatedly again. On 4 May the Parliament, in a special session, came back and confirmed or amended most of it.

Also necessary was an immediate change of the Aviation Act in order to be able to rapidly support apart alongside *Swiss* and *Edelweiss* also the flight-related companies with 600 million francs. The Parliament adjusted the law, limited it until 2025 and immediately brought it into force under the urgency procedure. This brought another article of the emergency law – Article 165 – into effect: the law comes into force immediately, but the people has the possibility to take the referendum in retrospect (which the Greens have already announced). – This part of emergency law has a longer history, which goes back to the time of the creation of the Federal Constitution and provides information on the nature of direct democracy in Switzerland.

## Urgency in the legislative procedure under Article 165 of the Federal Constitution

The 1874 Federal Constitution stated in Article 89 the by the standards of the time revolutionary sentence: “Federal laws and generally binding federal decrees that are not of an urgent nature, should moreover be presented to the people to accept or reject, if it is demanded by 30,000 Swiss citizens entitled to vote or by eight cantons”. This article should in future shape the Swiss legal system like no other. In this way 200 referendums on federal laws or federal decrees came into being. But the constitutional article from the beginning also contained a potential for conflict: Nowhere was defined what “urgent nature” means. The Parliament could decide with a simple majority, whether to

declare a law urgent and immediately put it into effect without allowing a referendum. This uncertainty existed from the beginning and should often cause unrest among the population. Questions were heard like: Why can’t we vote on it, almost every law is urgent, otherwise Parliament wouldn’t pass it? – Until the First World War the Parliament didn’t make use of this possibility.

That changed after the First World War and particularly during the bad patch of the great economic crisis of the thirties. Until the Second World War, the Parliament classed 150 temporary federal decrees (which were all of an economic nature) as urgent and thus withdrew them from the referendum. The majority of the population appreciated and accepted the extraordinary measures in the crisis because it was often a matter to help the farmers and small businesses to reduce unemployment, to save the people’s bank, to help out the watch or textile industry and such like. But the longer this condition lasted, the more the development was also critically judged because it restricted civil rights and liberties too much and interfered with federalist solutions. The then constitutional law teacher Professor *Zaccaria Giacometti* found clear words for this. He warned against the abuse of the right of emergency and spoke of “parliamentary absolutism” or even “parliamentary dictatorship”. It did not stop at skepticism: alone in the thirties, five popular initiatives were submitted which all had the target to set limits to the right of urgency (Wüthrich 2020, pp. 110–123). A group of constitutional law teachers for example suggested that a kind of constitutional court should be established which should judge whether the exclusion of the referendum really was justified or not. Two further initiatives were added after the war. – One thing quickly became clear: Not only federal decisions were urgent during the crisis, but also the desire in the population to find a solution for the emergency law which respects federalism and the civil rights and liberties.

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**"Emergency law and democracy"**

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**Power of attorney based on parliamentary decision**

During the Second World War there was another kind of emergency law. The Parliament decided on a kind of wartime mandate (proxy decision of 30 August 1939). It allowed the Federal Council to lead Switzerland at war largely without parliament. But even in this difficult time, numerous popular initiatives were submitted (see article on page 7), and there were even important referendums.

Two examples: In 1940 the people voted on a draft that would set up a far reaching military prep school for male adolescents. The people said no. In 1942 it was voted on a people's initiative of the Social Democrats SP, which demanded the popular election of the Federal Council. The SP protested that as a big party with a strong voter base, it had not yet representatives in the government. The people voted no, but a short time later – 1943 – the social democrat *Ernst Nobs*, Mayor of Zurich, was elected Federal Councillor by the Parliament.

The authority of the Federal Council went very far. In 1940 it provisionally introduced the military tax (the later direct federal tax) and in 1941 the goods turnover tax *Wust* (the later value added tax VAT). These new taxes should help to reduce the extensive precautionary and military measures. Overall, the Federal Council issued due to his power of attorney until 1945 approximately 500 federal decrees.

**Democratisation of emergency law**

After the war, on 1 June 1945, the Federal Council submitted to Parliament to remove its extraordinary powers, to grant, however, the authorisation to "exceptionally take measures that are unavoidable for the security of the country". The Parliament approved it unanimously. But not everyone agreed with this. Especially citizens from the French-speaking Switzerland (*Ligue Vaudoise*) submitted two popular initiatives: one wanted to entirely finish the power of attorney of the Federal Council. The other one was called "Return to direct democracy" and had the ambitious goal of democratising the emergency law which had worked out only insufficiently in the 1930s. *Zaccaria Giacometti*, Professor of Constitutional Law and Rector of the University of Zurich from 1952 to 1954 was involved (Wüthrich 2020, S. 175–186). The former resolved itself because "martial law" became soon obsolete in the beginning booming economy. The other was accepted by the peo-

ple in 1949. Its text is contained in Article 165 of the Federal Constitution and is applied today: Parliament can still adopt urgent legislation and set it into force immediately. But it will be voted on afterwards – optional or mandatory (if the constitutional basis is missing). – This regulation respects the rights of the people and fits into the direct democratic coined Swiss legal system. With this, a long lasting debate came to their close.

The democratised "right of emergency" was often applied. In the sixties and in the seventies the Parliament enacted eleven urgent and temporary federal decrees, all of which took effect immediately. They all were in violation of the freedom of trade and industry HGF and thus had no constitutional basis. However, they had a completely different content than the decisions which the Parliament adopted in the thirties with the objective of fighting unemployment. There was a boom now and the authorities were trying to dampen it and cool down the hot running economy. So they temporarily forbade the construction of luxurious single-family houses (in order to get free the fully stretched construction capacities for infrastructure and normal housing construction). Or they forbade to create new jobs (by ceiling the number of staff in the companies). The unemployment was 0.0 per cent, and hundreds of thousands of workers immigrated from foreign countries. The federal decrees restricted the raising of loans to discourage new investments. Or they took measures to protect the environment. Many Swiss lakes were so polluted that you no longer could swim. In addition, decisions were made to combat inflation and to protect the currency. All these federal decrees had no constitutional basis, so that it regularly came to mandatory voting within a year (see *Rhinow* 2011, S. 36–37). The people said yes eleven times and thereby bolstered the authorities. This was important because it is not easy for the authorities to make decisions in emergency situations that meet the requirements and which are also proportionately that is, do not restrict personal freedom and the democracy too much.

**Today**

In a press release on 29 April 2020, the Federal Council announced its decision from 19 April to convert into urgent federal legislation the emergency decrees it had issued to deal with the corona crisis. The consultation process is supposed to take place as early as June. The Federal Council announced to submit the message to Parliament as early as September. Its justification: "For emergency decrees based directly on the Federal Constitution, the

procedure for converting them into a parliamentary decree must be initiated after a period of validity of six months at the latest. If the Federal Council does not adopt a message within this period, the emergency decrees in question will cease to be valid and cannot be extended." According to the emergency procedure this law or these laws shall be implemented immediately. In case they lack a constitutional basis, Article 165 paragraph 3 of the Federal Constitution stipulates a mandatory or otherwise optional vote within one year afterwards (as required by the popular initiative "Return to direct democracy" of 1949).

Will the forthcoming crisis votes provide the authorities the support they need, as it was the case with the eleven votes on urgent law in the 1960s and 1970s (all of which ended with a yes)? Today's votes are likely to attract worldwide attention, as many countries are challenged to manage the consequences of the pandemic in a democratic way and to learn the lessons from it.

**Awakening?**

In 1949, the circle around *Zaccaria Giacometti* might not have imagined how much their popular initiative one day would contribute to directly involving the population in the political decision-making process, even during the crisis.

Awakening begins in the mind. Will there be an atmosphere of departure or even a heyday of direct democracy – as it was the case during the difficult times of the 1930s and of the Second World War? Proposals are still on the table today as to what we could do better in Switzerland. There are some things that we will judge somewhat differently than in the years before corona. Important referendums are already scheduled for September: The popular initiative on moderate immigration (limitation initiative) and several referendums on the procurement of combat aircraft, on paternity leave, on a new hunting law (which makes it easier to shoot wolves) and on tax deductions for children.

We can support the coming awakening by refocussing on the foundations of our state system and also by drawing on the experience of previous generations, which has ensured that politics today is so exciting and full of life. •

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**"Covid-19 is a medical problem"**

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have to try to eliminate the virus. Now we're in a situation where we do not know what is going to happen. Now we lift the lockdown; maybe the numbers go up; maybe there is another lockdown; the virus persists; maybe there are local outbreaks. We are now in a situation where we do not know what is going to happen. The best thing, of course, would be for the virus to weaken in the course of these multiple transmissions from person to person in such a way – and this can happen – that it is no longer dangerous. That would be the best; that is wishful thinking. We duck down and the virus kills itself.

*The worst thing that could happen is probably that it could mutate.*

The worst variant is if the virus is seasonal, like the flu, if it comes back mutated, in a similar pandemic wave; that would of course be the worst thing.

*Let's assume the worst case happens. What would have to be done to prepare for such a worst case scenario?*

I hope that we will then know better how to protect ourselves against such a pandemic. I mean, masks must be ready, enough disinfectant must be ready. I think tracking systems and testing must also be available and possible.

We are a technically networked world, and of course it cannot be assumed that we could control such a pandemic in today's world with the means of a thousand years ago. We must use the technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to control such pandemics in our networked world.

*Do you want a surveillance state like China?*

No, of course not. There are various tracking systems, some of which are anonymous, which simply have to be shut down again later. I think a lot of people are on Facebook these days, or iCloud, do not you? In 2016, the Swiss adopted an intelligence law that goes very far. Nobody is much worried about it. Today's youths are accused of having their data everywhere. And now, when it comes to saving several thousands of lives and fighting a pandemic, now suddenly data is so sacred. I mean, here I would expect society to show a little more unity; that is point number one.

And number two: if people agree to a tracking app and over 60% of the Swiss would do so – especially if no lockdown would then be required – then the state must be trusted to remove the tracking app afterwards or to keep it in reserve for another pandemic wave, as it were.

*We had a data protection expert as a guest yesterday: It is also argued that the co-inventor of Bluetooth says: "Bluetooth is not really set up for this. You cannot really find evidence of people having been this close. Do you think the lead in Asia in fighting the pandemic is really due to a tracking app of this kind, or what has been their main advantage?"*

I do not think there is one single measure. There are several measures – that is for certain. If you take South Korea: Nine days after the first Covid positive case the South Koreans had already distributed 700,000 masks to the sensitive areas. Two weeks after the first Covid-positive case, they already had a test that showed results within six hours. And they had the tracking system, and they reacted quickly. It is typical for a pandemic that the number of cases increases exponentially at the beginning. That means if you miss the first few weeks, you're in trouble. It takes a combination of the simple means known for a thousand years, plus the technology, plus the speed.

*You say that neither politicians nor the media, nor the majority of citizens are capable of separating ideology, politics and medicine in such a situation. How do you make out the difference?*

A lot of data on the beginning of the pandemic and also on how countries in Asia reacted can be found in scientific publications by purely Chinese authors, or by mixed Chinese and American authors. That is what you find in the US *National Library of Medicine*, and I think if you want to know something about the pandemic, you do not have to read daily newspapers, you have to read the scientific papers that have been published also by the Americans themselves in their best journals. The pandemic is a medical problem, and they cannot say that a scientific paper that is generally accepted is no good, just because it comes from China. I think they have mixed ideology and politics. China has this form of government, the Taiwanese a different one, which does not mean that medical data, interpretations and results coming from these countries are therefore not correct. I think it must be possible to discriminate, because we want to fight the pandemic, we do not want to take over another form of government. We want to fight a pandemic.

*But that would imply that, in your opinion, science has made no mistakes?*

Of course, science has needed time to find out what this thing actually is. All I can say is that, in an editorial on 6 January, *Anthony Fauci*, who also advises *Trump*, examined these Chinese scientific papers and said: Yes, they are not bad, you can see certain shortcomings, but these are

due to the fact that they do not yet know exactly what they are actually reporting on. And that is exactly the heart of the matter. And even on 6 January, he said we do not yet know exactly what is coming. I mean, this is a well-known virologist who assessed the situation in the same way. And I still think that the fact that the Chinese identified the complete genome of this virus on 7 January and communicated it to the whole world shows that they took it seriously from a scientific point of view. That is what must count for us, I think.

*After all, the information is coming in little by little, the research is ongoing. So since in science it was done in this way – what could then a policy, for example, copy from science; perhaps it is possible to learn from each other?*

Yes, of course: there is a good article in *Foreign Affairs*. I mean, *Foreign Affairs* is an international journal brought out by the *Council on Foreign Relations*, and that is, I would say, traditionally rather anti-Chinese. It's more like "America must lead again" and so on and so on. This journal also praised the Chinese scientific work on pandemic control, and even *Anthony Fauci* said there that he benefited greatly from working with his Chinese colleagues.

And there is an article which specifically mentions the excellent international cooperation at scientific level among the scientists of all these countries, and that this can be an example of how multilateral, international, bilateral cooperation should actually be in other areas too. That is what the pandemic could actually show us.

*You are very well networked with China through your foundation; you yourself have been to Wuhan. You were in China for almost a whole year. You work together with Uzbekistan, you are often there, you are sometimes in Africa – what are you ultimately learning from this networking? How should one communicate?* Well, what I am learning is that things are more complicated. That you cannot read 10 lines on something in the media and then you think you know how the world works. The problems are always more fundamental when you look closer. What of this is true anyway? Is it really like that? That's the one thing. The second is: You have to go to these countries, and you have to talk to these people. And apart from my medical work, I have somewhat made it my hobby to study these countries on a cultural, religious and political level, and you have to listen to the arguments from all sides and form your own opinion. They do not say for nothing that tra-

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velling educates. You have to talk to the people. I have also received many, many letters from business managers who work in China and in Europe, from European colleagues who run clinics in China, and all of them have told me that they cannot stand this China bashing either. I mean, this road is a dead-end, anyway.

*We are asked many questions. Mr Rolf Schmid from Winterbach asks: Why is the virus spreading pandemically worldwide, but not throughout China, but only in Wuhan? What can you tell us about that?*

It did not only spread in Hubei province and in Wuhan, but also to other Chinese provinces. But of course: the Chinese had the ambition to destroy the virus, so they imposed a curfew and actually closed the border. But they could not prevent it completely. For example, in the neighbouring province of Anhui, which also has over 60 million inhabitants, there were 995 positives and 6 deaths. That means that the measures have taken effect. Now there has been a recent outbreak in Harbin again, and they say that is because of the people returning to China and bringing the virus back. When they get to China, they have to spend 28 days in quarantine. I have mentioned the Chinese strategy, but it is questionable whether it is really possible to eliminate Covid like Sars. There are the Italians who think that, firstly, we cannot eliminate it and, secondly, herd immunity will not be an issue either, because that will take too long. We must have a vaccination or antibodies.

*And that may take time. Per WhatsApp Bärbel asks: How does a dictatorship work compared to us? Is it right that the people in Vietnam can protect themselves better?*

Yes, this is exactly this confounding of politics and medicine again. Of course, the Asian states are more collectively organised than we are; we place much more value on individual freedom. But perhaps we should also be prepared, if there is a state of emergency, to restrict this temporarily.

*Fundamental rights, but they have already been restricted.*

Yes, I think so. There is individual freedom, and there are social obligations. In the event of a pandemic, we may have to rebalance these for a certain period of time. It is of course the case that centralised monitoring will make it easier to combat this pandemic. But I can simply tell you: It did not take a Covid for the NSA to intercept your Chancellor's mobile phone, nor did it take a Covid to in-

"Whether herd immunity works is questionable for a disease, of which we do not know the acute damage, but neither the long-term consequences: And there are now more and more reports saying that younger people who have survived Covid-19 will have severe long-term damage to the lungs."

roduce facial recognition. Interestingly, these measures have made pandemic control easier, but I think you do not have to look to Asia in order to adopt a form of government – you have to look to Asia because you want to solve a medical problem.

*And there are other countries that deal with Covid differently. Frank Hoffmann from Weil im Schönbuch inquires: Do you know why it seems to work differently in Sweden and do you have information from other countries, for example Belarus?*

I have no information from Belarus. They simply do not know the numbers there, and I cannot say anything about it. In Sweden, they have a population about 1.5 to 2 million larger than that of Austria, but they have four to five times more fatalities than Austria. That is the one thing. They also initiated measures: Larger groups were not allowed to meet. It is not that they did nothing. Whether herd immunity works is questionable for a disease, of which we do not know the acute damage, but neither the long-term consequences: And there are now more and more reports saying that younger people who have survived Covid-19 will have severe long-term damage to the lungs. To be sure, they do not have symptoms when at rest, but under physical stress they have difficulty breathing. It is not known how many young people will suffer from such severe long-term damage.

*When we talk about a return to what we perceive as normal, there are still a great many uncertainties. Keyword: active infestation: You comment on it and say the whole thing is a "pipe dream". Why?*

Yes, that was the idea, that of actively, let's say, infecting the so-called low risk group. In my opinion, this is nonsense. First of all, you do not know the acute dangers or the long-term damage; they are only now coming to light – slowly. After all, with an active infestation you are multiplying the mass of viruses. And the more viruses you have, the higher the probability of mutation and the greater the probability that the virus can adapt to humans and become even more aggressive. This means that you actually have to limit the mass of viruses. It was also typical that in the Spanish flu, the second wave was much more damaging, much deadlier, because the virus had adapted to humans. This means

that you must reduce the amount of virus and not increase it by actively infecting people. We have no idea what that could mean. I mean, an infestation was actually the first medical recommendation on how to treat a pandemic in Switzerland, to the government and the media, and it came from an economist; and I think of course that is a joke, the first recommendation should come from the medical profession – and right at the beginning.

*But it is of course all the more important now that there should be further understanding between medicine, politics and business. The voices are getting louder that the lockdown must be relaxed. So what can good communication look like?*

Yes, of course, I have also written that the lifting of the lockdown is inevitable; nobody wants to live like that. There is something I am starting to realise: I have the impression that in Switzerland, medicine is seen as an impediment for the lifting of the lockdown; people are saying, yes, if we did not have it, the doctors so to speak, we would have been out of the lockdown long ago. And I think this kind of confrontation is very bad. Cooperation did not take place at the beginning, but it should take place now. The task of medicine is to provide the decision-makers in politics with the data and recommend measures that can guarantee the safest possible exit from the lockdown, which means that we have to work closely together.

*Since 80 per cent of infections are symptom-free at first, the German Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, said that antibody tests are important in order to find out whether or not I have already had the virus. How useful are such tests?*

There are, of course, over 80 antibody tests, but too little is known about their reliability. I know that the group that is doing research in Rotterdam, Hanover, but also in China, that developed antibodies against Sars, tested these antibodies in vitro against Covid, and they worked. And they are now evaluating them in animal experiments. Of course antibodies would be a blessing. There is now a new Israeli group that claims they have found these antibodies. Regardless of whether it is a vaccination, antibodies, whatever, I think a certain amount of time will pass before millions or billions of people have actual-

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**"Covid-19 is a medical problem"**

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ly been given the appropriate treatment – despite of everything.

*But the plans are already on hand, 3 million such tests are to be delivered this month, and from June onwards 5 million per month. Does that make sense right now?*

I think so. I mean, if you can speed up this development and also prove through good medical studies that it works, you can only say, the faster the better.

*You have four guest professorships in China, you know Wuhan well, and in 2006 you already established a voluntary foundation. What actually brought you to China?*

I worked at the University Hospital of Zurich, in the field of heart surgery, for 10 years, and in 1999 I spent a year with a visiting doctor from Wuhan. He invited me to give a lecture in Wuhan at the end of 2000. He told me to bring my magnifying glasses. I performed some simple operations, which were transmitted to the next room by video, which I only saw at the end of the operation. There were many chief surgeons from surrounding university hospitals sitting there. Then I received one invitation after another to perform operations in China, publicly. I then came to Vietnam by word of mouth, to Ho Chi Minh City. There they showed me a waiting list of 8,500 children who essentially could not get operations. There were three or four of them to a bed. I still have the video today. So I said, "You have to do something." And it was the Vietnamese who then asked if more people could come from Europe to Asia to train them on their patients with the means they had available.

And so we came to go from one country to another. We were active in 14 countries in Eurasia and in Africa, there in Er-

"There is an article which specifically mentions the excellent international cooperation at scientific level among the scientists of all these countries, and that this can be an example of how multilateral, international, bilateral cooperation should actually be in other areas too. That is what the pandemic could actually show us."

itrea, and we are now mainly active in Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Myanmar. I am also in China every year. And so far we have performed about 4,500 operations on children and adults and treated about 22,000 patients. But of course the main focus is on the training and education of our colleagues in these countries.

*So you are well networked. The question always arises, of course, how such a voluntary foundation is financed?*

Actually from interested private individuals, many of my patients whom I have operated on in Switzerland have donated to the foundation; for many years these were the main sponsors. Then we also have institutions, companies and firms in Switzerland. We also try to encourage people in these countries themselves to invest in their own health care systems. We say that new clinics are needed or that the clinic needs to be better equipped. You have the money for that, finance that, and then we will bring in what they cannot buy with their millions and billions, that is how it is done, and direct assistance at the operating table, one-to-one teaching also in intensive care, in cardiology and also in other subjects.

*Hence your comprehensive view. Now, when they published your guest commentary in the "Mittelländische Zeitung", what surprised you most about the reactions?*

What surprised me the most was that so many people wrote to me that they finally knew what this pandemic was, that here was the much hoped-for information – that

was what surprised me the most. That was the main tenor. When I think how many articles a day are published in our media about this pandemic, it really surprised me that people felt they were so badly informed. That is one thing, and the second thing was that most people agreed that our politics should rely on tolerance and mutual understanding. That this road, how shall I say, "we are the good guys and they are the bad", is not a road leading anywhere.

*Were there any reactions on the part of politicians? Did the Swiss Federal Council ask you to join their team of experts?*

I received a letter from our Federal Council after the first manuscript, and they said they would look at this manuscript and they would deal with my critical remarks. Yes, I got that.

*Thank you very much, Professor Vogt, for your visit to "SWR1 Leute". Your guest commentary will also be published with lots of information added. It is really worth reading. We are deeply grateful. Much obliged.*

- <sup>1</sup> SARS: "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome". The first cases occurred in November 2002 in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong with a novel infectious agent (SARS corona virus), which causes atypical pneumonia in humans with a severe, often fatal progression.
- <sup>2</sup> MERS-CoV: "Middle East Respiratory Syndrome - related coronavirus" is a virus from the corona virus family, first identified in 2012, which can cause severe respiratory infection, pneumonia and kidney failure in humans.

Source: "SWR1 Leute" from 5 May 2020

(Translation Current Concerns)

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## 75 years after May 1945 – more questions than answers

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht in the Second World War has given rise to numerous statements and analyses worldwide. This is no surprise. The topics and questions concerning the history of the Second World War, its causes, course and end, as well as its significance for post-war history and for our present are highly diverse and complex. As a rule, it is the perspective that determines what is picked out of the diversity. Also the following article can touch only a few aspects. Aspects which seem particularly important to the author today. There is no need to emphasise here that it is always a blessing when an inhuman political system such as the National Socialist regime comes to an end and when wars can be ended.

Searching in Wikipedia for “Bedingungslose Kapitulation der Wehrmacht” [Unconditional Surrender of the Wehrmacht], one finds the following entry at the beginning of the detailed article: “The unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht was a declaration of the Wehrmacht at the end of the Second World War. It contained the agreement to end the combat operations against the Allied forces. The capitulation was signed in the night of 7 May 1945 in the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Reims after unsuccessful attempts for negotiations from the German side on 6 May and came into force on 8 May. It marked the end of hostilities between the National Socialist German Reich and the Allies. Some German units, however, continued with combat operations against Soviet troops. In order to ensure that the capitulation was also signed by the commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht, *Wilhelm Keitel*, and the chiefs of the German navy and air force, it was agreed to ratify it. The German delegation flown in from Flensburg signed the document of surrender on 8/9 May at Red Army headquarters in Berlin-Karlshorst.”

These few sentences alone give rise to interesting questions. After *Adolf Hitler* himself had taken his own life in the “Führerbunker” (air raid shelter used by Hitler during Second World War as headquarters) in Berlin on 30 April 1945 and the new leadership of the Reich had moved from Berlin to Flensburg, the Wehrmacht leadership apparently believed until 6 May that they could “negotiate” with the Western powers (USA, Great Britain and France) and come to a separate agreement.

### “Let us work for peace”

What is asked of young people today is this:

do not let yourselves be forced into enmity and hatred of other people,  
of Russians or Americans,  
Jews or Turks,  
of alternatives or conservatives,  
blacks or whites.

Learn to live together, not in opposition to each other.

As democratically elected politicians, we, too, should heed this time and again and set a good example.

Let us honour freedom.

Let us work for peace.

Let us respect the rule of law.

Let us be true to our own conception of justice.

On this 8 May, let us face up as well as we can to the truth.

*This was how Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker concluded his speech on 8 May 1985.*

### Why did parts of the Wehrmacht leadership believe that they could continue the war against the Soviet Union?

The Western Powers did not discuss this, just like it had been agreed upon beforehand in the conferences of Germany’s opponents. They demanded “unconditional surrender”. In view of the obvious military defeat, this was signed on 7 May by Colonel General *Alfred Jodl*, the head of the Wehrmacht command staff, at the headquarters of the Western Allies – but not by all commanders of the armed forces. And: “Some German units continued the fighting against Soviet troops [...]” And: The leadership of the Red Army demanded a ratification of the surrender by the commanders of all German units. It was no longer Jodl, but General Field Marshal *Wilhelm Keitel*, Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, who headed the German delegation that signed the second instrument of surrender on 8/9 May 1945 at Red Army headquarters.

How are these individual events connected? What led parts of the Wehrmacht to believe that they could end the war with the Western powers but continue the war against the Soviet Union? In May 1945, the idea turned out to be a phantasm – especially the Commander of Allied forces and later US President *Dwight D. Eisenhower* was strictly against it; for he felt obliged to the results of the previous conferences of the Allies. Nonetheless, at the end of the war, leading circles in National Socialist Germany obviously thought mistakenly that they could gain support from the Western powers

in the war against the “Bolshevik” Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

### Is history used as a weapon to fight conflicts of the present?

*Alexander Rahr* worked for the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik* [German Council on Foreign Relations] (DGAP) for 18 years and until 2012 was programme director of the society’s *Berthold Beitz* Centre, focusing his work on Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Central Asia. From 2004 to 2015 he sat on the Steering Committee of the *Petersburg Dialogue*, a high-ranking regular meeting of representatives from politics, business and society from Germany and Russia. Since 2012 he has been project manager of the *German-Russian Forum*. There he is in charge of the *Potsdam meetings* and the working group *Common Region Lisbon-Vladivostok*. 2012–2015 he was advisor to the President of the *German-Russian Chamber of Commerce Abroad*. He is a member of the Russian *Valdai Club*. Since 2014 he was deputy chairman, then member of the advisory board of the *Association of the Russian Economy* in Germany. Since 2015 he has been an advisor for EU affairs of *Gazprom* in Brussels. He is the author of numerous books on Russia, including a biography of *Mikhail Gorbachev* (1985) and one of *Vladimir Putin* (2000). An interview with *Alexander Rahr* was published in May 2012 in the Russian newspaper “*Komsomolskaya Pravda*”. Several of his statements have triggered sharp reactions in Germany. For example he had said: “The Americans amputated

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**"75 years after May 1945 – ..."**

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the Germans' brains." Or: "The West is behaving like the Soviet Union".

In view of the seventy-fifth anniversary of 8/9 May 1945 he published a new book: "Der 8. Mai. Die Geschichte eines Tages" [8 May – The History of a Day]. In this book, contemporary witnesses – German, American and Russian – who personally experienced 8 May 1945 have their say. They tell of their experiences at that time.

In an interview with the Russian website *Sputnik* on 8 May 2020, Alexander Rahr is asked about the fact that Russia is accused of instrumentalising history. He answers: "8 May, or 9 May for Russia, is forever part of the historical memory of mankind. At that time a new world began. Today this day is unfortunately being instrumentalised – on both sides. History is used as a weapon to fight out conflicts of the present. It's frightening".

**Did the Americans prevent a common historical narrative?**

Further down in the interview, Rahr becomes more precise: "One should have developed a common historical narrative in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when East and West were in each other's arms. Actually, Western Europe and Russia were prepared to do this. But unfortunately the Americans came in our way, who, for geopolitical reasons, began to stir up conflict in Europe with Russia, to expand NATO eastwards and thus to keep a hold on Europe's security policy".

Indeed, the focus on Second World War, intensified since the escalation of the conflict between Russia and the USA, has become the subject of intense political debate. Politics wants to define what has happened in history. The US government has positioned itself, the EU and especially the governments of some Central and Eastern European EU members have also positioned themselves – and representatives of Russia have done so as well.

*Sergey J. Nechayev*, the Russian Federation's ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, made another statement on 8 May 2020 in the German newspaper "Junge Welt": "We must note with regret that recently there has been a growing number of political forces raising their heads which want to radically revise the causes, progress and results of the war, question the decisive contribution of the Red Army and the Soviet people to the victory over Nazism and blame the Soviet Union for unleashing the conflict. These forces set themselves the goal of rewriting history, they do not stop at lies and forgeries, nor do they stop at demolishing monuments and memorials to Soviet soldiers." (Translation *Current Concerns*).

Whoever reads the public speeches and statements 75 years after the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht cannot help but feel that history is indeed looking for arguments for the politics of the present. This is not to be rejected on principle, especially not when politics serves the people – and if it does not bend the truth. But that is not always the case.

**Is Germany's tie to the US really a good thing?**

Here are just two examples of many: The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" published an interview with the German historian *Heinrich August Winkler* on 8 May 2020. He argues that Germany's tie to the West, to the US – of West Germany before 1990 and of Germany as a whole after 1990 – was the most important lesson of the World War. He also quotes *Jürgen Habermas*, who in 1986 wrote (mutatis mutandis) that "the opening of the Federal Republic to the culture of the West was the most important intellectual achievement of his generation". The "success of the second German democracy", according to Winkler, had "a lot to do with the fact that democracy in the Federal Republic, unlike in the Weimar Republic, was in many ways deliberately oriented towards the example of Anglo-Saxon democracy". On the other hand, Winkler also said that "in parts of the East German population [...] the older, German-national view of history was able to live on unchallenged". The result: "This is why the AfD [the political party Alternative for Germany] is relatively strong in the East: it appeals to an attitude of German-national defiance." Winkler calls for "ethics of responsibility" in dealing with Russia: For this reason, "neither in the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia nor anywhere else in eastern Central Europe should the impression be given that we are making decisions with Russia over the heads of these countries". Winkler adopts the narrative style of the governments of these states, which is rejected by the Russian side: "Before the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany in 1941, it was a partner of the German aggressor through the *Hitler-Stalin Pact* of 1939. The memory of that pact continues to haunt our neighbouring countries".

There would be a lot to say about Heinrich August Winkler's position. Here only so much: A price of Germany's "ties with the West", its membership in NATO, has led to the fact that Germany today is involved in armed conflicts worldwide and, in 1999, with the war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, for the first time since the Second World War, was again involved in a war of aggression in Europe in violation of international law – accord-

ing to the Nuremberg Trials of 1946 the most serious of all war crimes. In his classic from 1997, "The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives", *Zbigniew Brzezinski* has openly described the means by which the USA has maintained its hegemony and the vassal status of its allies in Europe. Germany had declared this status as a reason of state.

**Is the EU a peace project?**

The second example is the speech of the German Federal President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* on the "75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War", which he gave in Berlin on 8 May. The Federal President also mentioned his lessons from the war. He took up the widespread German formula after the end of the war, "Never again war", but shortened it to the two words "Never again" and then said: "But for us Germans in particular this 'never again' means 'never again alone'. And this sentence is nowhere so true as in Europe. We must keep Europe together. We must think, feel and act as Europeans. If we do not hold Europe together, also during and after this pandemic, then we will have shown ourselves not to be worthy of 8 May. If Europe fails, the 'never again' also fails". Shortly afterwards he also made it clear what he does not want: "Today, we must liberate ourselves. Liberate ourselves from the temptations of a new brand of nationalism". The President has chosen a florid language. Most likely, by "Europe" he means the EU. What exactly he means by "nationalism" remains open. Does he also mean those who stick to the idea of sovereign, free and democratic European nation and constitutional states? Here it must be remembered that the supranational Europe that emerged after 1945, from the *European Coal and Steel Community* in 1952 to the *European Community* EC founded in 1967, from which the *European Union* EU developed in 1993, while it was associated by some with the idea of peace, was essentially a product of the Cold War and distrust of Germany. It was the EU which, with its eastward expansion (following NATO's eastward expansion) after 1990 and then, above all, with its association agreements with Eastern European states such as Ukraine, helped to provoke the conflict with Russia. The Federal President is omitting facts which he himself was involved in.

**Are there lessons after May 1945?**

Are there serious lessons from May 1945 that have actually been learned? The answer cannot be one-dimensional. It is bet-

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## “75 years after May 1945 – ...”

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ter to speak of a scale. In the one pan are the countless wars after 1945 – the list is very long<sup>2</sup>, and these wars have cost the lives of at least 25 million people worldwide. In this pan lie the many international crises and conflicts, many of them still unresolved today, the hegemonic aspirations of great powers, an unjust world economic and financial order, today’s war propaganda, enemy images, prejudices, computerised war “games”, mental neglect and everyday violence.

But there is also the other bowl: the attempts to codify international relations in international law, the essential substantive provisions of the UN Charter – above all the sentence in the preamble: “We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ...”. In this bowl we find the international human rights pacts, the attempts to build a culture of peace, equality and international understanding worldwide, the many approaches to peace education for the young generation. This bowl contains the knowledge of human social nature.

To which side the scales tilt is decided anew every day.



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## “I know war. This is why I want peace”

Franz Josef Strauss, frequently attacked, wrote in his memoirs: “I know war. This is why I want peace”<sup>3</sup>. One should have believed him. Just like many other personalities from the war generation who took on responsibility after the war: in business and society, but also in politics. Especially in Germany in the West and East. Many of those born after the war did not do justice to their parents. They saw themselves as something better, only to take part in new wars again after 1990 without sufficient immune defence. This is no less true for those people who still find it difficult to admit to German injustice in war.

### Still many research questions

The scientific research results on the causes, the course and the consequences of the Second World War fill entire libraries. Nevertheless many questions are still unanswered. It is to be hoped that all archives will be opened, that all questions will be dealt with in a dignified and objective manner and that research can be depoliticised to a certain extent. Politics will probably decide whether, how and when this is possible.

Certainly correct is the decisive conclusion of the survivors after the war: “Never again war!” But this is actually true even before a war and should have been a guiding principle for all people throughout human history. Even today we are still far from this. The reasons for this are manifold. The problem of striving for power is probably the central problem. This cannot be pointed out often enough. But humanity can also work on the solution of this problem.

<sup>1</sup> In this context, passages such as the following from an article by the historian *Ulrich Schlie* published in the German journal *Cicero* on 8 May 2020 with the title “Kriegsende am 8. Mai 1945 – Die Geschichte kennt keine Stunde Null” (End of the war on 8 May 1945 – History does not know a zero hour) are interesting: “Never have tensions in American-Soviet relations been greater than in April and May 1945. Molotov had paralysed the San Francisco Conference, which had been in session since 25 April by his inflexible stance, insisting on the demand for a Soviet veto and on voting in the Security Council. Only when Truman sent the former

Roosevelt confidant Harry Hopkins to Moscow for negotiations from 26 May to 6 June did he succeed in overcoming the deadlock in Soviet-US relations. (<https://www.cicero.de/kultur/kriegsende-1945-achter-mai-zweiter-weltkrieg-nationalsozialismus-geschichte-stunde-null>) An overview of the (all failed) German attempts to come to an agreement with the Western powers – directed against the Soviet Union – before the end of the war in 1945 can be found in an article by *Hansjakob Stehle*, “Deutsche Friedensfühler bei den Westmächten im Februar/März 1945” (German peace sensors among the Western powers in February/March 1945), in the *Quarterly Bulletins of Contemporary History*, issue 3/1982, published by the Munich Institute of Contemporary History.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline\\_of\\_war#Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_war#Wars)

<sup>3</sup> Strauss, Franz Josef. *Die Erinnerungen* (The memoirs). Siedler Verlag Berlin 1999, p. 42

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75 years after 8/9 May 1945

## Reminder for the future

### Moving rally of Russian fellow citizens for peace

by Marion and Christian Fischer, Cologne

The 8/9 May 2020 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. Although German politicians and the media did not ignore this event, the contribution made to it by the Soviet Union, the Russian people and the other peoples of this state was hardly appreciated. Unfortunately, it is left to small, active groups who do not want to accept the unworthy forgetting of history.

In Cologne – despite corona restrictions – a rally was held on 9 May at the Heumarkt, in the centre of the city, in which about 60 people took part at defined distances. It was the only Russian event in Germany on this day. In Düsseldorf there was a small memorial event in honor of Russian forced laborers, which had been organized by DFG-VK (*German Peace Society – United War Service Opponents*),

VVN-BDA (*Association of Persecuted Persons of the Nazi Regime – Association of Anti-Fascists*); Russians also took part. The organiser in Cologne was the Russian group “Reminder for the Future” or “Immortal Regiment”, a civil society movement founded in Russia and dedicated to the remembrance and honoring of the fall-

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## For a dialogue with russia

Speech by Eva Aras, Chairwoman of the Town Twinning Association Cologne-Volgograd, on 9 May 2020 (extract)

Dear citizens,  
dear friends

I welcome you and am pleased to be able to speak at the manifestation on the 75th anniversary of the Victory over National Socialism and Fascism. The 8th and 9th of May are dates of crucial importance for Europe, as they marked the end of the Second World War, which was cruel for all involved. At the same time, it also meant “liberation from the system of inhuman National Socialist tyranny” - as former German President *Richard von Weizsäcker* called it in his 1985 speech. The Soviet Union was invaded by Germany and 27 million citizens were killed. Did you know that this is almost half of all the victims in World War II? The Soviet Union bore the brunt. We Germans are infinitely grateful to them for having persevered in this war and for having liberated us from National Socialism together with the other Allies. Unfortunately, however, this gratitude is hardly noticeable, especially from our government.

- So the German side did not respond to Russia’s invitation to participate in the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War.
- neither *Putin* was invited to the D-Day in Normandy in June 2019 nor to the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz, whereby the liberation was an act of Soviet soldiers.

This is a disgrace – as the historian *Götz Aly* calls it – which is passed over wordlessly. The intention here is not a critical examination of *Putin*, but the appreciation of an entire people who have made a significant contribution to liberation from fascism.

But what can we do? In this political situation we can, as civil society, at least at the lower level, maintain understanding with Russia.

Our association has been doing this for 31 years. We support projects, especially the aid project for former forced labourers in Volgograd, which we have been promoting for 18 years; we organise regular trips to Volgograd. And each time we are overwhelmed by the wave of sympathy we encounter there: in the former Stalingrad, which was razed to the ground by Germans, everyone is so warm, open and hospitable towards us that we are almost ashamed of it. Despite its hostile attitude towards Russia, Germany has a high level of recognition and appreciation among the Russian population. We encounter this time and again. One loves German culture. So in the Hall of Fame in the large monument “The Motherland Calls” the “*Träumerei*” (dreamery) by *Schumann* is played.

The former Lord Mayor of Volgograd, *Jurij Starovatykh*, who founded

the city partnership Cologne-Volgograd with *Norbert Burger* 32 years ago, always uses the term “people’s diplomacy”: The big ones do their politics at the top, and we at the bottom simply keep in touch with each other, meet each other and find out how much we have in common.

Thus, the town twinning between Cologne and Volgograd can be seen as a mosaic stone that brings people closer and allows them to live together in peace and friendship.

But we do not want to stay there.

Thank God, there are always voices in our republic that refer to the Ostpolitik of *Willy Brandt* and *Egon Bahr* and advocate a dialogue with Russia. For some years now, together with other groups in Cologne, we have made it our task to strengthen such voices. [...]



Eva Aras during her speech on 8/9 May. (Picture mf)

## German-Russian town twinning – ambassadors of peace

*Letter of the German-Russian Forum to the Russian cities, municipalities and regions of the German-Russian partnership work*

ef. In commemoration of the end of the war 75 years ago, the German-Russian Forum on 8 and 9 May launched numerous commemoration initiatives to remind people of the importance of understanding and cooperation for a common future in Europe. Chairman Matthias Platzeck said in his video message: “Like no other nation, we have been given the assignment of seeking ways of understanding and reconciliation in order to preserve peace – also and especially again in this day and age.” German and Russian representatives from politics, society and science recalled with messages about the war that brought unspeakable suffering to mankind. The peoples of the Soviet Union – Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians and others – had to pay a particularly high toll of lives. Under the patronage of the foreign ministers of Russia and Germany, artists from Russia, Germany and the USA sent out a joint peace signal with a video concert containing works, among others, from Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky in Berlin, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Particularly in times of political tensions, town twinning is a pillar of German-Russian relations, because active civic involvement unites, reconciles and befriends people. The call of the German-Russian Forum to send a sign of solidarity to the Russian partner municipalities and their citizens, also in Corona times, was joined by more than 100 representatives of German cities, municipalities and districts as well as representatives of various initiatives and associations. The appeal, which reminds us that town twinnings are ambassadors for peace, is published in full.

“The Corona pandemic today reminds us once again how closely we are all linked together in one world. The crisis reminds us Germans 30 years after the unity of



*Silent commemoration at the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin.  
(picture German-Russian Forum)*

our nation and 75 years after the end of the war how much we in Europe are committed to solidarity. We, representatives of German cities, municipalities and districts, of initiatives, societies and associations that are in partnership with you, would like to declare our solidarity to you during this time of challenges.

These days our countries are celebrating the end of the Second World War. The date means a lot to all of us. 9 May is the day of victory over Hitler’s Germany in Russia and the successor states of the USSR. In Germany, 8 May is the ‘day of liberation from National Socialist tyranny’, as German President *Richard von Weizsäcker* has called it on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war. With this war, Germans have brought untold suf-

fering, especially to the peoples of the Soviet Union. Thus, town twinning and municipal cooperation are of particular importance to us: they are ambassadors of peace. These more than 100 official partnerships and countless other regional links between Russia and Germany stand for reconciliation and friendship in Europe. For us, they are both a gift and an obligation: they form the basis for the peaceful coexistence of our countries – today and in the future.

You, dear Russian friends and partners, are ready to build bridges between East and West with us even in challenging times. We would like to assure you how much we are committed to master-

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### “Reminder for the future”

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en ancestors and to peace work. Russians living in our country also belong to this movement. They organised the rally in Cologne and also invited the DFG-VK and the Town Twinning Association Cologne-Volgograd to speak. The contribution of the chairwoman of this association, *Eva Aras*, is printed in the adjacent box.

The rally was impressive not only because of her and other speeches, but also

because of the cultural performances of the Russian participants, some of them appeared in uniforms for expressing their honorable memory. But their behavior was anything but warlike: between and after the speeches, both the ladies and the people in uniform offered singing interludes – accompanied by an accordion player – in which everyone was immediately infected by the joie de vivre expressed in them.

Sometimes the reference to the “Russian soul” appears to be a little forced, but here it came alive. One had the impression

that for the Russian colleagues the various speeches were an important obligation, especially the remembrance of the victims and the sufferings of their ancestors and the appeals for a peaceful living together.

But their own music was the icing on the cake, giving them special joy and by creating a human connection directly, even if the lyrics of their songs were not translated.

Why do our politicians not participate in such peace work?

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “I wish everyone good health, every success and a peaceful sky above your heads” (Sergej Lavrov)

**Sergej Lavrov’s and Heiko Maas’ greetings on the occasion of the video concert on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war from Berlin, Moscow and St. Petersburg.**

“For us, just as for many other nations, Victory Day and the liberation of Europe from Nazism is one of the most important and revered dates. In our country, not a single family was spared by the war, taking the lives of millions of our citizens, and leaving in ruin a great number of cities and villages. Today, it is our sacred duty to safeguard the truth about what happened during those years, and remember the grim lessons

of war in order to prevent this tragedy from repeating itself”.

*Sergej Lavrov, 7 May 2020  
<https://www.mid.rul/en>*

“To be holding a common concert today is a sign of remarkable reconciliation between our peoples after the Second World War. We Germans are still filled with deep gratitude and great humility. [...] With your music you overcome boundaries and set a signal of cohesion,

and that feels good. Especially in the current crisis, in which we lack human closeness so much. All the more I wish you a wonderful evening. As a moment that makes us all pause, but which above all unites us”.

*Heiko Maas, 8 May 2020  
<https://germania.diplo.de/re-de/aktuelles/12339572>*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### “German-Russian town twinning – ...”

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ing crises together with you in solidarity, both now and in the future. In the fight against the corona virus, nations must not stand against each other. The virus knows no boundaries. Let us walk the path side by side – in medical research, in humanitarian aid and in business and politics.

With this in mind, we wish you and all citizens in the partner municipalities confidence, strength and above all health in these times of crisis!”

Source:

Letter of the German-Russian Forum to the Russian cities, municipalities and regions of the German-Russian partnership work from 30 April 2020; <https://www.deutsch-russisches-forum.de/portal/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Soldarit-tsschreiben.pdf>

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## “Is the big war coming?”

ds. Is the corona pandemic being used to prepare the West for war against China 75 years after the end of the Second World War? Recently, there has been a growing number of voices that see China as a major threat to world peace.

The “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” headlined on 12 May 2020: “China’s power triggers growing fears”. The People’s Republic of China, it continued, was using its economic power to modernise its military and expand its political influence around the globe. The USA felt challenged, Europe seemed hesitant.

This is followed by two contributions from the “Strategy Trends” series of the “Center for Security Studies” at ETH Zurich.

In an article entitled “Is the big war coming? Between the USA and China the danger of an armed conflict is increasing – this obliges us to say goodbye to illusions” the authors openly discuss the question of whether a war between the two great powers is to be expected. The Asia-Pacific re-

gion is facing a decisive decade. “Already today, an American-dominated and a Chinese model of order collide there.” Instead of a precarious balancing act for the benefit of the global economy, a confrontational downward spiral driven by both sides has taken its place. The Corona crisis has reinforced this trend. This is not yet an immediate prelude to a hegemonic elimination struggle on a global scale. But the developments in the Asia-Pacific region would shape the character of international relations far beyond the region in the coming years. Europe would also be affected by this.

The second article, “Beijing deliberately ensnares Europe”, warns once again that China consistently uses crises to expand its global influence. It warns that the EU lacks a unified response to China’s strategy and calls on Ursula von der Leyen to translate her wish for the EU Commission to be a “geopolitical commission” into action.

Isn’t this how wars have always been prepared? •

## A plea for history as a subject in its own right

by Dr phil René Roca, grammar school teacher for history in Basel and head of the *Research Institute for Direct Democracy*

*Curriculum 21* has now been introduced in the entire Volksschule (i.e. at all primary and lower secondary schools) in German-speaking Switzerland, with the exception of the canton of Aargau. At the secondary school level (Sek I) it also includes collective subjects. In most cantons there is now, among other things, the collective subject “Räume, Zeiten, Gesellschaften” (RZG; shorthand for “Spaces, Times, Societies”) instead of history and geography. Swiss history educationalists are rightly laughed at for this by foreign colleagues. The subject of history is disappearing, even though it lays the central foundation for our direct-democratic political system in elementary schools and has an important integrative func-

tion, especially for pupils with a migration background.

The value of the traditional, historically grown canon of subjects, including history as a subject taught in its own right, cannot be emphasised enough. It is the fruit of our history of science. The result is a structure of knowledge that is immediately apparent in schools, but also in libraries and universities. Knowledge is not a hodgepodge that can simply be “reassembled” under any term you want. Interdisciplinary work is only possible when structured basic knowledge is available. Especially at secondary school level, but also at primary schools, it is necessary to continuously impart historical knowledge.

Current curricula for the subject RZG in various cantons show that “history”

is only recognisable in the classroom in individual fragments, the weighting of which – apart from a few binding contents – is not fixed but is left to the discretion of the individual teachers. Thus, if the term “history” is abandoned, the specificity of historical thinking is abandoned. If a primarily thematic and thus mostly arbitrary approach to history is sought, this comes at the expense of an awareness of chronology and orientation in time. Historical awareness and historical thinking fall by the wayside. The ultimate sufferers are the students. There is still time to stop this nonsense by means of cantonal initiatives (see Canton of Baselland) and to reinstate history as an independent subject in lower secondary schools. •

# Money and mentality

by Peter Küpfer

*A tiny little organism has thrown things out of kilter worldwide. Our daily routines were disrupted – what was normal in our countries just two months ago has today become unthinkable. The crisis gave cause for many people to reflect in a positive sense. The reduced scale of our daily lives has given occurrence to acts of kindness: spontaneous contacts and neighbourhood voluntarism. This is hopeful. Especially in times when the major media commemorate the days when the Second World War came to an end.*

Today most of the world population suffer from hunger while another part is mainly confronted with the problem of reducing overweight. Today's situation hardly corresponds to the situation at the end of the last global war 75 years ago, which led to the Declaration of Human Rights: people should forego wars in order to settle their conflicts and solve them peacefully. They should meet each other in a spirit of brotherhood.

That people can and should meet in this post-war spirit has always been an issue or hope of literature. For it reflects not only the world as it is. It also reflects the world as it could be and as we humans dream of. The writers of all times have had a sense for what impairs developed humanity: It is envy, ill-will and striving for power. Even *Molière's* character comedies describe these impressively. These destructive forces endanger our world from within.

## Wealth – not a reliable value

Viennese writer *Hugo von Hofmannsthal* created a play based on his revised edition of the medieval story of the rich man's death, which deals exactly with the topics of money domination and meaning of life. For many years, his "Jedermann" ("Everyman") has been performed annually on the Salzburg Cathedral Square as one of the oldest open-air plays, attracting thousands of spectators every year – with the exception of this summer, for well-known reasons. It was written shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, at a time when the European powers were fighting for supremacy through the "means" of war, resulting in millions of casualties. Today, historians insist that one of the main reasons was the race for strategic and economic advantage. Even then, the great powers' struggle for oil reserves in the Middle East played an important role. Hofmannsthal, by using the example of "the rich man" in his disturbing play, shows how unreliable an exist-

ence is which is based on having more and wanting more than others. Heaven decided that his career should end "in the best years". Death is sent to him and takes him out in the middle of a feast with his friends and his "paramour", today one would probably say "cohabitant". Everyman asks for a 24-hour respite and starts looking for someone to accompany him on this difficult journey. But everybody, his best friend, his relatives, even his paramour, made excuses and did not want to accompany him. In the end only one friend remains, a particularly unreliable one: Mammon. The servants have to bring *Everyman* Mammon's heavy box from the cellar. The cover pops open, and out of it rises, huge, a veritable ghost: the embodied money. "You belong to me," desperate Everyman tells him, "you must accompany me and make my journey easier." Mammon refuses and mocks the desperate man with cold scorn: You are a fool and a coxcomb, he answers him. If you thought I, your money, was your servant, you have miscalculated wickedly. It was the other way round. You were my servant and I pulled the strings (of money multiplication):

### Mammon\*

*"Oh! Fool of fools? Why look you, Everyman:  
I stay behind on earth, and where are you?"*



Poster of this year's Salzburg festival for performance of "Everyman". (picture ma)

*The strength I placed in you, the giant power,  
What have you made it? – a spectacle,  
A glittering show, a fashioned pompousness,  
A lustful, cursed fury! He was but  
A bladder blown by me, and that he soared  
And still can soar, is due alone to me.  
This is what gave him courage to exist.  
(Lifts a handful of money from chest, and lets it fall back again.)  
Back whence it came it falls: there also ends  
Your happiness! Soon too your senses five  
Shall wither, till you know me not again.  
I was but lent you for this early day,  
And go not on your journey. I? Depart?  
Nay, I remain! You shall go forth, alone,  
In want and fell despair.  
[...]."*

In its linguistic simplicity and impressiveness, deliberately sought by Hofmannsthal, the text points to a very important aspect of the monetary economy (Hofmannsthal, as a son of a banker, is very familiar with it): just like the soil,

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money, if used sensibly, is a borrowed value. Only in this way can its power develop in a blessed way, in the service of all, as a loan and privilege which should be harnessed. For the benefit of all. There is only one true companion whom Everyone finds in his desperation. It is the figure of his "works", allegorically represented as a weak woman: All the good and useful things he did, despite his life as a rich man. It is little, but together with his rediscovered faith it is enough so that his soul is saved in the end. Just like that of another protagonist, *Goethe's Faust*, but this time entirely in a worldly garment.

**Faust – a person  
who lives his live by taking action**

After Faust left his parlour scholarly existence and went out into the world to realise "what holds the world together at its core" – he dedicated himself to the devil, according to the old Faust saga – and he also gained money and reputation. After many adventures, at first in his immediate surroundings, in which he becomes guilty partly through the actions of his diabolical companion (Mephistopheles), he arrives at the medieval court of the German Emperor. Here, in the second part of the Faust poem, gold, money, ruthless (exercise of) power and the resulting guilt influence the events on a much larger scale than in the first part, the Gretchen tragedy. Faust's adversary Mephisto is a modern, elegant and cosmopolitan new version of the devil. At the emperor's court, where Mephisto leads the enterprising Faust to show him "the big world", misery prevails: the imperial coffers are empty, nothing more is possible. The paralysis of life is just as threatening as in the global economic crisis that afflicts us today. In this situation Mephisto "invents" paper money to revive the paralysed economy and replenish the state coffers. However, the coverage of this money is based on a weak foundation (is today's foundation stronger?): Mephisto whispers into the emperor's ear, that according to the old law, all the wealth that is found underground belongs to the emperor, all the treasure chests that a caring private owner buried in the face of hardship and war and which have then fallen into oblivion belong to him. It makes sense to the emperor, the paper money is printed in no time at all, in the Faust drama by magic, in our modern world the central banks act similarly. How the emperor is to come into real possession of these supposed riches (and how far they really exist!) remains Mephisto's secret. Faust's artificial injection of money gives him a powerful position at court. With

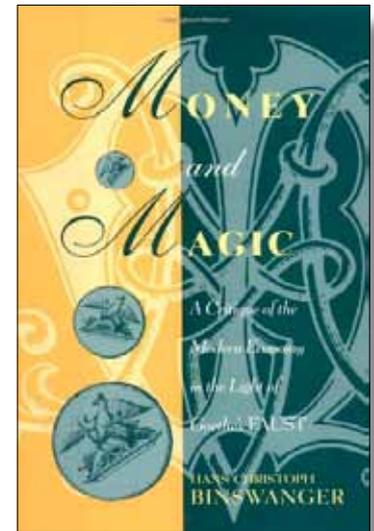
his entrepreneurial spirit, Faust achieves great things. As in the first part of the tragedy, however, he is guilty and causes, unintentionally but de facto, the death of two uninvolved people. In spite of this, Faust finally finds mercy before the eternal chair of justice, and Mephisto loses his wager. Faust's lifelong effort to be effective and active for the good of the whole weighs more heavily than his concomitant guilt: "Whoever strives, we can redeem", sing the heavenly figures, who stand protectively before Faust and carry him off into the Elysium.

Faust is, if you look at the whole thing, the epitome of a person who lives his life by taking action. On his life's journey, he realised that it is neither magic, nor metaphysics, neither power nor the personal pursuit of profit that gives the life of the individual its true meaning, but rather by contribution to the whole. For Goethe, the great model was not a construct, but nature. It can change into real, human culture if the striving is also real and natural, if it is human.

**Individuals measure themselves  
by the same standard ...**

A few generations later, which were marked by industrialisation and the expansion of the economy, the Swiss poet *Gottfried Keller*, a great admirer of Goethe, thought similarly. He too saw the source of a fulfilled life in contributing to the whole, the *bonum commune*. He was imbued with the idea that political participation is part of a fulfilled contribution. He found an ideal form in the still young Swiss democracy. As a writer, but also as the long-standing First State Writer of the Canton of Zurich, he repeatedly admonished the spirit that was to inspire this building and put his finger on what was threatening it. It is self-interest, maverickism, envy and greed, all traits that drive the people in Keller's works. Keller shaped what is at the core of democracy, and what threatens it, in many stories and in his old-age novel "Martin Salander", often, as be fitting his temperament, with a good dose of humour that does not detract from the seriousness of the matter.

All this is shown in the novella "The Banner of the Upright Seven", which is still highly readable today. It tells the story, told with humorous detachment but human respect, of the participation of a tried and tested group of deserving radical democrats from Zurich at the 1849 Schützenfest (national marksmen's festival) in Aarau. Marksmen's festivals back then were more than just large-scale festivities. The Swiss shooting tradition rests on the fact that Switzerland's centuries-long defensive tradition was essentially based on the fact that every Swiss citizen also saw himself as a defender of his country in times of need.



*The study by the St. Gallen economist explores Goethe's view of money and its deceptive appearance. (ISBN 13:9780226051857)*

When necessity demanded it, he stood up for his civil liberty with his personal weapon. This is what tradition wanted, and this is what the new Federal Constitution of 1848 wanted in principle, which stipulated that every Swiss citizen was also liable for military service based on his civil rights. This was also the case in 1939, when the Swiss Federal Council decided on general mobilisation.

With reference to one of the main protagonists, master tailor *Hediger*, this defendability of the Swiss citizen is clearly expressed in a much-quoted passage. In the description of the study chamber of the modest craftsman, reference is also made to the "bare ordinance rifle" along with live ammunition, which stands next to the books:

*"Until now, a friendly star had protected him from bloodshed due to lack of opportunity; yet he had seized the gun more than once and had hurried to the square, since it was still the time of the coups, and the gun had to remain unmoved between bed and cupboard; 'because', he used to say, 'no government and no battalions can protect justice and freedom where the citizen is unable to come to the door and see what is there himself!'"*

The seven-member round of old Republicans, the "Seven Upright Ones", wanted to participate as an autonomous delegation at the Schützenfest in Aarau of 1849. The year is significant. 1849, which is one year after the revolutionary year of 1848, when Germany and other European cities experienced turbulent times. It is also the year of the foundation of the Swiss federal republic with its expand-

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ed democratic constitution. This was in Switzerland only one year after the Country once again waged a civil war, which hopefully was the last one in its history, the so-called Sonderbund war. Once again, old irreconcilable opposites pitted against each other, opposites that for centuries had helped to shape the history of the Confederation and its internal conflicts: The countryside villages with their predominantly conservative and catholic thinking people on the one hand, and the mighty cities, the majority of which were protestants, who wanted a secular republican state, on the other hand. Thanks to the foresight and maturity of the General of the Federal troops, General *Dufour*, the inferior Sonderbund (the Alliance of Catholic Cantons) was treated with the greatest possible care – good conditions for the foundation of the federal state one year later. This state did not see itself as a victorious state, but as the guardian of the Swiss multilingual and multicultural nation of will, as described by the constitutionalists.

A love story is interwoven in the main plot of the novella. *Karl*, Hediger's son, had fallen in love with *Hermine Frymann* (and fortunately she also with him), the beautiful and self-confident daughter of the successful master carpenter, owner of a large joinery, the chairman of the "Seven Upright Ones". In Hediger's opinion the social differences between the two families are too big. He's afraid, that with a marriage between materially so differently positioned families, his freedom in dealing with his old friend would suffer. It is never good, he argues with his wife, when a man makes a fortune simply by marrying and not by his own aptitude. The calm, but fundamental reasoning between the two spouses gets lost into a gloomy, but based on the essential, vision of the future of the Swiss Confederation, if the principle of work ethic is exchanged for that of profiteering. Back then, Hediger's vision may have seemed an exaggeration to the readers. Seen through today's eyes Hediger's prophetic view and thus Keller's sense of the vulnerabilities of democracy are to be admired. His wife disagrees vigorously with her husband's point of view:

*"Larifari!" his wife interrupted him picking up the tablecloth and shaking it out of the window; "has Frymann, who holds the treasure of which we argue [Author's note: meant is his beautiful daughter] become unequal to the rest of you? Aren't you not of one mind and always putting your heads together?"*



*"The Banner of the Upright Seven" (Lithographie Otto Baumberger)*

*"That's something different!" cried the man, "something quite different! He didn't obtain his property by fraud, or by winning the lottery, but by putting together Thaler for Thaler acquired through his labour for forty years. Fortunately, here there are no monstrously rich people, prosperity is quite well distributed; but see which mischief millionaires, who also possess the political greed for power, will bring about!"*

And then the humble master tailor utters truly prophetic words:

*"There will come a time when in our land, and also elsewhere, great masses of money will amass, without having been worked for and saved in a honest way; then we must bare our teeth to the devil; then it will become apparent if the thread and the colour hold up on our flag! In short! I don't see why one of my sons should his hand out for foreign good, without having worked a single stroke."*

The novel ends in a conciliatory sound. Hediger's son *Karl* stands in for the

"Seven Uprights Ones", none of whom no one dare to do a well-worded introductory speech in front of the solemn assembly. He accompanies them to the Schützenfest and supports them in a buoyant, trusting and supporting speech. He also wins lots of honours for them presenting himself as a master shooter. For this he receives highest recognition, and he gets his *Hermine*, and the two families join hands for mutual benefit.

**... as do the states.**

Keller's late work novel "Martin Salander" makes Hediger's vision the main theme by critically examining the realities of Switzerland, which now have become economically more saturated. His years as the first state clerk of the Canton of Zurich have sharpened the matured writer's eye for the weaknesses of Swiss modern society and the state of the political convictions of its citizens. Keller identifies serious shortcomings. In his complete work, they are opposed

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Letter to  the Editor

## Corona crisis in a globalised economy

I would like to add some thoughts to the statements of the two National Councilors Ms *Estermann* and Ms *Badran* and also to the article by Ms *Duprat* in *Current Concerns* No 9 from 5 May 2020.

It is becoming apparent now in the crisis that the globalised economic disorder with its ideology of growth and shareholder value turns out to be a system that does not serve the human family. The neoliberal model of deregulated financial, goods and service markets, accompanied by the so-called free movement of persons, originates from the ideology of unlimited growth and neglects resource conservation as well as climate and environmental protection. The always “more”, accompanied by cost savings due to relocation of production facilities to low-wage and lowest-wage countries and thus dependent supply chains, prevents the development of less developed economies. As well, if certain countries are kept “down” as cheap raw material suppliers. The situation is similar when it comes to the employment of labour such as harvest hands or caregivers, which are currently running out. It makes more sense to qualify and deploy people without work in their own country for these activities instead of taking them away from other countries.

A solution would be a new social market economy concept in which the fulfil-

ment of demand at fair prices and reasonable profits has priority and the markets are contained to economic areas with similar living conditions. In other words, what is consumed in an economic sphere is mostly produced by resident workers. Wage dumping with workers from Eastern Europe or beyond would be stopped. Instead of “land grabbing” by large corporations and free trade, regulation, for the purpose of promoting in particular small farms, which offer their products on regional markets, would be the better solution. This applies not only to continents such as Africa.

The climate and the environment would be better protected by the absence of long transport routes, less private (travel) and business mobility, accompanied by the creation of sustainable, useful and resource-efficient goods and services instead of “more and more”. We are now experiencing how nature has recovered tremendously only within a few weeks due to the global lockdown. A system based on an appropriate distribution within developed economies instead of the growth ideology would be a resource-efficient, environmentally-, climate-friendly and socially acceptable alternative vision for the future. At the same time, the gap between rich and poor needs to be narrowed by geographi-

cal boundaries between developed and less developed countries. In recent decades, the globalised world economy, oriented towards profitable growth, has led to an unprecedented level of capital accumulation such as at companies like *Amazon*, *Google*, *Zalando* or *facebook* – to name just a few. On the other hand, over 800 million people worldwide are starving. This corresponds to 11% of the world population.

Established politicians such as the German Development Minister *Müller* (CSU) are now expressing similar statements: “The further, faster, more capitalism of the last 30 years needs to stop.” For him, the corona crisis is a wake-up call to humankind to deal with nature and the environment differently (source: *n-tv* from 3 May 2020).

The dissolution of the world and the selfishness of some not only harm the climate and the environment, but have accelerated inequalities not only between the regions of the world, but also within developed economies. Global mobility and open markets are now spreading viruses around the globe in no time at all and putting a STOP in front of us, in the sense of: No longer like this!

*Werner Voß, Wiehl (Germany)*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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by a multitude of other, truly democratic virtues.

These are the core values of human ethics, which are recognised as fundamental in all major cultures worldwide. They are not aggressiveness, but compassion, not hatred, but empathy, not arrogance, but modesty, not indifference, but sympathy. Based on this attitude, joy and satisfaction emerge in one’s own contribution to the

common whole, the *bonum commune*. The basis for this is a good school, which also provides political education in this spirit and the development of the community from the bottom up.

For this reason, and not because of their unfortunately numerous wars, humankind has survived and developed to this day. This is the basis of natural law and the ethical code that animate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This constitutes the soul of the poems of all great world-famous poets, who we are

reading with great benefit today. They point out what the individual aims for and what communities, including states, want to achieve by peaceful means. It is the attitude of everyone’s respect for each individual contribution to the whole. If this crisis calls us to reflect what is essential, it has its good points. ●

\* The play of *Everyman* by A. M. Robertson, San Francisco, 1917; page 72 – 73; <https://archive.org/details/playeverymanbas00ordygoog/page/n70/mode/2up>

# Ride in peace!

## Velosolex – a phoenix from the ashes

by Heini Hofmann

With today's bicycle and e-bike boom, people forget that the road to self-propelled bicycles was long. The invention of the cultic Velosolex, which is still popular today, proved to be a great moment in the misery of wartime. This Cinderella story is still regarded as an exemplar of far-sighted corporate strategy.

As early as 1895 the French inventor *René Gillet* had the idea of mounting a motor on the front wheel of a bicycle. While two-stroke engines and friction roller drives were still suspect to German technicians, the spark ignited in France. In 1901 the *Ixion*, a bicycle with two-stroke front-wheel drive, was created here. Soon German two-wheelers were also equipped with it (*Sigurd*) or built under licence in the *Komet* factories. The *Ixion* was followed a good decade later, also in France, by the *Cyclotracteur* with a four-stroke auxiliary engine, which was also used abroad. But the big breakthrough was still to come.

### Need is the mother of invention

But the real breakthrough for the self-propelled bicycle came – not by chance – during the Second World War: two young Parisian entrepreneurs, *Maurice Goudard* and *Marcel Mennesson*, built radial radiators in their company to cool buses and trucks, and later produced carburettors under the name *Solex*.

This Solex brand name is later transferred to their bicycle factory, another pillar of their company. Since as from 1940 onwards, the prototype of a self-propelled bicycle with a 2-stroke engine, flanged over the front wheel on an ordinary Alcyon men's bicycle frame, and equipped with 700 mm wheels (French patent 1941, US patent 1942) was created.

Despite the war situation, the company acted with foresight and a long-term perspective: the first 700 prototypes were distributed to the factory workers from 1942 onwards to test and improve them. This serious approach pays off! For example, it turns out that the standard bicycle frames are not strong enough for the installation of an auxiliary engine in continuous operation, for what reason it is replaced by a more stable, "open" and also women-friendly gooseneck frame (*Col de Cygne*).

### 1946 first Velosolex series

The Solex story is an exemplar of skilful corporate tactics: in the difficult post-war period – in the sense of a popular, reasonably priced means of transport – the en-

gine capacity is limited to 45 cc, an output of 0.4 hp at 2,000 rpm and a consumption of only one litre of fuel per 100 km with a total weight of 25 kg and a speed of 28 km/h. This opens up the Solex to the French cyclomoteurs class, which at that time did not require registration or a driving licence.

In 1946 the factory in Paris-Courbevoie launched the first series *Velosolex 650* (2-stroke idler piston engine and power transmission to the front wheel by means of carbon friction rollers) as an additional mainstay, with a daily production of 15 units. The global triumphant progress has begun. But despite success where idealism is at work, there is constant experimentation and improvement.

Thus, in 1947 a long list of newly modified series begins, whereby the proven basic principle always remains the same, as much as does the cultic black paint: "Le noir c'est triste, c'est ça qui est drôle". With each new series, the daily production increases rapidly. The Velosolex becomes the French *savoir vivre* in bicycle design

– analogous to *Citroën's* 2CV (coined Tin Snail or the duck) in car design!

### Export, licence and imitation

Also from 1947, and at the request of the Solex company, *British Petroleum* (BP), to refuel the Solex with the premix product *Solexin* (94% petrol plus 6% energol oil) in yellow-green 2-litre metal cans was made easier.

Licensees and imitators are finding what is successful. Licensed operations outside France are springing up mushroom-like in the Netherlands, the UK, Poland, Denmark, Italy, Latvia, Germany, and Switzerland (see box). Assembly lines are being set up in Cyprus, Finland, Greece, and Ireland. And from 1974 onwards there are special export models even for Canada, the USA and Brazil, among others.

But competition appears also. In 1958, in the north of France the *VéloVap* is developed with more power, a sky blue frame



The legion of Solex-posters covers the whole range from "travail" to "plaisir".  
(picture Marc Wernli)

**"Ride in peace"**

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and white wall tyres, which was more refined than "the little black Solex horse". In the same year, also in the north of France, the *Flandria Galet* follows, which looks similar to the Solex with black frame colour, but is also designed as a coloured luxury version for the Benelux countries.

**The end of the Solex fairytale**

But the good old self-propelled Velosolex knows how to hold its own, continues to optimise itself and remains full of ideas: smaller wheels for greater driving safety, improved performance and an increase in speed to 30 km/h, special versions such as light three-wheeled delivery van models and with the F4, a mini-bike for children with a noise-generating plastic motor dummy. In 1965, even the standard colour was given competition. The Solex 3800 series not only came in black, but also in white or red.

But every fairy tale has an end – even that of the cheapest motorisation of the post-war period. More than forty years after the first series in Courbevoie (1946), the original Velosolex production in France ends in Saint-Quentin in November 1988. The last one hundred copies are sold to enthusiasts as the *Nostalgia* model. It is not exactly known how many of these icons were built in total; there are said to

be well over six million (worldwide even over eight).

**Only the E-Solex was a flop**

After the sale of the Solex company, the cult vehicle is still being built, but loses its nimbus because it is no longer the original. The Black'n Roll version made in China became famous. And then something strange happens. In 2005, the *Groupe Cible* in Paris announces the market launch of an electrically powered e-Solex (lithium-ion battery, 30 km/h, 35 kg), but with a wheel hub motor at the back and only a dummy motor at the front ... The target audience is young, urban and female.

But despite the smart red elements in the basic colour black, this e-Solex remains a flop - which is surprising in view of the current e-bike boom. This is probably because the innovation was too futuristic and thus not compatible with the nostalgic feelings of the dyed-in-the-wool original Solexes. Even technical inventions must arouse emotions if they are to be successful.

**The Brigitte Bardot Effect**

But all in all, the Velosolex, like phoenix from the ashes of wartime, wrote a technical fairy tale as if from the Arabian Nights. What the old aunt *Junkers Ju-52* is among the airplanes or the jeep among the off-road vehicles, the Solex is among the bicycles: an icon, with French charm.

Popular with everyone, driven by workers and students, priests and professors, farmers and film idols like *Brigitte Bardot*, who triggered a real boom, but also *Charles Aznavour*, *Jacques Tati* or *Steve McQueen*. (The writer of this epistle has also been driving a solex for over fifty years, and was never let down by it!)

Velosolex stands for a form of locomotion in which speed is not the measure of all things. This is documented by such famous slogans as "Ride in peace", "La bicyclette qui roule toute seule", "Freedom and Postwar Mobility", "Pour le travail et le plaisir", "For handsome guys and smart bees", "Passe partout, même dans la boue (dirt)". Its strengths are: a simple and robust construction, hardly susceptible to breakdowns, roadworthy due to moderate speed, lightness and low price.

In addition, the Solex is versatile: it made history at the post office in France and Switzerland as a postman's bicycle, but also as a midwife's bicycle, as the tennis champion prize in Roland-Garros and even in the military during the Vietnam War. In this country, it was affectionately called a nose-warmer bike (because of the engine positioned at the front) and, because some monasteries used it as a service vehicle, "Christian persecutor" or "Maria Hilf" engine. Which brings us to the conclusion of the title: Ride in peace!•

(Translation *Current Concerns*)**Solex special case Switzerland**

*hh.* The federal road traffic legislation was less favourable to the cult vehicle than that of its country of origin, France, where 14-year-olds were already allowed to drive a Solex without a licence. A 1947 decision of the Federal Council placed the bicycle with auxiliary engine in the category of motor vehicles, although the Solex is much closer to a bicycle than a motorcycle. This had negative consequences for the less well-off population, but also for tourism, cross-border workers and hospitality in general, as Solex riders from France and Italy were not allowed to cross the Swiss border.

The Geneva-based company *Hispano Suiza*, which assembled around 15,000 Velosolexes between 1948 and 1957 using components from Switzerland, was also affected. In view of the International Road Conference to be held in Geneva in 1949, there was resistance in the media and from experts with facts (e.g. that the number of accidents involving motor-assisted bicy-

cles was lower than with normal bicycles). The result was a new Federal Council decision in 1950, which was

somewhat more generous but still more restrictive than on the other side of the border.



The company *Hispano Suiza* produced Swiss Velosolex in Geneva from 1948 to 1957. (picture Public Domain)