

Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

Solidarity-based healthcare versus healthcare industry

What can we learn from the coronavirus crisis?

by Jürg Barben, Professor for paediatric pneumology, children's hospital of Eastern Switzerland, St. Gallen, Thomas Cerny,
Professor emeritus for oncology, president of Cancer Research Switzerland



Jürg Barben
(Picture ma)

Thomas Cerny
(Picture ma)

Before the coronavirus crisis hit, newspapers were filled with headlines concerning the rising costs in healthcare and how they might be contained efficiently. The justification of innovative therapies costing millions must be discussed. The coronavirus pandemic has put healthcare at the centre of media attention and highlights how important a well-functioning health system is – and that it comes at a cost.

Looking for a “new normal” amidst the coronavirus pandemic, it is more than ap-

The essentials in brief

- The global pharmaceutical market has grown steadily since the early 1980s. Pharmaceutical profit exceeded the cumulative profit of all *Forbes*-listed industries in 2003.
- The number of essential generics that can no longer be supplied is increasing daily, the basic supply of our population is increasingly at risk.
- As a stock corporation, pharmaceutical companies are committed to “shareholder value” and not to patients or the common good of our society.
- The health care system which is based on solidarity must no longer degenerate into a health market that is one-sidedly geared to profit maximisation.

“The healthcare system is part of the social system of our society. Part of our wealth is invested in healthcare for the benefit of all. A health industry, on the other hand, is part of the economic system. Capital owners invest in this healthcare industry and they expect a return, for the benefit of few. You can't have both at the same time, because the goals of these two systems fundamentally contradict each other.”

Giovanni Maio

propriate to rethink costs in the healthcare system. The question is whether it is ethically justifiable to make billions in profits at the expense of ill people. Our health is one of the greatest goods we have, and many are willing to spend a lot of money on it. The global healthcare sector is expanding rapidly and has proven to be extremely lucrative, with the highest profit margins in the economy.

Health service versus health industry

In his book “Business Health – How the Market Abolishes the Art of Healing”, medical ethicist *Giovanni Maio* describes the consequences of the economisation of healthcare: “The healthcare system is part of the social system of our society. Part of our wealth is invested in health care for the benefit of all. A health industry, on the other hand, is part of the economic system. Capital owners invest in this healthcare industry and they expect a return, for the benefit of few. You can't have both at the same time, because the goals of these two systems fundamentally contradict each other.” Nowadays, many corporations pursue profit maximisation, which is fundamentally incompatible with a health system based on solidarity.

The role of the pharma industry

Since the early 1980s, the global pharmaceutical market has grown steadily, reaching over 1000 billion US dollars a year. Half of the market exists in the United States. The top 10 pharmaceutical com-

panies generate two thirds of the sales (www.pmlive.com). Since the *Reagan* presidency, the big pharmaceutical companies have followed the so-called “blockbuster model” (drugs with annual sales of over 1 billion dollars) with profit maximisation within, but also outside of legal boundaries, with profit margins often exceeding 20%.^{1,2} In 2003, pharmaceutical profit surpassed the cumulative profit of all *Forbes*-listed industries. However, the golden days of the “blockbuster model” are coming to an end, now there are numerous generic drugs on the market for many common diseases such as hypertension, asthma, depression and tumours. In addition, the patent protection of many “box office hits” is expiring, and generic drugs have become significantly cheaper.

Now, “personalised medicine” is emerging as the new buzzword in pharmaceuticals.¹ The development of so-called *orphan drugs*, i.e. drugs for rare diseases such as cystic fibrosis, spinal muscular atrophy and tumours, has opened up a promising future market for the pharmaceutical industry. Legal incentives such as the extension of patent protection have made research into *orphan drugs* attractive, which has led to astronomical sums being charged for such drugs today.

Compensation for high development costs?

Representatives of the pharmaceutical industry justify high prices of drugs with

continued on page 2

"Solidarity-based healthcare ..."

continued from page 1

high development costs. However, many discoveries and innovations are made in research institutions at universities, which are financed with public money. This often results in small start-ups being bought up by large corporations for horrific sums, which are then booked as development costs.

The mean development costs for a new drug have been the subject of controversy for years; so far the most cited studies by *Di Masi* et al. estimated these costs (assuming 11 % loan costs and a clinical success rate of 12 %) at \$ 1.1–2.8 billion.³ A recent study examining 355 new FDA-approved drugs in 2009–2018 arrived at a significantly lower cost estimate: After considering the cost of failed trials, the median cost of research and development investment to bring a new drug to market was calculated to be \$ 985 million (95 % CI: \$ 684–1229 million).⁴ Today, pharmaceutical companies are investing far more in marketing, manufacturing, and sales than in research and development.⁵ In the past 20 years, the pharmaceutical and healthcare product industries spent \$ 230 million annually on lobbying in the United States alone, more than any other industry.⁶ The massive purchase prices for "pipeline shopping" are also included in the drug development costs. It is therefore not surprising that the companies are hardly interested in taking care of a high-quality generic or biosimilar market. The number of essential generic drugs that are no longer available is growing every day, and basic supplies for our population is increasingly at risk.

Who determines the price of a new drug?

Many do not know how the pricing of a new drug works and that in the USA the pricing is in no way regulated – it is left to the companies. Therefore, all pharmaceutical companies are trying to get approval for their new drugs in the USA, since the American healthcare market is the most

Which role do patents play?

Patents are neither bad nor good. They can contribute to the benefit, but also to the detriment of a society and its economy. They only make sense if the overall benefit for the general public predominates. Only then can it be politically justified that the state grants a monopoly to individuals or companies, which can turn it into a non-competitive business. Today, patents are often misused to maximise profits without any corresponding benefit. Patent disputes also prevent innovation and delay or even hinder the development and market launch of generics and biosimilars.

Why patents in oncology are harmful today or "It's the economy, stupid!"
Swiss Cancer Bulletin 2020; 202: 114-7

lucrative in the world and generates the most profits. After approval by the American health authority FDA, the company sets the price for the drug as it sees fit. As stock corporations, the companies are committed to "shareholder value", which serves to generate maximum profit, and not to the patients or the common good of our society. Once the maximum price has been set, it will be further protected by many regulations and patents. As a result, the drug is withdrawn from free trade and its price kept high long term.² In Europe, despite HTA processes, most authorities align themselves with the American price structure. It is not surprising, then, that the pharmaceutical industry is one of the most profitable industries.

In Switzerland, there have been patents for the chemical sector since 1907, but it was not until the *Bayh-Dole Act 1980* that public research institutions were allowed to patent and license their findings, to found and sell start-ups on attractive terms.⁷ As a result, US companies were able to be more innovative, to become more productive and to keep profits in the US. Surprisingly, it has not yet been proven that patents serve to promote new inventions, let alone that they are indispensable for an innovation process.⁸

Conclusions

In summary, the profit margin of the pharmaceutical industry is far too high compared to other branches and no longer reflects the investment risk of development costs. Most of the claimed costs of innovative drugs today reflect the purchase of start-ups as well as lobbying and PR activities, not the real development costs. There is an urgent need for complete transparency in pricing with comprehensible pricing models and – where necessary – compulsory licenses and bans on excessive marketing measures for the launch of expensive drugs. It requires a political will to establish internationally valid, fair rules. "Business as usual" is no longer tenable even in the richest economies, especially since the corona crisis hit. A healthcare system based on solidarity must not turn into such a one-sided profit-maximizing health care market, where large corporations can excessively enrich themselves at the expense of ill people. •

Source: Barben, J., Cerny, T. "Welche Lehren ziehen wir aus der Coronakrise?" (What can we learn from the coronavirus crisis?), *Schweizerische Ärztezeitung SAeZ* (Swiss Medical Journal) 2020;101(37):1152–1154; Reprint with friendly permission of the authors. (Translation from German to English: Isabelle Bannerman-Wirth)

¹ Möhr P. Personalisierte Medizin und ihre Triebkräfte. *SAeZ* 2016;97:1018-20

² Cerny T. Warum Patente in der Onkologie heute schädlich sind. *Schweizer Krebsbulletin* 2020;202:114-7

³ DiMasi JA et al. "Innovation in the pharmaceutical industry: New estimates of R&D costs", in: *J Health Econ* 2016;47:20-33

⁴ Wouters OJ et al. "Estimated Research and Development Investment Needed to Bring a New Medicine to Market", in: *JAMA* 2020;323:844-53

⁵ Tay-Teo K et al. "Comparison of Sales Income and Research and Development Costs for FDA-Approved Cancer Drugs Sold by Originator Drug Companies", in: *JAMA Netw Open* 2019;2:e186875

⁶ "Wouters OJ. Lobbying Expenditures and Campaign Contributions by the Pharmaceutical and Health Product Industry in the US", in: *JAMA Intern Med* 2020;180:688-97

⁷ Markel H. "Patents, Profits, and the American People – The Bayh-Dole Act of 1980", in: *N Engl J Med* 2013;369:794-6

⁸ Ridley M. "Rasender Fortschritt? Schön wär's", in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 4 June 2020

16-year-olds to the ballot box?

The responsibility of voters in direct democracy should not be underestimated!

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The National Council took an astonishingly quick decision in the parliamentary autumn session: After an extremely brief discussion with only four statements, it approved a parliamentary initiative. According to this initiative, active voting and election rights for 16-year-olds are to be introduced at federal level. Luckily, also in this question things are never as bad as they seem: It is to be hoped that the Council of States will think things through thoroughly before they vote on it, and if not, the voters will have the last word.

The initiative comes from the Green *Sibel Arslan* (Baselstadt). In her own words, it is her “heartfelt concern” to “give young people a voice”.¹ On 3 July, the National Council’s Political Institutions Committee had recommended the initiative with 12:12 votes with one abstention and the president’s casting vote narrowly to rejection.

Poorly designed ...

That the initiative is badly launched, the youngest national councillor, 26-year-old *Andri Silberschmidt* (FDP/the Liberals Zurich), actually had to explain his fellow councillors. Active and passive right to vote should not diverge: Who may vote actively should also be allowed to run for election. Furthermore, the voting age and the age of maturity (18 years) should be the same.²

It must be added that these arguments are not a mere formalism, but correspond to the understanding of the responsible citizen in direct democracy. The voting rights of the Swiss do not only include the right to speak out and have a say in decisions, as some young people might think who demonstrate against climate change or the pandemic-related compulsory masks in discos and clubs. It is connected with the obligation to make a contribution to the common good. Although some 20- or 30-year-olds also lack the personal maturity for this, as the supporters of the initiative claimed, this is not an argument for voting rights for 16-year-olds.

But the initiative is also incongruous from a federalist perspective: “Before we decide here on new rights centrally, it is up to the cantons to take the first step,” says *Andri Silberschmidt*. Only one canton (Glarus) has so far introduced the voting age of 16, while several cantons have rejected it at the ballot box. Should they have a say in the decision-making process in the Confederation before they can participate in the community assembly and have a say in cantonal matters? An upside-down world.

... with quite weird reasoning ...

The main arguments of the proponents: The young people would have too little to say “because of the demographics”

(*Sibel Arslan*) — or expressed less elegantly: “Democracy in Switzerland suffers from old age [...]” (*Tamara Funicello*, SP (Swiss Social Democratic Party, Bern). Pretty screwy, isn’t it?

And because there are so many interested 16- and 17-year-olds, they must have subito the tone in politics? Let’s rather make our young people aware that they can learn a lot from their older fellow citizens who are well experienced in democracy and life, because they simply lack the experience and knowledge at the age of 16 — by the way, also at 18.

“16-year-olds *have the necessary political education because this takes place mostly in compulsory school*, which means for many young people shortly before their 16th birthday.” (*Sibel Arslan*; similar to *Tamara Funicello*) [emphasis mw]. A bold statement! In the questionable curriculum 21 of the elementary school, “political education” has its place among the thousands of so-called competencies in a small place and yet, with its abundance of content and its detachment, it goes beyond any framework (see box). The typical contradiction of “competence-oriented” learning: many high-flying goals with little behind them. Above all, however, upper school students (13 to 16 years old) are too young for a genuine “political

continued on page 4

“Political Education” for senior grades in Curriculum 21 – Inviting 13 to 16-year-old students to rebellion?

mw. Curriculum 21 contains quite a “nourishing” program entitled „Understanding democracy and human rights and campaigning.“ It is meant for youngsters who should spend their remaining studying time on the accomplishment of their basic knowledge during these last three years of secondary school. Teachers may choose how they want to use the scarce time for this kind of “political education”. Either tolerating that their students download some “explanations” and “theses” from the Internet without understanding much of them or they encourage them to participate in climate demonstrations and so on. Anyway, the subject material on “political education” in *Curriculum 21* gives the teacher a questionable platform to form the attitudes of the majority of his students who are still very amenable to influence.

“*Curriculum 21. Spaces, Times, Societies (including Geography and History)*

Part 8 Understanding democracy and human rights and campaigning

1. Students are able to explain Swiss democracy and compare it to other systems.

a. Students are able to tell how democracy came about and how it developed and is distinguished from other political systems.

* Democracy, People’s sovereignty, Restriction of Power, Citizens Rights

b. They can distinguish between the three powers on the level of the Commune, the Canton and the Federation and show what tasks they have to solve. *Constitution, Division of Powers, Government, Judiciary

c. They can explain significant peculiarities of Swiss Democracy and explain the rights and duties which result from them

*Federalism, People, Commune, Direct Democracy, Initiative, Referendum, Parties, Associations

d. They can take a stand about contemporary problems and controversies and combine them with their personal everyday experiences within and without school and can argue for their positions (e.g. relationship between state and economy, settlement areas.)

Furthermore there are the topics Human Rights and Children’s Rights (“2. Students are able to explain the development, significance of and the threats to human rights”), and the topic Switzerland’s International relations. (“3. Students are able to recognize and judge the position of Switzerland in Europe and the world”)

At least 80 to 100 teacher-guided lessons would be necessary if the objective of this undertaking were that the students got to know the fundamentals of Switzerland’s state model and the rights and duties deriving from it. Comment on 1.d: Before they were capable of judging contemporary issues, students would have to get informed about goals and arguments of both sides. For ethical and educational reasons it is not permissible to present one-sided and erroneous slogans as for example “Nein zur schädlichen Kündigungsinitiative” (“No to the damaging dismissal initiative”) and name it “information” about the Initiative “For a moderate immigration”.

Back to the rule of law!

Lausanne activists sentenced for trespassing

mw. Do you remember the climate activists who occupied a Credit Suisse branch in Lausanne in November 2018, played tennis there and disrupted operations so that the bank had to be closed for a short time? CS filed a complaint for trespassing. To the surprise of many legal experts and laymen with a sound understanding of the law, the twelve activists were acquitted on January 13, 2020: The judging district judge – possibly impressed by the parade of lawyers – found that the threat of climate change was an “emergency” within the meaning of the Swiss Criminal Code, which could justify an act that was punishable in itself.¹ Since the public prosecutor of the canton of Vaud referred the case to the cantonal court of appeal, the latter is now putting the rule of law back on its feet.

Listening to the activists, one could be struck by “a hint of sympathy”, said *Eric Cottier*, Attorney General of the Canton of Vaud, at the court hearing. However, the cantonal court should not be guided by this, but should “simply apply the law”, and this is crystal clear in this case.² On 24 September, the cantonal court of Vaud sentenced the activists to conditional fines and penalties for trespassing and violating the law on administrative fines.

The law has thus been satisfied. But if you listen to the comments of the criminals and their lawyers, you may feel chilly: The motives here are quite different from the maintenance of the rule of law. According to one activist, the judiciary did not dare “to develop the law further.” One of the twelve (!) lawyers even announced that “the court of appeal preferred to defend the interests of the financial center to the detriment of

future generations”.³ Obviously, some lawyers do not care about that the judiciary is not responsible for politics, but for administering justice.

In reality, the perpetrators and their defense attorneys are not at all dissatisfied with the verdict: they have already announced that they want to take it to the Federal Supreme Court and possibly the *European Court of Human Rights*. The attention of the media and many “well-meaning” contemporaries will thus be assured for years to come. •

¹ see Wüthrich, Marianne. “Leveraging the rule of law for activists?”, in: *Zeit-Fragen* of 28.1.2020

² Fumagalli, Antonio. “Trial against climate activists who played tennis in a CS branch: Prosecutor demands that the court ‘simply apply the law’”, in: *NZZ online* of 22.9.2020.

³ “Acquittal for climate activists in Vaud overturned”, in: *swissinfo* of 24.9.2020 (*Keystone-SDA*)

Mayor of Bern supports illegal demonstrations

mw. During the sessions of the National Council and the Council of States (four times three weeks a year) demonstrations on the *Bundesplatz* in Bern are prohibited. The parliamentarians are supposed to make their way to the entrance of the *Bundeshaus* by not having to push through demonstrators and not be disturbed in their work by the noise of the loudspeakers.

In disregard of the ban, on Monday, 21 September, climate activists occupied the *Bundesplatz* and announced that they wanted to stay for one week (i.e. until the end of the Session on Friday). The Presidents of the National Council and the Council of States asked the Bern city government to clear the *Bundesplatz*. On Tuesday the demonstrators were still there, only in the night to Wednesday the police cleared the protest camp.

How was that possible? Why did the authorities not intervene immediately? Quite simply: The green mayor *Alec von Graffenried* – who can be re-elected or not by the people of Bern! – lived so to

speak with the climate protesters and refused to enforce the law. The following excerpts from an interview with *SRF News* speak for themselves:

“SRF News: Alec von Graffenried, what do you say to the protest?”

Alec von Graffenried: It is colourful. We are impressed by how quickly this was organised and built up. [...]

Is it acceptable what the climate activists do?”

The *Bundesplatz* should principally be free during the sessions, and now it is not free. This means that it is an infringement. We need to see how we can handle that.

Do you have sympathy for the demonstration?”

We understand the climate strike movement and their conviction, but we must see how we can find a way with this protest. There are rules that apply to everyone. Activists must also comply with these rules.

The camp has been tolerated for several hours - is it still up tonight?”

I can't tell you yet. They are, however, cooperative. This is a good prerequisite, so that it must not immediately be cleared.

They want to stay until the end of the week. How long is the city of Bern going to watch that?”

We are now entering into negotiations with them, more we cannot say yet. The action week will last until the end of the week anyway. So the activists will be present in the city by the end of the week - I don't know yet what that looks like. Whether they stay here, we'll see. [...]

Source: “Protest on the Bundesplatz. Bernese Mayor: ‘We did not expect this’.”, in: SRF News of Monday, 21.9.2020

If this is the introduction into living together under the rule of law and into the sense of rules and of mutual consideration, which we adults today intend to give to our youth - then good night at six 'o clock.

“16-year-olds to the ballot box?”

continued from page 3

education”. A realistic introduction to citizenship education is much more appropriate at the vocational school level (from 16 years of age), where it has always been part of general education, or at the *Gymnasium*, where in some cantons it still needs to be developed.

... but with all the more transparent tongues in cheek?

According to National Councillor *Fu-niciello*, young people should have a say

in their future, because “they will have to live in it the longest. That is why the 16-year-olds should be able to vote, for example, on retirement pensions, the CO2 law or working hours. She adds: Lowering the active voting and voting age is a strengthening of our democracy.” Strengthening of democracy? Or is it rather the hoped-for influx of young people via the climate demonstrations to the Greens and the Social Democrats? But the scheme may backfire. As the attitude of many young people — at least those who are completing a vocational

training — is, as I have experienced time and again as a vocational school teacher, rather “conservative”, i.e. they do not want to prematurely replace the tried and tested with something “more modern”. Conclusion: Let's stick to active and passive voting and voting rights from the age of 18. •

¹ Parliamentary Initiative 19.415. Giving young people a voice. Active voting and voting rights for 16-year-olds as a first step into active political life. Submitted by *Sibel Arslan* (GP BS).

² Parliamentary Initiative 19.415. Negotiation in the National Council on 10 September 2020

After the vote on the hunting law

The wolf in the Grisons

by Rico Calcagnini, President of “Habitats without large predators”/the Grisons

The international rewilding lobby with its “Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe” (LCIE) and with the “Plan for the Reintroduction of the Wolf in Europe” by Professor *Luigi Boitani* (University of Rome) has already caused great damage in many European countries. In 90 pages, Professor Boitani offers guidance on how to reintroduce wolves, for example by recommending the release of wolves in new areas or in areas with non-viable populations. The problem was further exacerbated by the strict protection of wolves under the so-called Bern Convention. This was signed in the 1970s by many European countries, especially those that did not have wolves at that time.

In 2018, for example, in France an estimated 500 wolves killed 12,500 farm animals, despite herd protection with electric fences and 3800 guard dogs, i.e. seven dogs per wolf! Initially, these measures still had an effect, but the wolf quickly adapted to the situation and developed new strategies. For example, it also attacks during the day when the sheep are not penned in, or it attacks the herds in the pack so that the guard dogs have no chance.

In Switzerland, too, the wolf population has developed rapidly, as the example of the canton of Grisons shows. The two

packs of 2018 have become seven within a good two years. In addition, the wolves are becoming increasingly brazen, losing their fear of people, circulating in inhabited areas, even on the grounds of a children’s ski school, breaking into stables, massacring farm animals in protected pastures and recently even attacking calves from suckler cow herds.

By the end of September, over 200 animals had already been ripped and killed in the Grisons, and there was an increase not only in numbers but also in the animal species: for the first time, from August onwards, at least six calves from mother stock were ripped and eaten by wolves, and for the first time in September an adult donkey was ripped from a fenced area by wolves and half-eaten.

In the name of animal and human safety and the continued existence of our alpine economy, it is high time that our national and cantonal authorities put an end to this devastating dynamic by the targeted regulation of wolves. Our mountain farmers are desperate, they are reaching their limits and will abandon livestock farming in the Alpine region in time. This is particularly true after the narrow rejection of the revised hunting law by the people on 27 September. This missed an opportunity to take a step in the right direction by giving

the cantons more autonomy in regulating large carnivore populations, as has already been done successfully with other protected species, such as stone deer. For example, the animal and nature conservation organisations have disregarded the needs of the population in the mountain regions with their nationwide multi-million “no”-propaganda and have done a disservice to the species richness in the Alpine region.

The question now is how the intolerable situation in individual regions can be changed for the better and the dynamics of the spread of large predators stopped. The referendum organisations are called upon to play their part in the search for acceptable solutions, given that they have admitted the need to regulate wolf populations after the vote (“*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 28 September 2020: “Ein Wolfsgraben spaltet das Land” (A wolf pit divides the country).

Our organisation will continue to work for the preservation and development of alpine and mountain agriculture, for biodiversity and the safety of animals, landscapes and people. It is unacceptable that large predators should be allowed to get the upper hand, that mountain farmers should be displaced and that the well-tended alpine pastures become overgrown and decay. Our Alps must not degenerate into wilderness. •

Baselland corrects its Curriculum 21

gl. In the canton of Baselland a new curriculum for English at senior grades has become effective. Subject matter and teaching subjects for the school year were listed on only two pages in a concise and clear way. Only on the following pages there are elaborate descriptions of competences to be found, such as are common in *Curriculum 21*, very much to the great sorrow of many teachers.

This procedure means a first and important step in the correction of *Curriculum 21* with its thousands of fragment-

ed competences which is very unpopular with teachers.

The Teachers’ Union *Starke Volksschule beider Basel* (i.e. Baselland and Baselstadt) had started an initiative “For curricula with a clearly defined subject matter and teaching subjects” in 2016, which was adopted by 84% of the population in 2018. Since then the Public School Baselland Curriculum consists of two parts: a first part containing one to three pages for every subject and grade, the second one containing comprehensive descriptions of competences.

It will take some time before this new curriculum will come into effect at all grades and for all subjects. Up to then the teachers’ association *Starke Volksschule beider Basel* and other organisations who had fought the introduction of *Curriculum 21* from the start on reasonable grounds, will have to do a great job in order to correct the greatest blunders and achieve the school authorities’ change of thinking in the long term. •

Source: www.condorcet.ch

Farmers or agricultural industry?

by Prof. Dr Eberhard Hamer, SME Institute Lower Saxony



Eberhard Hamer
(Picture ma)

No other industry is as highly competitive as agriculture, but there is also no other industry receiving as many subsidies as agriculture does. It is a question of these subsidies when green ecophantasts fight for “lean grassland”,

for “natural forests with bark beetles”, for “a green band” lengthwise through Germany, for “frog bridges”, for a “production without artificial fertilisers” and similar uneconomical “causes”.

On the other hand, the farmers as producers are fighting a desperate battle against the market power of the big buyers of milk, pigs, grain or other things. These buyers can dictate prices to them. They are international corporations, and the small farmers are helpless against them.

To a considerable extent, agriculture subsidies go to the processors of agricultural products. There is no conclusive explanation known for this fact. For all intents and purposes, agricultural subsidies should only benefit agricultural producers.

Only 9% of our 266,700 agricultural enterprises count more than 100 hectares; so more than 90% are small, medium-sized family businesses. It is also always these that are at the forefront of media coverage, and they are seen by the population as the actual farm structure.

Economically, however, the situation is quite different:

– The average farm size in Germany is 66 hectares with an increasing tendency, because more and more small farms cannot survive and thus the concentration of farms is increasing. The annual death of

about 200,000 farms thus mainly affects small farms.

– It is, however, not the 90% small farms but the large farms that have the say in the large agricultural associations. The latter have so far succeeded in ensuring that subsidies are calculated on the basis of hectares, which means that large companies have benefited excessively.

– There is also a legal difference between the family farm and most large-scale agricultural corporations: the former are sole proprietorship farms, the latter are usually corporations. In the East, many functionaries of the old agricultural production cooperatives have taken these over (formerly: “Junkerland in Bauernhand – Squire’s land in farmer’s hand”; now: “Von den blauen zu den roten Baronen – From the blue to the red barons”).

– The mentality is completely different between family farms and large-scale agricultural corporations: While the former – in order to survive at all – usually have to combine crops and livestock farming, mass and mono-production prevail with the large farms. Either agriculture or animal husbandry – and both in large dimensions.

– In terms of business management and production requirements, a large agricultural enterprise today is in principle no different from other large production or service enterprises, except that mass production is, of course, carried out in agriculture or livestock farming.

Therefore, in practice, these large farms are not agricultural enterprises but commercial enterprises on an agricultural basis.

So although farmers’ economic activity has for many reasons not been considered to be commercial and they are therefore not subject to trade tax, this does not apply to agricultural factories. A pig fat-

tening facility with thousands of pigs, a factory farm with tens of thousands of chickens, or a dairy farm with hundreds of cows is no longer an agricultural but in reality a commercial enterprise with mass production, high-tech, and a narrow product range. This applies to all large agricultural corporations.

The EU is currently debating how subsidies should be distributed more fairly.

If one takes seriously the idea that large agrarian corporations are differently structured, legally different, and are mass instead of variable producers, one must also differentiate between farmers and industrial companies in the matter of agricultural promotion. Large corporations must not be allowed to receive subsidies, would also have to pay trade tax, since they have as little to do with farming businesses as crafts have to do with industry.

If therefore

– the corporations were considered commercial enterprises and not agricultural enterprises,

– the commercial enterprises were subject to trade tax

– and the agricultural subsidies were to benefit only family farms consistently, this would

– reduce the death of small businesses,

– promote the change to organic farming,

– revive the real purpose of subsidies (maintaining family farms),

– require lower subsidies

– and destroy the false label of the agricultural agribusinesses as “farms”.

Then the unfair competition between small farmers and mass agricultural production in Germany would also disappear, through trade tax and the reduction of subsidies; then the 90 % farming enterprises would be able to compete again and agricultural policy would again benefit farmers instead of corporations. •

Current Concerns

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

Subscribe to Current Concerns – The journal of an independent cooperative

The cooperative *Zeit-Fragen* is a politically and financially independent organisation. All of its members work on a voluntary and honorary basis. The journal does not accept commercial advertisements of any kind and receives no financial support from business organisations. The journal *Current Concerns* is financed exclusively by its subscribers. We warmly recommend our model of free and independent press coverage to other journals.

Annual subscription rate of
CHF 40,-; Euro 30,-; USD 40,-; GBP 25,-
for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of
CHF 20,-; Euro 15,-; USD 20,-; GBP 12,50
for all other countries.

Please choose one of the following ways of payment:

- send a cheque to *Current Concerns*, P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich, or

- send us your credit card details (only *Visa*), or

- pay into one of the following accounts:

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| CH: | Postcheck-Konto (CHF): | 87-644472-4 | IBAN CH91 0900 0000 8764 4472 4 | BIC POFICHBEXXX |
| CH: | Postcheck-Konto (Euro): | 91-738798-6 | IBAN CH83 0900 0000 9173 8798 6 | BIC POFICHBEXXX |
| D: | Volksbank Tübingen, Kto. 67 517 005, BLZ 64190110 | | IBAN DE12 6419 0110 0067 5170 05 | BIC GENODES1TUE |
| A: | Raiffeisen Landesbank, Kto. 1-05.713.599, BLZ 37000 | | IBAN AT55 3700 0001 0571 3599 | BIC RVVGAT2B |

“To learn to use the force of our humanity”

Another look at 30 years of “reunification”

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

3 October 2020 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the accession of the previously newly founded five states of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the area of application of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany. From then on, the Basic Law, which was adopted in 1949 only as a transitional text, also applied to the people of the former German Democratic Republic with only minor changes. The wish of a number of East German civil rights activists for a new all-German constitution, which had been jointly drafted and decided by referendum, was not granted. It is commonly referred to as “reunification”, but the term is misleading. People in the former GDR were obliged to adapt to previous Federal Republican conditions and customs in almost all areas of life. The „reunification“ was dominated by the Federal Republic.

30 years is an occasion to think about many things. The judgments on 3 October 1990 and the following 30 years are very different. No detailed own judgement should be added here. It should merely be pointed out that despite (or perhaps because of) the pressure to adapt, there are still different ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour in the west and east of Germany. This is already evident from the fact that the election results in East and West favour completely different political parties. Anyone who comes to East Germany and enters into an open discussion quickly realises that many things are judged differently in the East than in the West. Less helpful are the voices that link these differences with a negative judgement of the East Germans. So, there will be no convergence in the future either. It would be better to take the voices and the mood in East Germany seriously and seek honest dialogue. But the current political environment is not very helpful in this respect.

No hope for a short-term political turnaround

Many are therefore hoping for the success of mass citizen protests. But the loud cry “We are the people” is no guarantee for a truly democratically legitimised, honest direct-democratic turnaround. The term “critical mass” used by protagonists of such movements illustrates the problem. They keep saying that a mass movement for political objectives does not need a majority of citizens behind it, and that there will be a majority some day, if the “critical mass” is only loud and determined enough. To what extent are citizens here considered to be mature?

It is also time to admit that the contribution of “peaceful revolutions” to the changes in the former Warsaw Pact states was probably not the decisive factor. Just as the subsequent colour revolutions were in many ways externally driven.

An honest political turnaround, in which not only the old rulers are replaced by new ones, must follow a serious direct-democratic path. This presupposes a lot: a good national education; respect for the dignity of all people, including those whose policies you would like to change; the courage to take many small steps; the willingness to undertake unspectacular development work; mature personalities with an honest democratic basic convictions; and above all: a staying power that thinks beyond a generation. Anyone who does not consider how diverse the ways are to prevent real democracy is building on sandy ground.

Political regresses in Germany since 1990

The enlarged Germany has taken considerable steps backwards since 1990. It is not the place to list all the points here. This is most conspicuous and worrying in the “new” foreign policy and military orientation.

The representatives of the four victorious powers of the Second World War, together with the representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, had agreed in the “Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany”, or “Two Plus Four Agreement” for short, signed on 12 September 1990, as the basis for the “new” Germany with Article 2:

“The Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic reaffirm their declarations that only peace will emanate from German soil. According to the constitution of the united Germany, acts tending to undertaken with the intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for aggressive war, are unconstitutional and punishable offence. The Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic declare that the united Germany will never employ any of its weapons except in accordance with its constitution and the Charter of the United Nations”.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, German politicians have been shaking this to the core with their “salami tactics” for

the gradual realisation of German Armed Forces missions abroad. Less than ten years later, in 1999 during NATO’s war of aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the then German government clearly broke that treaty – and the German parliament and the German courts did not contradict.

Ursula von der Leyen is fuelling the „bogyman Russia“.

So where are we today? Here is just one example of unfortunately very many. Ursula von der Leyen, former German Defense Minister and current President of the EU Commission, emphasised right at the beginning of her “State of the [European] Union Address“ on 16 September 2020:

“To those that advocate closer ties with Russia, I say that the poisoning of *Alexei Navalny* with an advanced chemical agent is not a one off. We have seen the pattern in Georgia and Ukraine, Syria and Salisbury – and in election meddling around the world. This pattern is not changing – and no pipeline will change that.”

Not “only peace will come” from such flat bogeyman constructions.

The political conditions in Germany today are not very pleasant, even for those who reject simple black and white drawings. They will not be changed for the better from one day to the next, as I said before.

Overcoming walls and building bridges with humanity

Must citizens therefore be politically passive? The answer is no. We have already pointed out the long-term tasks that lie ahead. There is something else that is widely underestimated in terms of its importance for change in politics: concrete acts of humanity and international understanding. These are always possible, even under the most difficult conditions. Humanity and international understanding follow the social nature of man, it can overcome walls, build bridges and bring conflicting parties closer together, immunise against enemy images and are the ferment of togetherness.

In *Current Concerns* No. 18 of 31 August 2020, there was already talk of a newly published non-fiction novel. The award-winning Irish author *Colum McCann*, who lives in New York, also published it in German in August 2020 with the title “Apeirogon”. The main characters are an Israeli and a Palestinian. Both, the Israeli and the Palestinian, have lost their 14- and 10-year-old daughters in an act

“Learning to use the power of our ...”

continued from page 7

of violence: the Israeli through Palestinian suicide bombers, the Palestinian during an Israeli police operation in the West Bank. But both fathers have not given in to hatred and revenge. They work together in the joint Israeli-Palestinian peace movement. The two main characters in this novel, *Bassam Aramin* and *Rami Elhanan*, are real people. The death of their two daughters *Abir Aramin* and *Smadar Elhanan* is also a bitter reality.

The novel is divided into 1001 chapters. Counting starts from 1 to 500, then there is a chapter headlined 1001, and then counts backwards, from 500 to 1 at the end of the novel. One of the most impressive parts of the novel are the two chapters 500, where Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan themselves have their say. Both show humanity and international understanding in a situation that most of us can hardly imagine. But let one of the two, the Israeli Rami Elhanan, speak for himself.

The story of Rami Elhanan

“My name is Rami Elhanan. I am the father of Smadar. [...] I was a young soldier fighting the October ‘73 war in Sinai, a horrible war, everyone knows this, it’s no revelation. [...] My job included bringing in ammunition and taking out the dead and wounded. I lost some of my very close friends, carried them out on stretchers. I emerged from the war bitter, angry, disappointed, with just one thing on my mind – to detach myself from any kind of involvement or commitment, to block myself off from anything official at all.”

A few pages later, Rami Elhanan describes the death of his 14-year-old daughter, his thoughts and feelings in the days and weeks that followed:

“You have to make a decision. What are you going to do now, with this new, unbearable burden on your shoulders? What are you going to do with this incredible danger that eats you alive? [...] the first choice is obvious: revenge. When someone kills your daughter you want to get even. You want to go out and kill an Arab, any Arab, all Arabs, and then you want to try to kill his family and anyone else around him, it’s expected, it’s demanded. Every Arab you see, you want him dead. [...] Look, I have a bad temper. I know it. I have an ability to blow up. Long ago, I killed people in the war. Distantly, like in a video game. I held a gun. I drove tanks. I fought in three wars. I survived. And the truth is, the awful truth, the Arabs were just a thing

to me, remote and abstract and meaningless. I didn’t see them as anything real or tangible. They weren’t even visible. [...] Then after a while you start asking yourself questions, you know, we’re not animals, we can use our brains, we use our imaginations, we have to find a way to get out of bed in the morning. And you ask yourself, Will killing anyone bring my daughter back? Will killing every other Arab bring her back? Will causing pain to someone else ease the unbearable pain that you are suffering?”

Israelis and Palestinians, who “nevertheless wanted peace”

Through an orthodox Jew, *Jitzschak Frankenthal*, whom he first meets with many prejudices, he gets to know a circle of parents, Jews, Palestinians and other affected people who have lost one or more children in the violent clashes that have been going on for decades, a circle called the “Parents Circle”, people who “nevertheless wanted peace”.

The first time he also meets a Palestinian woman:

“I was standing there, and I saw a few Palestinians passing by in a bus. Listen, this flabbergasted me. I knew it was going to happen, but still I had to do a double take. Arabs? Really? Going into the same meeting as these Israelis? How could that be? A thinking, feeling, breathing Palestinian? And I remember seeing this lady in this black, traditional Palestinian dress, with her headscarf – you know, the sort of woman who I might have thought could be the mother of one of the bombers who took my child. She was slow and elegant, stepping down from the bus, walking in my direction. And then I saw it, she had a picture of her daughter to her chest. She

walked past me. I couldn’t move. And this was like an earthquake inside me: this woman had lost her child. It maybe sounds simple, but it was not. I had been in a sort of coffin. This lifted the lid from my eyes. My grief and her grief, the same grief. [...]

You see, I was forty-seven, forty-eight years old at that time, and I had to learn to admit it was the first time in my life, to that point – I can say this now, I could never even think it then – it was the first time that I’d met Palestinians as human beings. Not just workers in the streets, not just caricatures in the newspapers, not just transparencies, terrorists, objects, but – how do I say this? – human beings – human beings, I can’t believe I’m saying that, it sounds so wrong, but it was a revelation – yes, human beings who carry the same burden that I carry, people who suffer exactly as I suffer. An equality of pain.”

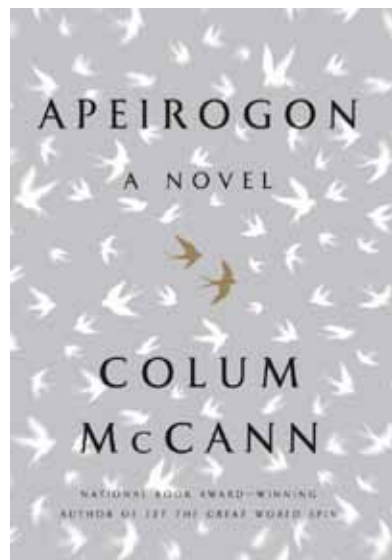
The duty to understand, what is going on around us...

“Some people have an interest in keeping the silence. Others have an interest in showing hatred based on fear. Fear makes money, and it makes laws, and it takes land, and it builds settlements, and fear likes to keep everyone silent. And, let’s face it, in Israel we’re very good at fear, it occupies us. Our politicians like to scare us. We like to scare each other. We use the word ‘security’ to silence others. But it’s not about that, it’s about occupying someone else’s life, someone else’s land, someone else’s head. It’s about control. Which is power. And I realised this with the force of an ax, that it’s true, this notion of speaking truth against power. Power already knows the truth. It tries to hide it. So you have to speak out against power. And I began, back then, to understand the duty we have to try to understand what’s going on. Once you know what’s going on then you begin to think: What can we do about it?”

...and to keep on putting tiny cracks in the wall

By quoting only a few excerpts from a novel, you cannot do justice to the whole work. The words of Rami Elhanan deserve to be read completely. In the following pages he describes what he has decided to do. His answer to the question: “What can you do yourself?” He criticises the occupation policy as inhumane. But he sees his main task in telling his very personal story, in devoting his life to,

“going everywhere possible, to talk to anyone possible [...]. My name is Rami Elhanan, I am the father of Smadar. I



ISBN 9780593134511

continued on page 9

The Belarusian Maidan

The Colour Revolution after the 9 August 2020 presidential elections

by Peter Bachmaier*, Vienna



Peter Bachmaier
(Picture ma)

The picture that the Western media has drawn of Belarus in recent months has nothing to do with reality. There are also hardly any journalists who have ever visited the country and have an objective idea about it.

The model of the social people's state

In reality, Belarus is a socially oriented, independent and sovereign nation-state with free healthcare and education, stable jobs and affordable housing. The country is a „citadel of traditional culture“, as one official slogan reads: culture is characterised by classical literature and art, traditional aesthetics, realistic style in literature and the priority of the family. There is a renaissance of Christianity of both Orthodox and Catholic denominations.

Belarusians come from the Rus, the East Slavic people, which more than 1,000 years ago consisted of three principalities: Kiev, Polotsk and Novgorod, and was Christianized in 988. Later it was largely ruled by Poland and Lithuania, and when only one area in the northeast remained, it was called “Belaya Rus”, meaning the pure Rus, not subject to “Latinism”.

* Prof. Dr. Peter Bachmaier, Eastern European historian and political scientist, board member of the Austrian Institute for Eastern and South Eastern Europe in Vienna (1972-2005), lecturer at the University of Vienna (1993-2007), President of the Austrian-Belarusian Society (since 2006).

“Learning to use the power of our ...”

continued from page 8

repeat it every day, and every day it becomes something new because somebody else hears it. I will tell it until the day I die, and it will never change, but it will keep on putting a tiny crack in the wall until the day I die.”

No less impressively tells the Palestinian Bassam Aramin. One of his statements is: “We had to learn to use the force of our humanity.”

Palestine, Israel ... and Germany

It will be said that the situation in the Middle East is very different from that in Germany and Europe. On the one hand, this is true, but on the other hand the following must be pointed out:

The examples of the Palestinian Bassam Aramin and the Israeli Rami Elhanan



Independence Square in Minsk. (Picture www.minsk-old-new.com)

The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), founded in 1920, suffered under *Stalin's* repressions, but the fact remains that without the BSSR there would be no present-day Republic of Belarus. In the end, it was the most developed Soviet republic with the highest standards in industry and education.

On 24 August 1991, the BSSR declared its independence and pursued a pro-Western course until 1994, which, similar to Russia and Ukraine, led to the path of neoliberalism. However, in 1994 *Alexander Lukashenko* won the presidential election with 81 % of the vote – Lukashenko, who did not come from the nomenklatura and did not represent their interests. He re-

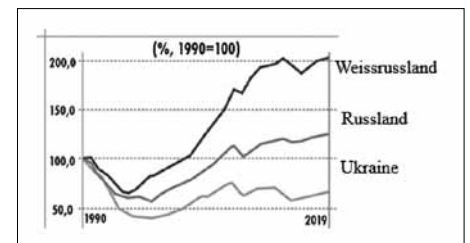
tained the state industry and many social institutions of the Soviet system, but disempowered the nascent new oligarchy.

Since then Belarus has been a presidential republic in which the president appoints the government and determines the basic lines of domestic and foreign policy. The president is elected every five years and the National Assembly every four years according to a majority vote. The Soviet system was developed politically, economically and culturally. Since then, Belarus can point to growth, stability and social security. In 2005 it was the first ex-Soviet republic to regain the gross domestic product of the era before the collapse of the Soviet Union: 120% of the level of 1990, compared with 85 % in Russia and 60 % in Ukraine.

show that even in a region of the world where violence, the principle of revenge and mutual hatred are part of everyday life, understanding and humanity are possible – if people choose to do so. How much easier it must be in a country like Germany or in the relations between the peoples of Europe – if here too the will to do so is strong enough.

The dynamics should not be underestimated of the sometimes sharp polarisation of public and private conflicts, the enemy stereotypes within Germany – for example, “left” against “right” – or else within Europe – for example, EU states against Russia and its allies. If unabated, violence can also result from this – with all its consequences.

So far there is no evidence that the German state is taking appropriate steps to counteract these developments. All the more reason for the citizens to take action. •



The index of real GDP, source: Sergei Glazyev, Belarusian Choice: Macroeconomic Analysis (Russian), Belarus sednja of 30 August 2020.

President Lukashenko chose this path to avoid the extremes of shock therapy and colonisation by Western capital. He managed to avoid economic disaster, corruption, massive capital exports and the ruin

"The Belarusian Maidan"

continued from page 9

of the country. Due to this course, Belarus has become the most successful of the former Soviet republics. Real GDP doubled between 1990 and 2014 (Russia's real GDP grew by 15% and Ukraine's by 30%, according to the World Bank).

The widely held view that the Belarusian economy is a relic of Soviet socialism does not correspond to reality. Here are market mechanisms at work, which create quite a fierce competition due to the openness of the Belarusian economy even for state-owned enterprises, which are oriented towards the export of high-tech products.

The high technology park in Minsk, founded in 2005, the Belarusian "Silicon Valley", is a growth industry that currently consists of about 400 IT companies (one third are foreign companies) with more than 30,000 employees.

A milestone in the cooperation between Belarus and China is the development of the industrial park *Weliki Kamen* (Big Stone). The park covers 92 square kilometres and has a special legal status that is conducive to business activity, with great incentives for foreign investors. The park is located 25 km from Minsk and in the immediate vicinity of the international airport, railway lines and the Berlin-Moscow motorway. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, there are 63 companies in the park whose investments exceeds one billion US dollars.

Spiritual rebirth

National culture is seen as the "cornerstone of independence". Education is given high priority by the government, which, compared to other CIS countries, is reflected in the above-average share of

the state budget (about 7%). The objectives of the education reform adopted in 1998 put the "restoration of the national and cultural foundations of education" in first place. The subject "state ideology", a kind of civic education taught in the upper classes, serves the purpose of education for love of the homeland, the state and the family. The change in values that accompanied the disintegration of the Soviet Union and was associated with increased Western influence is being fought by the government.

Patriotic education is also the task of the *Belarusian Republican Union of Youth* (BRSM), which has carried out a number of actions in this direction in recent years, such as "We Serve Belarus" to connect youth with the army, the "Remembrance" action to commemorate the defence of the homeland in the years of the Second World War, and finally the "Christmas Tree" action, which is held annually at the Orthodox Christmas celebration in early January with the participation of the Orthodox clergy. The annual *Cyril and Methodius Lectures* at the Minsk State University and the holiday of Slavic literature on 24 May serve the rebirth of Christian values in Belarusian society.

The Prize "For Spiritual Rebirth", founded by a presidential decree, is awarded annually on 7 January, the day of Christ's birth according to the Orthodox calendar, to creative artists, writers, teachers and clergy for outstanding achievements in the field of literature and art, in the humanitarian field and for the consolidation of spiritual values.

Corona crisis: no panic in Belarus

In March 2020, the corona epidemic also reached Belarus, but there was a comprehensive plan to combat the epidemic.

There were still hospitals for infectious diseases from the Soviet era, preventive measures for an epidemic with medical equipment, institutes for virology and epidemiology and trained personnel.

According to the UN, Belarus was well prepared for the crisis, with 41 doctors, 114 nurses and 110 hospital beds per 10,000 inhabitants. In contrast, the average for advanced European countries is 30 doctors, 81 nurses and 55 hospital beds.

However, Lukashenko emphasised Belarus' independent path by refusing to impose a quarantine on the whole country. Belarus is a country that has not had a lockdown. The factories and shops, the inns, schools, universities, and churches were not closed, but remained open and continued to operate.

In June 2020, the IMF offered Belarus a loan of \$ 940 million, but the head of state described the additional, non-financial conditions as unacceptable. "Belarus was supposed to do what Italy has done in the fight against the corona virus. The IMF continued to call for quarantine, isolation, and a curfew. What is this nonsense? We are not jumping on anyone's command", said Lukashenko.¹

The mistakes of the authorities

It is obvious that the potential for street protest has been accumulating for several years. This accumulation has been facilitated by the mistakes made by the authorities in the socio-economic field: the ill-conceived decree on parasitism of 2017 (concerning some 500,000 people not in work), failures in the introduction of a new method of calculating salaries, the calculation of seniority, an increase in social differentiation, failures in youth policy and the lack of a clear, comprehensible explanation for the chosen position of the state during the pandemic.²

There were also misjudgements in the ideological field. The consolidation of society, understood as the need for reconciliation with those who hold pro-Western and nationalist views (about 15 to 20% of the population), has not worked. During the riots, symbols and slogans dominated the streets.

There were obvious mistakes in the field of information. In the beginning, the radical opposition agenda almost completely dominated the new media (*YouTube*, *Messenger*, social networks). There was not enough time for the use of government-related new media; it was necessary to highlight this area as a field of work separate from the traditional media and to provide normal resources for it. There was no sharp reaction to the activities of the Polish-sponsored provocative



Holiday of the Slavic scriptures (St. Cyril and Methodius) in Minsk.
(Picture www.minsknews.by, 24 May 2017)

"The Belarusian Maidan"

continued from page 10

Telegram channels and the call for violence through diplomatic and other channels.

The mistakes in education were the adoption of elements of the Western education system, such as the Bologna system and public schools, which were a result of the EU's Eastern Partnership.

Influence of new media

The European Commission is supporting radio and TV programmes of the *BBC* and *Deutsche Welle* which broadcast news and rock music five days a week specifically for Belarus. It is also supporting the "Belarusian Humanities University", founded by the *Soros* Foundation "Open Society", which had to move from Minsk to Vilnius (Lithuania) in 2006.

In the early stages of the election campaign, it was obvious that the opposition had developed a multi-level professional political technology project, in which new media played a decisive role.

In the first months of 2020, the number of opposition media activists increased dramatically, mainly due to the increase in Telegram accounts. The number of subscribers to the five largest opposition Telegram accounts alone rose from 317,000 on 1 January to 672,000 subscribers on 20 June 2020.

The channel *nexta* (Belarusian *nechta*, Russian *nektion* for "someone"), founded two years ago in Warsaw by Stepan Putilo and Roman Protasewitsch, who also works for *Radio Free Europe* and the *BBC*, already has two million subscribers, according to its own statement. The channel is mainly providing demonstrators in Minsk with the necessary information about meeting points, dates, banners, and political slogans.

The opposition's protest rallies led to a division of society with aggressions previously unknown. The state power always propagated the unity of the people in an ethnic and religious sense based on the Belarusian national culture. The protest movement used the symbolism of the White Ruthenian People's Republic proclaimed in March 1918 under German protectorate with the white-red-white flag, which was also used in the years 1991-1995, and the raised fist as a symbol of insurrection, which was also used in various uprisings of the last decades – in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Egypt.³

The driving force behind the Belarusian protests was a new middle class – young IT experts and cultural workers, largely a result of the state's efforts in recent years. There are already more than 100,000 of them, earning well in West-



High technology park in Minsk. (Picture ma)

ern companies, but without any political awareness.

Attempt for a colour revolution

For the presidential elections on 9 August 2020, 141 election observers from CIS countries and other independent observers from Western countries were accredited to the Central Election Commission. As in previous elections, the OSCE was also invited, but declined to participate, citing the corona measures.

After the presidential election, developments followed the classic pattern of a colour revolution. When the Central Election Commission announced on 9 August that Alexander Lukashenko had won about 80% and *Svetlana Tikhanovskaya* about 10% of the votes, tens of thousands of demonstrators in Minsk on 9 and 10 August declared *Tikhanovskaya* the "real election winner".

Two prominent candidates were unable to run for election. *Valeri Zepkalo*, a former Belarusian ambassador to the USA, had built the country's first high-tech park, but had fallen out with the president. He left the country after the election commission rejected his candidacy because he was unable to collect the required number of signatures.

Viktor Babariko, who for 20 years ran one of the country's largest banks, *Belgazprombank*, and a cultural club for young people, was arrested on 11 June on charges of tax evasion and money laundering on a grand scale. *Babariko* claims that this was politically motivated. However, he sent his campaign manager to lead *Tikhanovskaya*'s campaign.

On 9 August, after the polling stations closed, people took to the streets. Of course, as in all previous elections, unrest was expected, but its scale exceeded the wildest expectations. As it later turned out, organised groups of provocateurs were active in the crowd and clashed with the police. "Molotov cocktails" and cobbles

stones flew at the police officers. On the second night the demonstrators started to build barricades, blocking the roads and throwing "Molotov cocktails" and stones again. A real urban guerrilla unfolded in the streets, and everything was coordinated from the same *Nechta* channel in real time from Poland.

The protests did not have a clear objective, the people were not even promised anything, as for example on the Kiev Maidan 2013–2014 the accession to the EU, here everything was only aimed at a change of government.

The aim of the protests

According to *Belta* from 19 August 2020, the "Coordination Council for the Transfer of Power" called in its programme for the introduction of border and custom control with Russia, the approval of television broadcasts from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, the withdrawal from the defence alliance of the ex-Soviet countries OWKS. Furthermore, it called for a gradual ban of the Russian language until 2030, the introduction of the Belarusian language in the army, the establishment of the Belarusian autocephalous Orthodox Church, and finally for the accession to the European Union and NATO (the programme has since been removed from the Coordination Council's website).⁴

However, the documents of the Coordination Council do not mention the points also announced on state television. A member of the Coordination Council, lawyer *Mr Maxim Znak*, stated at a press conference that the Council has no political programme. Also at the demonstrations, apart from symbols, there are only the demands "Get off!", "New elections!" and "Changes!"

The traces of the protests lead to Washington. For years, the US state foundation *National Endowment for Democracy*

continued on page 12

"The Belarusian Maidan"

continued from page 11

(NED) has been supporting the Belarusian opposition and "civil society". For 2019, the NED lists 34 projects in Belarus on its website that have received financial support. The main aim is to strengthen the anti-Lukashenko opposition and relevant NGOs. For example, the NED says "Strengthening NGOs: Increasing local and regional civil engagement".

Another goal of the Western sponsors of the opposition movement is likely to be the interruption of the New Silk Road, which runs from China through Belarus to the EU countries. US Secretary of State *Michael Pompeo* was on tour in several Central European countries between 11 and 15 August 2020 with the open goal of convincing them to abandon cooperation with China and Russia.

As early as 2018, the *Social Engineering Agency (SEA)* determined a high probability for Belarus that a classic colour revolution – according to the methodology of the theorist of "non-violent protests" Gene Sharp – could take place in the next two years. The appropriate instruments were already in place – a dense network of several dozen NGOs, think tanks, media and hundreds of bloggers and opinion leaders, financed by companies in Poland and Lithuania with a million-dollar budget.

In his speech on 16 August 2020 on Independence Square, President Lukashenko explained the protests:

"You have come here to defend your country, your independence, your families, your wives, sisters and children! We have built this beautiful country with you under all difficulties! Whom do you want to hand it over to?"

On the Western borders of our country, a military power is being established. Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and unfortunately our beloved Ukraine, their leaders, want to command us to hold new elections. If we give in to them, we will hit buffers and will perish as a state, as a people and as a nation.

They will kill the President and you will be on your knees. Remember, I have never betrayed you, never! I will never betray you!"⁵

The signing of an agreement on enhanced defence cooperation between the US and Poland on 15 August has made Poland a "crucial point of regional security" (as the US State Department describes it).

Former Ukrainian Prime Minister *Nikolay Azarov* (2010–2014) said in a speech in Minsk: "As I watch what is happening now, I would like to say that it is very reminiscent of the preparation of the first Maidan, which began in our country

in 2003–2004. Western special services started long ago with the preparations for the Belarusian elections.

They failed to destroy the Soviet legacy in Belarus. On the contrary, industry has been modernised and competitive companies such as MAZ, BELAZ, *Gomselmash* have been founded... I do not even mention that Belarus has managed to create a high-tech estate bringing together almost a thousand IT production companies – products for two billion US dollars.

"The traces of the protests lead to Washington. For years, the US state foundation *National Endowment for Democracy (NED)* has been supporting the Belarusian opposition and 'civil society'. For 2019, the NED lists 34 projects in Belarus on its website that have received financial support. The main aim is to strengthen the anti-Lukashenko opposition and relevant NGOs."

It was said on the podium at the time: 'Tomorrow we will sign a treaty with the EU – and we will have European salaries and pensions'. Where are they now? Real wages and pensions have fallen by half in US dollars and prices have risen incredibly. Ukraine started to import agricultural products.

In Ukraine, we now have the highest mortality rate in Europe. Every year, simply because of physical decline, our population is decreasing by 300,000 people. About ten million people went abroad because companies were closed and there was no work anymore. The medical system is completely destroyed. Covid-19 has shown it. With my speech, I would like to warn you seriously: Do not believe in this European 'carrot'! Do not believe it!"

The meeting of the Presidents of Belarus and Russia in Sochi

On 14 September 2020 in Sochi, Alexander Lukashenko and *Vladimir Putin* discussed the state and prospects for the development of bilateral cooperation in various areas, international problems and the situation in the region, as well as issues of joint response to future challenges. Alexander Lukashenko remarked:

"These events have shown that we need to stay closer to our older brother and work together on all issues, including business". The President of Belarus also noted that the parties had taken a systematic and gradual approach in the creation and drafting of the Treaty on the Union State. "Our states and our peoples will always be on cordial terms."

Vladimir Putin stated at the beginning that Russia considers Belarus as its closest ally and will fulfil all its obligations under the treaties and agreements. "Russia

remains committed to all our agreements, including those arising from the Treaty on the Union State (CSTO)". In addition, the Russian President announced that Russia would grant the Belarusian state a loan of 1.5 billion US dollar.⁶

In his speech at the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly on 18 September 2020, Foreign Minister of Belarus, *Vladimir Makei*, explained: "Today's actions by the EU countries undermine the sovereignty and independence of Belarus, despite the declarations of

their support." He also commented towards journalists on the adoption of the resolution "Situation of human rights in Belarus" by the UN Human Rights Council: "This can clearly be interpreted as interference in the internal affairs of our state."⁷

The Foreign Minister continued: "The West side is now closed to us. So we need to maximise cooperation with Russia. This vector, to which we have always been attracted, needs to be developed to the maximum. Hereby, cooperation in the military and information sectors will also be intensified."⁸

The results of these events will be as follows. Integration into the Russian Federation will be revived and Belarus will generally orientate itself Eastwards. Cooperation with the People's Republic of China will increase. Relations with the EU will deteriorate significantly, particularly with Poland and Lithuania. A constitutional reform will be implemented to strengthen the parliament and the role of the parties in political life. •

¹ Röper, Thomas. *Anti-Spiegel* of 17 August 2020

² Dzermant, Aleksey. "Die Fehler der Behörden" (The mistakes of the authorities) (russ.) of 13 August 2020, <https://t.me/dzermant>

³ Sankin, Wladimir. "Regimewechsel in Belarus, Social Engineering Agency (SEA)" (Regime change in Belarus, Social Engineering Agency (SEA), in: *rt deutsch* of 13 August 2020. The founder of the SEA, *Anton Davidchenko*, is a former participant of the Odessa uprising in May 2014 against the new Kiev government, who has left for Russia and is studying the strategy of "social engineering".

⁴ *Belta* from 19 August 2020

⁵ *Speech of President Alexander Lukashenko on Independence Square in Minsk* on 16 August 2020, belta.by of 16 August 2020

⁶ *Belarus segodnja* of 14 September 2020

⁷ *Belta* of 18 September 2020

⁸ *Belta* of 17 September 2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

75 years end of war

The “Buchenwald children” on the Zugerberg

How the “Swiss Donation” helped traumatised young people

by Winfried Pogorzelski

Towards the end of and immediately after the Second World War, Switzerland provided assistance to many war-affected persons in a variety of ways to ease the material and psychological consequences for those affected.¹ It was important for the neutral country to stay independent and not to join the relief agency of the victorious Allies, the so-called UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), which had already been founded in 1943 by the USA, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and China, and, after the end of the war, was taken over by the UN.

The Federal Council gives the necessary impulse as a sign of gratitude

Thus Switzerland organised humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance even in war-torn Europe. In December 1944, the Federal Council published the brochure “Our people would like to thank” (circulation: 1.5 million), and thus initiated the integration of various relief organisations to form the so-called “Swiss donation for the victims of war”. As a patriotic relief organisation, it was also intended to help overcome Switzerland’s isolation in foreign policy. A fundraising campaign among the population brought in around 47 million francs, with the federal government contributing more than 300 million francs.

In 18 European countries various relief campaigns were carried out-organised and carried out by the Red Cross. For example, children suffering from tuberculosis were brought from Vienna to Davos for recreation; in the German towns of Friedrichshafen and Constance or (Swiss) Kreuzlingen, Switzerland supplied thousands of children with clothing, shoes and food. Hundreds of 4 to 10-year-old children arrived in Switzerland by train from Hamburg, where they were provided with all the necessary care.

Relief and recovery for the traumatised

One special campaign consisted in Switzerland offering the Allies to receive 2,000 children and adolescents from concentration camps for half a year for recreation in Switzerland.² On 25 June, instead of the expected children, 374 young adults between the ages of 17 and 25 arrived in Basel as most of the children had been killed by the SS under the pretext not being fit for work.



Drawing of Kalman Landau’s picture series: The train journey of the young people from Buchenwald to Switzerland is documented here. The original blue and white colour of the flags probably refers to the coat of arms of the canton of Zug. (Picture Archive for Contemporary History ETH Zurich: NL Charlotte Weber/85)

Before that, the young people had been liberated by US troops. They had reached Buchenwald only a few months ago: The SS had driven them from the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Gross-Rosen concentration camps westward into the notorious death marches – leading to Buchenwald, among other places – to prevent their liberation by the Red Army.³

The female adolescents were accommodated in a home in Vaumarcus in the canton of Vaud, the male adolescents on the Zugerberg. They arrived there on 14 July 1945 with the Zugerberg cable car. Their new home, Haus Felsenegg, was in poor condition and first had to be renovated, since it had served as accommodation for soldiers during the war.

The Red Cross Children’s Relief Services and the local caregivers had differing ideas about how to spend the recovery time, i.e., how to spend the time in a sensible way, and what the traumatised young people needed most. The Red Cross representatives believed that a scout-like program would be the right thing: camping, singing songs, outdoor games, excursions, etc. In contrast, the caregivers, in addition to loving attention, focussed on teaching and learning. Materials such as textbooks,

pens and notebooks were provided; classes were established and a schedule was created. Arithmetic, cultural history, geography and merchandise knowledge were among the subjects on the schedule.⁴

With touching words, *Charlotte Weber*, one of the caregivers, describes how she tried to help the young people in coping with their nightmares, their separation from their parents or even their loss: “I quietly open the door and then, I go to the bed of the boy, who has now suddenly become like a little child, lonely, abandoned. I gently caress his hair, looking for a handkerchief: ‘[...] dear child, have a good cry’, I say quietly, often I am silent just staying there. [...] So every evening I go from room to room, cover a sleeping person a little better, squeeze warm hands [...]. There is chatting, laughter, I get to hear jokes, often also very sad stories. They all call me Mummy, spontaneously and quite naturally. So now I have a hundred and seven children!”⁵

“gezeichnet”. The ‘Buchenwald children’ on the Zugerberg” – an exhibition

On the Zugerberg, the young people who had escaped the concentration camp were

continued on page 14

"The 'Buchenwald children' ..."

continued from page 13

given a first opportunity to better cope with their experiences or to deal with it by talking about it. The caregivers encouraged them to do so, and many took their first steps in this direction. Those who didn't want to or were not able to speak had the opportunity to draw, which was actively used.

In 2018/19, the Museum Burg Zug showed 150 coloured drawings from the legacy of caregivers and private individuals, in addition to personal objects, documents, photographs, films, maps, etc.⁶ With impressive precision and vividness, the young illustrators clearly captured what they had experienced: their arrival in Auschwitz, physical training in the open air and hard forced labour to be performed daily, the gassing of inmates and their cremation. Torture and executions for escape attempts were also recorded in detail. Finally, the arrival of the Americans and the longed-for opening of walls and barbed wire are depicted in drawings. The graphical depiction of seventeen-year-old *Kalman Landau*, comprising a total of 39 illustrations, is particularly impressive: it depicts his journey from his first arrest, through his stay in the various camps, to his liberation and his journey to our country: There are green railway carriages on a track and an alley of leafy trees, and above all, the striking title: "We are going to Switzerland".

„Outside was beautiful...“ – the example of Max Perkal

One of the young people, *Max Perkal*, was born in Poland in 1926. After the invasion of the German troops, he was interned in a ghetto with other thousands of Jews before being deported to Auschwitz. Via the Buchenwald concentration camp, his path leads to the Zugerberg, where he meets Charlotte Weber. In three blue school exercise books he writes down his experiences in a mixture of Yiddish (his mother tongue) and German and without a uniform spelling under the title "Schön war draussen ..." ("Outside was beautiful ..."). At the end of his stay on the Zugerberg, he hands over the booklets to Charlotte Weber, who is aware that a publication is out of question for the time being: repressing the past, "crossing over to the other side by trivialising, denying"⁷ — Thus she sketches from her point of view the state of mind, in which there were probably many who had escaped hell. The two met in Zurich in the early 1960s, in Jerusalem in 1970 and again in Zurich in 1994, when Charlotte Weber presented her book entitled "Gegen den Strom der



Drawing of the series of paintings by Henryk Reicher: "GAZKAMMER UND KREMATORIUM" (gas chamber and crematorium). On the left you can see the crematorium drawn in the original bright red; the building attached to the right has the designation "Bad" (Bathroom) above the door. From the right, prisoners are brought in on a truck and then driven into the building. From the loudspeakers you can probably hear orders. (Picture Archive for Contemporary History ETH Zurich: S Biographies and Special Topics/78)

Finsternis" (Against the current of darkness).⁸ For the first time since it was written down, Perkal picks up his notebooks again.

He agrees to the publication in the conviction that, as one of the few survivors who lost his entire family during the war, he must bear witness to the events. The text describes the period from the deportation to Auschwitz in 1943, to the stay in the Birkenau concentration camp, to the gruelling march - one of the infamous death marches - in January 1945 over the Krkonoše Mountains (Poland/Czech Republic) to the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. The concise and at the same time vivid depictions of everyday life in a concentration camp contain almost all the humiliation, cruelty and sheer misery that was part of the relentless daily routine; they do not let the reader go so quickly, especially since it is always present that these are the experiences of a young person. The title "Schön war draussen draussen..." ("It was nice outside") reflects two things: firstly, the fact that the author considers the experience of natural beauty to be refreshing, and secondly, that he is deeply moved by the fact that most people - especially the young inmates - will not be able to enjoy such experiences again and again in the future: "Look how beautiful it is outside, look how beautiful the snow shines under the sunbeams. Will we still be able to walk on this ground? Will we still get out of these wagons with our strengths, or will we be carried out in the appearance of corpses?"⁹

It is also the unquenchable longing for nature experiences, for the beauty of this

earth, from which the author draws his will to survive: "And then in spring, when the snow is turned into water, my bones should serve as food for dogs or birds. No, I still want to live, I want to come back to my hometown unexpectedly when the war is over, and show my enemies, who think I am already dead, that I am still alive."¹⁰ And he makes plans for the life after the war, after the camp: in his fellow prisoner *Izrael Lewkowicz* he has found "a brother" again, with whom he wants to take life into his own hands.¹¹

Keeping memories alive in the service of "Never again!"

It is to the credit of Max Perkal and Charlotte Weber that they, on behalf of innumerable other refugees and refugee helpers, endeavoured to ensure that the memory of the injustice done to innumerable people in the Second World War and especially in the concentration camps is not forgotten. And they show impressively that something can be done to counter this injustice. At the *Institute Montana* (International School with bilingual primary and secondary school, Swiss Grammar School as well as International School with boarding school for girls and boys), where I worked for many years as a German and History teacher at the Swiss Grammar School, the memory of this part of its history is also kept alive. In 2008, Max Perkal, who now lives in the USA, had his say in a very special way on the Zugerberg: as part of an event organised by the Zuger cultur-

continued on page 15

What I needed were real teachers!

by Carl Bossard



Carl Bossard
(Picture ma)

The end of the school year is always also a farewell to teachers. What was their from day to day influence? Decisive conditions for success in the field are revealed by their own personal thoughts and by student statements.

“What do I leave behind?” asks a retired teacher. He has worked at the same institution with heart and soul for 40 years. These days, that is no longer a matter of course. False cuddliness and fast-selling alignment never were his thing. Whoever confronted him felt a certain severity, felt that he would make demands.

When he left, he was asked about the most important issues in his professional life, and he surprisingly said: “Humiliations – unintentional injuries that we in-

flict on our students.” Anyone speaking in this way is aware that he is not simply teaching mathematics or German, he is not simply teaching a subject. No, he is teaching young people. And a second thing is clear to him: it is a human being who stands before the children and young people – with all his strengths and weaknesses, all at the same time.

The litmus test in everyday school life

A basic pedagogical attitude shimmers through in the unexpected sentence quoted above. It guided this teachers’ work of many years: he sought to combine goal-oriented teaching with human empathy and to reconcile basic humanistic obligations with professional consistency. He wanted to have an effect, wanted to achieve “added value”, wanted to lead to aha moments. And that is what he did – for generations of young people who came to him for lessons. There was only one indicator for the success of his commitment: the learning success of his students. But he added, in a sibylline fashion: “Would I like to go to school with me?”

That is probably the litmus test: a person’s influence in the school institution. People give its value to the institution. “It is the teacher that counts,” has been said in professional literature from its beginning. “I’m super important” was a title of *Die Zeit* after the publication of the famous study by *John Hattie*.¹ There it said in large letters: “Small classes are useless, open instruction is useless. What matters is: the teacher.” And, let it be added, also the quality of his or her teaching.

Attitude and passion

The teacher’s personality, and not simply his knowledge or “professional competence” plays a large part in his teaching.² The quality of teaching depends on the teachers. Their expertise, their attitude, their passion are decisive – and also whether they are willing to check the effectiveness of what they do. In other words: “What impact do I have? And would I like going to school with me?” It is not enough for teachers to know a lot

continued on page 16

“The ‘Buchenwald children’ ...”

continued from page 14

al association *Zuger Privileg*, a reading with his notes took place in front of pupils and teachers in the Felsenegg in the assembly hall, which at the time served as a dining hall.¹²

To this day, the international school feels committed to the heritage of its founder *Max Husmann*, who, under the impression of the First World War, wanted to make a contribution to peace and under whose assistance the stay of the “Buchenwald children” on the Zugerberg was made possible: Students from many countries of the world learn and live together and demonstrate in this way that international understanding is possible and does not have to remain a utopia. •

¹ The remarks on Switzerland’s relief efforts are based on the following sources: Hug, Peter. “Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten”, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS)*, version of 28 October 2011, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/043513/2011-10-28/>; HelveticArchives – the archive database of the Swiss National Library, Swiss Confederation, keyword: Swiss donation to war-affected persons: certificates of gratitude (1944-1948), <https://www.helveticaarchives.ch/detail.aspx?ID=222319>

² cf. Publications of the Archive for Contemporary History ETH Zurich, Volume 5, Chronos Verlag, Zurich 2010: Lerf, Madeleine. “Buchenwaldkinder” – a Swiss relief action. Humanitarian commitment, political calculation and individual ex-

perience, <https://www.afz.ethz.ch/publikationen/schriftenreihe/buchenwaldkinder>

³ vgl. Schmutz, Barbara. «Was man erlebt hat, bleibt im Kopf drin», (What you have experienced stays in your head), in: *Zuger Neujahrsblatt 2008*, published by the Charitable Society of canton Zug, Zug 2008, p. 73, http://www.zugerneujahrsblatt.ch/uploads/Archiv_ZNJB/Zuger_Neujahrsblatt_2008.pdf

⁴ cf. *ibid.* p. 77

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ cf. the contribution of: Swiss Cultural Television on the Net: Museum Burg Zug, Drawn* Holocaust, published on 16 January 2019, <https://www.arttv.ch/mehr/museum-burg-zug-gezeichnet-holocaust>

⁷ Weber, Charlotte. “The notebooks of Max Perkal”, in: Max Perkal; Charlotte Weber; Aron Ronald Bodenheimer: *Outside was beautiful: the notebooks of a 19-year-old Jew written in 1945*. Published by Chronos Verlag and The Menard Press, Zurich, Switzerland and London (1995), p. 66

⁸ Weber, Charlotte. “Gegen den Strom der Finsternis. Als Betreuerin in Schweizer Flüchtlingsheimen 1942–1945” (Against the current of darkness. As a caregiver in Swiss refugee homes 1942-1945), Zurich 1994 (Chronos Verlag)

⁹ Max Perkal; Charlotte Weber; Aron Ronald Bodenheimer: “Outside was beautiful: the notebooks of a 19-year-old Jew written in 1945”. Published by Chronos Verlag and The Menard Press, Zurich, Switzerland and London (1995), p. 51. spelling and vocabulary of the original

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 50

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 39

¹² cf. Pogorzelski, Winfried. “Aus der Hölle Buchenwald auf den Zugerberg. Lesung aus den Aufzeichnungen des 19jährigen Juden Max Perkal in der Aula” (From the hell Buchenwald to the Zugerberg, reading from the notes of the 19-year-old Jew Max Perkal in the assembly hall), in: *Montana Blatt* No. 179, Zugerberg 2008, p. 8

* means both “drawn” and “ravaged”

Current Concerns

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

Publisher: Zeit-Fragen Cooperative

Editor: Erika Vögel, Eva-Maria Föllmer-Müller

Address: Current Concerns,

P.O. Box, CH-8044 Zurich

Phone: +41 (0)44 350 65 50

Fax: +41 (0)44 350 65 51

E-Mail: CurrentConcerns@zeit-fragen.ch

Subscription details:

published regularly electronically as PDF file

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 40,-, € 30,-, £ 25,-, \$ 40,-

for the following countries:

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

Annual subscription rate of

SFr. 20,-, € 15,-, £ 12,50, \$ 20,-

for all other countries.

Account: Postcheck-Konto: PC 87-644472-4

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

© 2020. All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

“What I needed were real teachers!”

continued from page 15

and be trained in modern methods. They must also be able to build up a relationship with their students and want to help them progress.

One such teacher was known by 16-year old *Chayenne Wiederkehr* from Stäfa. She made the leap from secondary school B, the former Realschule, directly to the Gymnasium, reported the *SonntagsZeitung* in an insightful portrait.³ The student also passed the hard probationary period. She owed this unusual step to her teacher, who “immediately recognised my potential and encouraged me enormously.” The secret of this pedagogue: She combined intensive, topic-related learning on the part of her student with a high degree of person-oriented teacher control. That worked.

“What I needed instead were teachers!”

The writer *Lukas Bärfuss* outlines what student-centered teachers can achieve with their inspired passion. In his “Ode to Teachers”, winner of the renowned *Georg Büchner Literature Prize*, he writes: “I hated school, but I loved my teachers. That is a little strange, I know. But basically it is no contradiction.”⁴

His “school career was [...] not exactly what you would call successful,” Bärfuss admits. After nine years of being taught, he left school and took a job. He candid-

ly admits: “I didn’t need a class schedule, I didn’t need a curriculum. I didn’t need desks, I didn’t need exams. – What I needed were teachers.”

“My teacher’s enthusiasm aroused my own enthusiasm”

Teachers such as the deputy one in his seventh grade: “A man with a beard who read poetry to us. Not because it was in the curriculum. He read poems to us because he loved poetry. Poems were important to him. Vital! And basically he didn’t share the poems with us. He shared his love, he shared his passion.”

Thanks to this pedagogue the later poet Bärfuss was able to memorise some poems: “Harlem” by *Ingeborg Bachmann* or *Rainer Maria Rilkes* “Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen – I live my life in growing rings”. This was because “I felt how these poems touched our teacher, and I wanted to experience this touch. My teacher’s enthusiasm awakened my own enthusiasm”. This passion for the educational mission results from a passion for the world; it springs from a lively interest in the cause and in young people. Bärfuss is deeply convinced of this.

“Because he infected us with his passion”

“She was an enthusiastic teacher to the last day of school.” You hear that often and we even read it in the days between school years. Or then it says: “He passionately liked his work in the classroom.” So

it is not “the teachers” alone that count, but the teachers’ enthusiasm, their pedagogical passion.

This is the decisive factor for success in the field. It is not without reason that the writer *Thomas Hürlimann* says of his physics teacher *Father Kassian* in the Einsiedeln monastery school: “He was an excellent teacher, because he infected us with his passion. [...] He knew how to inspire me with enthusiasm even for physical processes and formulas.”⁵

Lukas Bärfuss accents this even more: “I do not know what would have become of me if my teachers had not shared their passions with me.”⁶ He needed “their passions, their enthusiasm.” And he repeats: “I would not have needed a school. But without teachers I would be poorer”. •

¹ Spiewak, Martin. “Ich bin superwichtig!” (I am super important!), in: *Die Zeit*, 3 January 2013, p. 55.

² Oelkers, Jürgen. *Die Persönlichkeit im Lehrberuf und wie man sie bildet* (The personality in the teaching profession and how to form it), unpubl. Ms., 2009, p. 2.

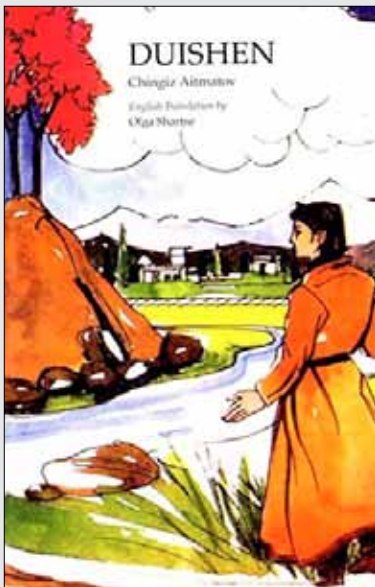
³ Bandle, Rico. “Sie schaffte es von der Sek B direkt ans Gymnasium” (She made it from Sek B directly to high school), in: *SonntagsZeitung* of 28 June 2020, p. 21.

⁴ Bärfuss, Lukas. *Stil und Moral* (Style and morals. Essays). Munich 2018, p. 152 [punctuation adapted].

⁵ Hürlimann, Thomas. “Die pädagogische Provinz”, in: *Der Sprung in den Papierkorb. Geschichten, Gedanken und Notizen am Rand*. (The Pedagogical Province, in: The Leap into the Wastebasket. Stories, thoughts and marginal notes). Zurich 2008, p. 109.

⁶ Bärfuss, op. cit., p. 155.

Source: *Journal 21*

Chinghiz Aitmatov: Duishen/The first teacher

ISBN 978-8-1237-3848-2

cc. In his moving novel “The First Teacher” (1962), the Kyrgyz writer *Chinghiz Aitmatov* uses the young teacher *Duishen* and his pupil *Altynai*, whom Aitmatov lets tell the story, to point out what is most important at school: the teacher.

„Duishen taught us as well as he could, he taught us what he thought we should know, guided by his instinct alone. But the sincere enthusiasm with which he tackled the job was not wasted on us, of that I am sure.

He accomplished more than he realised. Yes, he did, because in that school of his, in that old mud stable with gaping holes in the walls through which we could see the snow-clad mountaintops, we Kirghiz children, who had never left the confines of our village, suddenly glimpsed a new and wonderful world. [...]

I was the oldest of his pupils. Perhaps that was why I was the quickest to learn,

though I don’t think it was the only reason. Every word he spoke, every letter he taught me to write, were sacred for me. And there was nothing more important in life than grasping what he taught. [...]

I suppose we all adored our teacher for his kindness, his goodness, for his dreams about our future. I think we appreciated all that, young though we were. Why else did we make that long tramp to school every day, gasping in the wind as we climbed the steep hill, wading through the deep snow? We went to school of our own free will. No one forced us to go and freeze in that icy barn. It was so cold there that rime formed from our breathing on faces, hands and clothes. We took turns warming ourselves near the stove, while the rest sat still and listened to Duishen.”

Source: *Chinghiz Aitmatov. Duishen/The first teacher*, National Book Trust, A-5. Green Park, New Delhi-110016 India, 2002