

# 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*

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## At the beginning of the year

by Erika Vögeli



Mural “Health and Freedom” by Hans Erni (today exhibited in the Palais des Nations in Geneva): On the left, the young family, in the background of which lurks the disease-bearing Death as a hooded man, in the middle the happy family – whereby the gesture of the woman pointing to the left picture could also be interpreted as an awareness of the foundations of one’s own happiness in the face of existing injustice, while the right part reminds us of the importance of sufficient and healthy nutrition for a healthy development. (Picture ma)

With the spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2 and the measures taken against it around the globe our lives partly have been turned upside down. For many people – especially in poor countries – life has become even more difficult. The outrageous injustices have become even greater. The global financial elite and some sectors of the economy have enriched themselves even further, the super-rich have become even richer and the poor even poorer. This is in all the newspapers, and the prognoses about the negative consequences are piling up everywhere. The question merely is what conclusions we draw from this.

The would-be global governance will do everything in its power to maintain and, if possible, expand its position. And according to the motto “Divide and conquer”, the debates about rightness and nonsense of the measures taken, the fueling of antagonisms and alleged conflicts of interest will surely find their place there. The fact is that all the changes pretended necessary because of corona, in the sense of the “Great Reset” have long been in the planning – and implementation. Readily the opportunity is taken to push them further. *Alfred de Zayas* counters this with a decidedly other possibility. In his committed plea, he calls on every-

one to understand the situation as an “historic opportunity” and to urge our governments to use our limited resources instead of wars and the destruction of life for its protection, for far-sighted prevention and research as appropriate. “This is the moment to rise up to the challenge, demand reasonable budgetary priorities, laws and regulations that place people above profits, demand ethics in foreign policy, an end to the insane arms race and criminal wars.”

*Diana Johnstone*, in her article “The great pretext ... for an anti-utopia” (in the last issue) pointed out, that “cries of alarm from the margins” will not change the balance of power. What is needed, according to her approach, is “for people to get together everywhere to study the issues and develop well-reasoned opinions on goals and methods of future development.” Certainly the question arises whether and how such public discussions could be protected from dishonest influence ... in order to enable a real “free market of ideas”, and that regardless of any political correctness “the right to be wrong” (*Alfred de Zayas*) is guaranteed.

In any case, *Diana Johnstone*’s advice expresses something fundamental that our time sorely needs: those who with good

reason are discontent with the current political, economic and social conditions must not wear themselves out with polarisation and the unrest and fragmentation that goes with it. They must not let themselves be roped in for “Wutbürger” (enraged citizen) strategies or be fobbed off with endless pseudo-democratic squabbling. Instead, the actual majority of our states, which are fed up to be served with “managed democracy” and control via global governance, could take on the real issues themselves. What is urgently needed in the thunderstorm of globalisation is a return to value-oriented unions, of initiatives and opportunities of direct, not “controlled” discussion and encounter from person to person, to the recovery of the political, of good faith and trust, so that people can get once again an own voice “from below”, and to the strengthening of existing self-organisation. This cannot be done overnight, but where you start, it changes something fundamental: It is the step out of powerlessness, resignation, and anger towards civic responsibility and self-help. These approaches exist in many areas – perhaps we just don’t make enough use of them.

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# Every human being has the right to live in peace

## Push-back against the “Great Reset”

by Prof. Dr iur. et phil. Alfred de Zayas



Alfred de Zayas  
(Picture ma)

The coronavirus upheaval justifies raising and addressing fundamental questions. Do we want to go back to “business as usual”, do we want to pick up on a dysfunctional economic model characterized by wealth imbalances and structural violence?

This is a historic opportunity to demand and implement cross-cutting changes in the system, redefine our priorities in terms of human rights and human dignity, demand that our governments cease wasting our limited resources in wars, missiles, drones, military bases, false flag and other criminal interventions, and instead devote more research and development into preparedness strategies – preparedness to anticipate threats, prevent them where possible or combat the consequences of future pandemics, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis or asteroid impacts.

This is the time to revive the legacy of Eleanor Roosevelt, rediscover the spirituality of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, ensure that human rights are juridical, justiciable and enforceable. It is also time to draw on the experience of

top economists like Jeffrey Sachs, Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty, and reorient the economy toward a coherent human-security paradigm that leaves no one behind. We can and must demand transparency and accountability from the authorities, whose responsibility it is to convert the economy into a sustainable people-centred institution that creates jobs in the health, education and services sectors.

We must push-back against the embrace of Big Brother, globalism, militarism, totalitarianism, intrusive government surveillance, conformist culture and homologation, thought police and denunciation, fake news from government and the so-called “quality press”, fake law, fake history, fake diplomacy, fake democracy.

We must push-back against efforts to turn us into mere numbers, robots, or “consumers”. Inaction against the social virus of conformism and indifference means surrendering the fundamental freedoms and human rights acquired that prior generations won for themselves and for us. This is no time to cop out, deceiving ourselves that things eventually will fall into place. This is the moment to rise up to the challenge, demand reasonable budgetary priorities, laws and regulations that place people above profits, demand ethics in foreign policy, an end to the insane arms race and criminal wars.

All humans have a right to live in peace – not just ourselves, but also all the peoples that our governments assault, exploit and humiliate. We demand that public institutions promote and protect our privacy and family life. Both are under attack in flagrant violation of articles 17 and 23 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), and Article 10 of the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. We must assert our individual and collective right to our culture, identity and traditions, our right to access all information, as stipulated in article 19(2) ICCPR, our right to impart information without governmental or private-sector censorship, our right to our own opinions, our right to be wrong. If we allow ourselves to be intimidated by the tenets of “political correctness” and succumb to self-censorship, Orwellian dystopia has won.

We demand from our democratically elected officials that they do what they were elected to do, that they represent us and not only the lobbies or the corporations. The alternative to action is reckless self-delusion. The Romans already knew that *mundus vult decipi* – the world wants to be deceived. Let us not be deceived by the World Economic Forum’s “Great Reset”, the latest scam to keep the rich rich and the poor poor. Even Julius Caesar

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### The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

#### Article 17

1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

#### Article 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

#### Article 23

1. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

2. The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized.
3. No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
4. States Parties to the present Covenant shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children.

### The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

#### Article 10

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that:

1. The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children. Marriage must be entered into

- with the free consent of the intending spouses.
2. Special protection should be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before and after childbirth. During such period working mothers should be accorded paid leave or leave with adequate social security benefits.
3. Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for

reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work harmful to their morals or health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law. States should also set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law.

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There is a human force that could give a solid foundation and momentum to this human path the sense of human bonding. At the moment, the dominant mood in the media public sphere is one of fatigue, alleged antagonism of interests, a kind of singularisation of concerns.

But this was not always the case. At the very beginning of the pandemic there was something quite different – at least in this country. A different mood prevailed. Not exuberant. Not a festive mood. But something very solid, something humanly connecting. Something that gave courage, that inspired creative activity in the face of the problems, that made people look for solutions. Something that could provide

**"Every human being has the right ..."**

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*sar* warned about our blindness and our tendency to believe what we want to believe: *Quae volumus, ea credimus libenter* (We like to believe what we want.) (*De bello civili*, 2, 27, 2).

More than ever in 2021, we must demonstrate the courage of our convictions and learn to articulate our own ideas – notwithstanding the asphyxiating social pressures of an emerging "cancel culture" that destroys the marketplace of ideas and undermines democratic governance. We need more whistleblowers who reveal the crimes and covers-up of government officials and mercenaries, including those in the private sector. We need pluralistic news services -- and this necessarily entails more, not less, alternative media. *Sapere aude!* Dare to know. (Horace/Immanuel Kant)!

a real basis for overcoming such a crisis and many other problems. Interestingly enough, it initially received a voice in many media. It was the awareness that we can only deal with such a situation together. Solidarity in the true sense of the word. Humanity. This includes mutual consideration, taking care of each other, mutual help. Something like reflection began about our situation and our living together in a broader sense. About the importance of real, human relationships, about sensible economics, reflection about globalisation and much more. About the fact that things cannot go on "like this" – not only in this country, but also in the larger dimension of global conditions. Not in an activist way, but very serious and considered. On this basis one could work together. Develop solutions. Also for the consequences of the pandemic and how to combat it.

We could also think about the nature of freedom there. About the fact that it only makes sense in a social context. And about the fact that it cannot be had or maintained without morality. Perhaps we would then be better armed against the effects of completely unnecessary debates, for example, those about an alleged trade-off between the economy and health or the constructed opposition between freedom and health. Better armed, too, against the suggestion techniques of "communication experts" who want to denigrate the natural human striving for the best possible protection of life and health as "health fanaticism" and, with the spin that freedom has always "had its price," put protection efforts on the sidelines as "exaggerated." So, about a hundred deaths a day for the "freedom" of partying, going to restaurants, riding ski gondolas? For whose freedom? That of the shark in the trout pond? Political freedom is not lost through the restrictions against

the spread of a virus, but first in the mind. In the lack of awareness of what the conditions of human coexistence and freedom are, and that the life of man is the highest good; it is its preservation and continuation and possible improvement, which human activity has always served – must serve, even the economic. Because without life there is also no freedom.

When the inhabitants of the valley of Uri wanted to maintain the freedom that was possible at the time and bought their freedom from the Habsburgs by enabling the emperor to redeem his pledge debts to the Habsburgs, they had first of all taken great restrictions upon themselves: They literally stunted themselves for freedom – a resolutely solidary effort by the whole community – for everyone.

How about that? The mood in the spring had the potential to do just that. Or in other words of the great poet of freedom, *Friedrich Schiller*:

*Freiheit liebt das Tier der Wüste,  
Frei im Äther herrscht der Gott,  
Ihrer Brust gewaltg'e Lüste  
Zähmet das Naturgebot;  
Doch der Mensch in ihrer Mitte  
Soll sich an den Menschen reihn,  
Und allein durch seine Sitte  
Kann er frei und mächtig sein.  
(aus: Das Eleusische Fest)*

*(Freedom's love the beast inflames,  
And the god rules free in air,  
While the law of Nature tames  
Each wild lust that lingers there.  
Yet, when thus together thrown,  
Man with man must fain unite;  
And by his own worth\* alone  
Can he freedom gain, and might.  
[from: The Eleusinium Festival]  
\*within the meaning of morals)*

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# Syria – No future without electricity, heating oil and work

by Karin Leukefeld, Homs (Syria)

*For Christians in Syria, Christmas in 2020 was lacklustre. The brightly coloured decorations on churches and houses that once would attract thousands to Christian neighbourhoods in order to take part in the festivities are scarce. Prices for necessary everyday goods are high, the US occupation of Syria's oil and gas resources, the looting of wheat, oil and cotton in the north-east of the country, financial and economic sanctions by the EU and the US are exacerbating the people's misery.*

## Christmas 2020 – On the tracks of the Syrian Christians

Bassir, Deraa province. In 2020, Syria's largest Christmas tree was already erected in mid-December in the village of Bassir, south of Damascus. The Christian village, located south of Damascus in the province of Deraa, was first mentioned in 8 BC. Later on, Bassir became a military base for the Romans with 5,000 soldiers in order to protect the transport routes from south and east to the Mediterranean and Rome.

Before the war in 2011, around 3,700 people lived in Bassir, today there are still about 2,000 left. Bassir and the surrounding villages were largely spared from the fighting. The inhabitants are farmers providing Damascus with its daily bread and vegetables. Before the war, the harvests from Bassir were exported to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and as far as the Gulf States. But for ten years, the borders have been closed and many workers and especially the young men have left Syria.

By putting up the Christmas tree, Christmas was intended to be celebrated with the inhabitants of the surrounding Muslim villages, despite all the problems. The people are linked through work, and even the war would not destroy their relationships. Somehow, however, the locally conceived celebration then turned into a big media event celebrated with celebrities from Damascus and spiritual dignitaries of all religions in a blaze of publicity, and the Christmas tree turned into the "tree of home".

Thousands of people crowded around Bassir church, local notables lined up to welcome the guests. The church was decorated with glittering lights, life-size dolls in the various provincial costumes and a "Message from Syria" to the world. "What is a Christmas tree but the marvelous demonstration of the greatest Son of Syria, our Lord Jesus Christ," it said. It invited everyone to remember that Syria is



*Maaloula December 2020: The Christmas tree is set up in the central square. (Picture Karin Leukefeld)*

a second home for all people: "For those who are here and those who are gone, those who are near and those who are far away, murderers and martyrs, residents and refugees, friends and enemies."

As early winter darkness fell, fireworks were displayed and the tree – draped all over with fairy lights – was ceremoniously lit. Beyond the crowd, having a cup of tea in the simple house of a farming family in a familiar circle, people would later say that they wished that all the money for the fireworks and for the big tree, for the festivities and the modern tilt camera including drone that transmitted the events on screens – that all the money had been distributed to families, it would have helped quite a few.

## A winter without electricity and heating oil

"Do you in Europe actually know what it's like to live without electricity? Without heating oil in winter, without gas for cooking? When bread is getting more and more expensive, as do fruits and vegetables, but people have less and less money? Before the war and the economic crisis, some people here earned the equivalent of 1,500 US dollars; today they have 35 US dollars, or the equivalent of around 90,000 Syrian pounds. If someone wants to feed his family of five, what can he buy to eat? The simplest meal, felafel with vegetables and bread, costs 500 Syrian pounds. If the family eats this for breakfast, lunch and dinner, that's 2,500 pounds per meal, 7,500 pounds per day. There are 30 days in a month, so if you calculate 30

times 7,500 pounds, a family has to spend 225,000 pounds a month just on felafel. Without anything to drink, without soap or washing powder, without oil or anything else. But the family only has 90,000 pounds. And surely, they will have children who go to school or study, who need books, internet access and so on. What if someone in the family gets sick and needs expensive medication? Which may not even be available then!"

Father *Zehri Ghazal* has talked himself into a rage. His manner of speaking is in complete contrast to his appearance and his otherwise calm, humorous manner. The conversation between him and the author focuses on the miserable economic situation in Syria and the question of how people can survive. What can the Church do, how could Europe help? And finally, what about Christmas this year? How will the Syrian Christians celebrate?

This year's Christmas will be sad, says Father Zehri: "Father Christmas is naked, he has no presents, everything has been confiscated at the border," he says, still laughing. "How are we supposed to have hope in a land without electricity, without internet, without water, without gas, without bread, without petrol! This year 2020 has been the worst year, not only for us, for the whole world," he adds and becomes serious. "You must know that there is simply nothing we can do here, in this situation. Two people from our church committed suicide because they were not able to provide their children with food. Even we, as a church, were not able to

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## UN expert Nils Melzer welcomes refusal to extradite Julian Assange



Nils Melzer  
(Picture Twitter)

UN Special Rapporteur on torture *Nils Melzer* today (5 January 2021) welcomed a British court's refusal to extradite *Wikileaks* founder *Julian Assange* to the United States on the basis that he would be exposed to "oppressive" conditions of imprisonment that would almost certainly cause him to commit suicide.

"This ruling confirms my own assessment that, in the United States, Mr. Assange would be exposed to conditions of detention, which are widely recognised to amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," said Melzer.

Mr. Assange is currently being held in prolonged solitary confinement at Belmarsh Prison in London under a US extradition request for espionage and computer fraud. "If extradited to the United States, he faces a sentence of up to 175 years imprisonment under inhumane conditions of near total isolation," Melzer said.

At the same time, the judgement on Monday sets an alarming precedent effectively denying investigative journalists the protection of press freedom and paving the way for their prosecution under charges of espionage. In 2010, Mr. Assange published sensitive military documents relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I am gravely concerned that the judgement confirms the entire, very dangerous rationale underlying the US indictment, which effectively amounts to criminalizing national security journalism," Melzer said.

The United States has announced it will appeal the judgment, but welcomed the judge's dismissal of all arguments in defence of Assange based on press freedom, the public interest in the exposure of government misconduct, the prohibition of political offence extraditions, and the US failure to provide fair trials to national security defendants.

"This is of great concern because none of these questions will now be reviewed by the Appeals Court, as the only issue at stake will be Mr. Assange's medical fitness to withstand US conditions of detention," said Melzer.

"Should the US provide assurances that Mr. Assange will be treated humanely, his extradition could potentially be confirmed on appeal without any meaningful review of the very serious legal concerns raised by this case."

Melzer has repeatedly expressed in individual communications and statements that Mr. Assange has been subjected to more than 10 years of arbitrary detention and political persecution. During a visit conducted to Belmarsh Prison in 2019, Melzer and a specialised medical team found that Mr. Assange showed all the symptoms typical for prolonged exposure to psychological torture.

"The judgement fails to recognise that Mr. Assange's deplorable state of health is the direct consequence of a decade of deliberate and systematic violation of his most fundamental human rights by the Governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ecuador," said Melzer.

According to the expert, the failure of the judgment to denounce and redress the persecution and torture of Mr. Assange, "leaves fully intact the intended intimidating effect on journalists and whistleblowers worldwide who may be tempted to publish secret evidence for war crimes, corruption and other government misconduct."

"Mr. Assange must now be immediately set free, rehabilitated and compensated for the abuse and arbitrariness he has been exposed to," said Melzer. "Even with a pending appeal, his continued isolation in a high security prison is completely unnecessary and disproportionate. There is no justification whatsoever for preventing him from awaiting the final judgment in a setting where he can recover his health and live a normal family and professional life."

"Hopefully this judgement will put an end to the persecution and imprisonment of Mr. Julian Assange as an individual. But in the big picture it sets a devastating precedent severely undermining press freedom, accountability and the rule of law." •

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26638&LangID=E> of 5 January 2021

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help them! There is too much of a burden on people."

Since the beginning of the EU sanctions against Syria in 2011, the money of the Syrian churches has been kept in Lebanese banks, and was then brought to Syria. With Lebanon in an economic crisis and Lebanese banks freezing all payments, even from accounts in foreign currency, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, also in charge of its Um Al Zennar Church in the old city of Homs, can no longer pay salaries except in Syrian pounds. Since the beginning of the US sanctions, the so-called *Caesar Act*, the Syrian pound has been losing more and more ground against the dollar, and the money is melting away in the people's pockets. The situation is no different for the Lebanese.

Humanitarian aid distributed to needy people in Syria by international and UN organisations is only meant to keep peo-

ple from fleeing to Europe, Ghazal says. The churchman is sure that the only thing that interests is that no more refugees from Syria flow into Europe: "But in view of the hopeless situation in our country and the economic blockade with which Europe and the USA are strangling us, many families no longer feel able to keep on living here and so, they will do anything to get to Belgium or Germany or Sweden. They take all their money, sell what they can sell and use the money to send their children abroad to study and build a better future. Will these young people return later? The answer is no. Why should they return to a country without electricity, without heating oil, without petrol, and in addition, to a country where they won't find work because their parents don't have work anymore neither? Why should they return?"

Silence fills the room until someone cautiously remarks that it is about the motherland, about one's own roots, about the origin of the Christians in general, who had been shaping Bilad al-Sham, the

Promised Land, long before the Muslims. With the Christians disappearing from Iraq and Palestine, they might not leave Syria as well.

"We Christians were once five per cent of the Syrian population, which numbered 23 million before the war," says Father Zehri. "But what do we see when we look to Aleppo, to Jazeera, where there are almost no Christians left. Idlib as well and here, in the old city of Homs, before the war we counted 75,000 Christians, today there are maybe 5,000 left!" If things continue like this, if parents send their children abroad who then will not return, it will not take 30 years until there are no Christians left in Syria, he says. Indeed, he adds after a short pause, if there was an agreement between the West and Syria, Christians might decide to stay or even return to their homeland. But he suspects that Europe wouldn't want that at all: "Your government also wants the Christians, the young, well-educated people, to

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leave Syria," he says frankly. It is a political decision.

**"The common people are suffering, why?"**

The situation of Christians in Syria is not good. Like all Syrians, they are suffering from the lack of necessities and immense price increases. In addition, they must observe their presence in Syria melt away almost like ice in the sun. Christians have no weapons to defend their existence in Syria. Christians only had the word, the writing and a pen, says Father *Taher Jussif*, who leads the parish of Saint George in Maaloula. In view of the hatred experienced by Christians, monasteries, churches and almost all the places invaded by the "Islamic State", it is unlikely that Christians in Syria will have a future. Added to this is the silence of the world that has accompanied this devastation.

Maaloula lies hidden between high cliffs at an altitude of 1,500 metres between Damascus and Homs and had been repeatedly attacked, occupied and looted by armed Islamists between 2013 and 2015; the churches were set on fire. The faces on pictures and icons were cut up, smashed or otherwise defaced. The dogmatic Islamic ban on images was the reason for the destruction. The persons and saints venerated by Christians in Syria are demons of evil for jihadists.

Jussif, called simply "Abuna Taher" by the people of Maaloula, is a man of action and does not wait long before starting something. By volunteers and restoration painters from Maaloula, the final renovation works are being completed before Christmas; the church is resembling a large studio. The colourful murals were freshened up, old icons were restored and hung up. The priest wants to keep the icons destroyed by the jihadists during the occupation of Maaloula in a museum. No one should forget what happened.

The priest only interrupts his work in the church to have lunch with guests or to rehearse songs and chorales for the Christmas service with the children of Maaloula which he accompanies on the flute. Christmas fills him with hope despite all the difficulties, he says. "Christmas means life and light, then we are really close to Jesus Christ." The Christmas light, the life can change people's way of thinking, he is convinced. For "Abuna Taher", Christians in Europe are very far from their reality, the Christian reality in Syria, he says. The only message he wants to send them, he says, is very simple: "Don't help us. Period."

This winter, life is particularly hard, says *Joseph Saadi*. The dentist comes from Maaloula and has also been mayor

since the liberation from armed jihadists in 2015. Together with the city council chairman *Ibrahim al-Shaer* and a dozen curious people, Saadi is watching the Christmas tree being erected. "If we are lucky, the generator of St. George's Church will give us electricity on Christmas Eve so we can light the Christmas tree," says Saadi, rubbing his cold hands. Before the war, there was always electricity, says al-Shaer. The houses, churches and monasteries of Maaloula would have lit up the whole Christmas night. This year, he says, people did without decorations because there was too little electricity and most of them had no money to spend on Christmas decorations.

Because of the severe economic crisis and the rapid decline of the Syrian currency, everything is so expensive that many "have not been able to eat meat for a long time", Saadi continues. Even he, as a dentist, no longer earns enough to buy everything his family has been used to or even needs. "People just cannot afford dental treatments anymore," so he lacks income. He wonders why Europe has imposed an economic blockade on Syria, thus also punishing the neighbouring states of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon: "If it wasn't for that and if we could use our oil again, we could rebuild our country," Saadi is sure. "The ordinary people are suffering, old and young, why?"

**The Christians of the desert**

The "Christians of the desert" are considered to be particularly rooted, but the war has blown them to the winds as well. In Tadmur, the small town next to Palmyra, there were only a few hundred Christians. In 2015, with the advance of IS, they fled to Homs; no one has returned to this day. The small church lies destroyed.

In the dry, stony soil of Qaryatayn, the "Christians of the desert" have planted vines and fruit trees for decades. Flocks of sheep and goats moved across the plains, which in the winter months are turned into green pastures by the rain. 1,500 Christians lived in the village of Qaryatayn, which is about 100 km east of Homs. In 2015, the IS took the place, with the support of Muslims living there. They destroyed the *Deir Mar Elian* monastery located in the west of the village. They kidnapped 260 Christian men, women and children. Some young women were taken all the way to Raqqa. The houses of the Christians in Qaryatayn had previously been marked by Muslim neighbours with an "N", the initial letter of Naseri, which means Christians.

"We were one with the Muslims," says a woman who does not want to read her name in the newspaper. She and her two sisters were born in Qaryatayn, and all three have worked as teachers in the village's primary schools all their lives. In

2015, they were among the 260 Christians who were abducted; the "N" with which the house had been marked can still be seen on the wall surrounding their house. By negotiations the hostages were released six months later. In 2019, the sisters returned to Qaryatayn. Only six of the once 1,500 Christians returned to Qaryatayn. Most of them were afraid, the sisters say. People sold their houses, many left Syria to find a better future in another country. That would be out of the question for them, the women laugh, they are at home in Qaryatayn.

They will spend Christmas watching television. Seeing the colourful decorations in Damascus they could listen to the church service and celebrate with each other that they are still alive. And next year, hopefully and God willing, they could celebrate Christmas together again in Qaryatayn. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



(Picture ma)

ef. Independent journalist *Karin Leukefeld* was born in 1954 in Stuttgart and has studied ethnology, islamology and political sciences. She has been reporting from the Extended Middle East for daily and weekly journals as well as German state sponsored radio programmes since the year 2000. She was accredited in Syria in 2010 and has been reporting on the Syria conflict since then. Since the beginning of the war in 2011 she moves back and forth between Damascus, Beirut, other places in the Arab world and her hometown Bonn. She has published several books, such as "Syrien zwischen Schatten und Licht – Geschichte und Geschichten von 1916-2016. Menschen erzählen von ihrem zerrissenen Land" (Syria Between Light and Shadow – History and Stories 1916–2016. People Narrate about their War-torn Country.) (2016, Rotpunkt edition Zurich); "Flächenbrand Syrien, Irak, die Arabische Welt und der Islamische Staat" (Surface Fire Syria, Iraq, the Arab World and the Islamic State.) (2015, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2017, PapyRossa edition, Cologne). Her new book will be released soon: "Im Auge des Orkans: Syrien, der Nahe Osten und die Entstehung einer neuen Weltordnung" (In the Eye of the Hurricane: Syria, the Middle East and the Rise of a New World Order (2021, PapyRossa edition, Cologne).

# What will happen if Germany goes “green”?

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

*“All parties fool their voters, but there is no other party that has got such a phenomenal difference between its image and its reality.”*

*Jutta Ditfurth, former chairwoman of the party “Die Grünen” (The Greens)<sup>1</sup>*

2021 is the year of the next federal elections in Germany. For the first time since 2005, it is seriously expected that the party “Bündnis 90/Die Grünen” will form the government together with other parties represented in the Bundestag, as for quite some time now, this party has been doing everything it can to accomplish this end. And it is massively supported by the “zeitgeist”. After a few political ascents and descents, this party has achieved high sympathy ratings and considerable electoral successes since the last Bundestag elections; and as so often before, it is making use of its aura of being the environmentalist avant-garde, promoting peace and fighting for human rights, if now without any radicalism and in an entirely liberal and bourgeois way. Its prominent representatives have learned to conduct themselves in a particularly smart way and not to frighten anyone any more. But who actually bothers about what Germany and Europe will really face, should the Greens have a significant influence on German politics? It is time to take a closer look at this question. The following article is about the party’s foreign and security policy programme.

After seven years and 34 rounds of negotiations, the relevant representatives of the European Union and China signed a comprehensive investment agreement called the *Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI)* on 30 December 2020. Top politicians on both sides agree that this agreement is a milestone in bilateral economic relations and according to the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 31 December, it is intended “primarily to offer EU companies new opportunities in the rapidly growing Chinese market and to ensure fairer competitive conditions than before”. China, the newspaper continues, “will in return receive the assurance that the EU’s internal market is open and is intended to remain so.”

## Green politician Bütikofer 2020: Coordinate EU-China policy with Biden

This is not the place to go into more detail about this agreement. It is more interesting to note from whom a loud dissenting voice was heard: from Member of the European Parliament *Reinhard Bütikofer*, who is a member of the German party *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* and was formerly its lead-

“When it comes down to business – rearmament, Russia-bashing, Nord Stream 2 – the Greens are reliable from the point of view of the USA, which is terrorising half the world with sanctions, trade wars, drone wars and bomb wars even in the Corona crisis.” (*Oskar Lafontaine*)

er. In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* on 31 December, he complained about the Chinese’ lack of compliance with the treaty and the absence of clear, “European” standards: on sustainability, human rights and the ban on forced labour. Bütikofer suspects that China’s current concession is an attempt to split the EU from the USA before *Joseph Biden* takes office, and counters that the EU should “first talk to Biden” to “see where we [EU and USA] can adopt a common policy”.

## Bütikofer, Özdemir and Biden 2004: Together with neo-conservative war-mongers against Russia

Adopting a “common policy” with powerful forces in the USA is not a one-off within the Green Party, certainly not for Reinhard Bütikofer. Sixteen years ago, on 28 September 2004, he and his party colleague *Cem Özdemir* together with 98 others signed an “Open Letter” to the heads of state and government of the European Union and the Nato states. This letter was intended to counter the rapprochements of Germany’s own government and “old Europe” with Russia during and after the Iraq war in 2003. It had been written by one of the main warmonger groups in the USA, the neo-conservative “Project for the New American Century”<sup>2</sup> after the attack on a Russian school in Beslan. It sharply criticised the Russian President *Putin* (also in office at the time). Unlike in the 2001 Afghanistan war, Putin had spoken out against the new war waged by the USA and its “coalition of the willing”, which violated international law. The letter, however, glossed over this war as part of an attempt to “bring about democratic change everywhere in the world, including the greater Middle East”, and claimed: “The leaders of the West must realise that their current strategy towards Russia [at that time still partly endeavouring to reach an understanding] has failed.”

In addition to the two prominent Green politicians, numerous well-known US and European neoconservatives had signed the letter. *Joseph Biden, the incoming US president, was also among the signatories.*

Bütikofer’s anti-Russian and now also anti-Chinese statements correspond to a

long-standing line of procedure. Just one more example: On 2 November 2016, the “*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*” had reported on German opposition to Nord Stream 2.<sup>3</sup> Among those opposed was Reinhard Bütikofer, who criticised *Gerhard Schröder* at the time: “Gerhard Schröder is committed to Russian energy exports, which finance Russian war exports.”

## “Role model” Fischer

Already with NATO’s war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in spring 1999, which violated international law, the image the Green Party had cultivated until then, namely of standing for the protection of the environment and for peace, had been contradicted by reality. *Joscha Fischer*, at that time German Foreign Minister and a very prominent Green, had, at that time still against the resistance of numerous party colleagues, propagated the war, using an unspeakable Auschwitz comparison. Among other things, this war was accompanied by massive environmental damage, not least through the NATO use of radioactive weapons systems and the bombing of chemical-industrial plants. In the following years Fischer, unlike the then chancellor *Gerhard Schröder*, never made any critical statements about his policies at the time. The fact that he built up close transatlantic ties in the years that followed, not least with the then US Secretary of State *Madeleine Albright*, fitted in with his war propaganda. He has stuck to his line to this day – as was again noticeable in an interview with the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” on 29 December 2020.

## Jutta Ditfurth’s view on the German Greens’ US relations

*Jutta Ditfurth* has shown that Bütikofer, Özdemir and Fischer are no exceptional phenomena in the Green Party in her book published almost ten years ago, “*Krieg, Atom, Armut. Was sie reden, was sie tun. Die Grünen – War, Atoms, Poverty. What they talk about, what they do. The Green Party*” – especially in the chapter “*In Stahlgewittern – In storms of steel*”. In an interview with *Spiegel online*

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**“What will happen ...”**

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on 20 February 2011, she succinctly summarised her research once more: “*Spiegel online*: You say the Greens have turned from a pacifist to a war party. You even accuse the federal leader Cem Özdemir of ‘walking on the US leash’. *Ditfurth*: In 2002, Özdemir disappeared from the German public eye for a while, after the bonus mile affair and the scandal about a private loan [...]. He was in the USA, sponsored by the *German Marshall Fund*, and did some kind of additional training. Then followed his steep political rise – and suddenly he is sitting on all kinds of committees that always have something to do with how Europe and Germany relate to the USA. In October 2010, *WikiLeaks* published around 400,000 secret documents on the Iraq war. Cem Özdemir found that ethically questionable.” Then she added her personal experience: “I myself have experienced the influence of the US government on local politicians: When I was the federal chairperson of the Green Party, the US State Department wanted to contact me. I said I was not interested. But they tried anyway during my lecture tour through the USA in 1987. At *Georgetown University* in Washington, I suddenly found myself standing in front of an invited audience – including lots of uniform wearers and CIA employees. We argued loudly – a former city commander of Berlin yelled out: ‘If we had wished so, the Greens would never have existed!’”

**Few other analyses so far**

Jutta Ditfurth has remained pretty much alone with her presentation of these matters. Yet a few exceptions should be pointed out here. On 17 July 2011, a few months after the publication of Ms Ditfurth’s book, *David Noack* published a chart showing a transatlantic network in which Green politicians are involved. Eight years later, on 21 June 2019, this illustration was subjected to a “fact check”.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion: “A chart apparently shows transatlantic relations of prominent Green politicians. It is currently being re-circulated on *Facebook*, but dates from 2011. *Most of the claims are true*, but some information is wrong or out of date.” (Emphasis by the author)

Also interesting is a text from 2 March 2015 by *Robert Zion*, at that time himself a member of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and at the same time active in the *German Peace Society*. It is entitled: “Die Grünen: Parteiferne Anstiftung – The Greens: incitement without affiliation.”<sup>5</sup> In its introduction it says: “In the Ukraine crisis, a good part of the external image of the Greens is shaped by parts of the *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, which is close to the party. In the process, very specific trans-

atlantic attitudes and connections with a long history emerge once more. “The text refers to events already mentioned above and then reports on a conference hosted by the *US Center for European Policy Analysis* in early October 2014. The topic of this conference was “Reviving Atlantism in Central Europe: Threats and Opportunities.” One of the keynote speakers was *Victoria Nuland*, co-responsible for the coup in Ukraine in February 2014 and wife of neo-conservative *Robert Kagan*. From Germany, only two people were invited: the Green politician *Marieluise Beck*, married to the co-chair of the *Heinrich Böll Foundation Ralf Fücks*, and their daughter *Charlotte Beck*, who shortly afterwards became programme director for foreign and security policy at the Washington office of the Green Foundation.

Also interesting are the references in the text to the ideological origins of the Greens, who are courted by US neo-conservatives: they do not come from the environmental movement, but were once avowed Trotskyists or Maoists. In 1983, for example, *Marieluise Beck* still described herself as a “Trotskyist sympathiser”. Many prominent US neo-conservatives also have a Trotskyist background. Incidentally, the already mentioned *Reinhard Bütikofer* writes on his own internet site about his student days: “He joined the *Communist University Group (KHG)*, later the *Communist League of West Germany (KBW)*.”

**The German Greens in the year of the federal elections: fully NATO-compatible**

On 26 September 2021, the next Bundestag will be elected in Germany. Almost all the top politicians of the “Bündnis 90/Die Grünen” party have now embraced transatlantic ties and made the party not only fully EU-compatible, but also NATO-compatible. The latest pieces in the mosaic so far are the new party manifesto adopted at the end of November 2020 and the statements of top Green politicians during and around the perfectly organised digital party convention.

The party leaders largely followed a policy paper of 16 April 2020 drafted by their member of the Bundestag *Franziska Brantner*.<sup>6</sup> Her line of argument was as follows: The world is in great disorder. Authoritarian states lusting for conquest like Russia and China are trying with all their might to fill the power-political vacuum. What the USA will do is uncertain (in April it was not yet clear whether *Donald Trump* would remain US president). Even so the Greens see themselves “closely linked to the USA in terms of values and defence policy” (!). EU-Europe and Germany as a part of this, would have to assume “more responsibility” in the whole world, which means also being ready for more military efforts, if necessary for

more war operations everywhere in the world. According to the Green politician, Europe ought to “grow up and reorganise the division of labour in the transatlantic alliance”, ought to “optimise its military capabilities”. Of course, there are always reservations about military missions, also because of Germany’s history, and it is true that they should be raised. However, the Greens must “also face up to difficult questions about war and peace”. For example, “How do we ensure that it is we who dominate the spiral of escalation and not Putin, *Erdogan* or *Xi Jinping*?”

In the new party programme, we find the significant statement: “Direct [military] operations [of the Bundeswehr] within the framework of the United Nations have [...] priority over crisis operations of the EU and NATO. So it is only “priority” now. This has little connection to international law and the UN Charter.

The chairperson of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, *Annalena Baerbock*, continued this line around the party conference at the end of November 2020, so that the Berlin daily “*Der Tagesspiegel*” wrote on 1 December 2020: “The Greens are making themselves fit for government. Higher spending on the Bundeswehr or combat missions with France – Green Party leader *Baerbock* is ready to talk about it. There is much praise from the CDU.”

**Oskar Lafontaine: “When it comes down to business, the Greens are reliable from the point of view of the USA”**

*Oskar Lafontaine*, former SPD leader and now prominent, but reclusive, in the *Die Linke* party, commented on the development of the Greens as early as 29 April 2020: “When it comes down to business – rearmament, Russia-bashing, Nord Stream 2 – the Greens are reliable from the point of view of the USA, which is terrorising half the world with sanctions, trade wars, drone wars and bomb wars even in the corona crisis.”<sup>7</sup>

Do all German Greens voters know and approve of all this? ●

<sup>1</sup> “Grünen-Wähler wollen getäuscht werden.” (Green voters want to be deceived), *Spiegel online* in conversation with *Jutta Ditfurth*, 20 February 2011; <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/alt-linke-jutta-ditfurth-gruenen-waehler-wollenge-tauescht-werden-a-745943.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20121015185232/http://newamericancentury.org/russia-20040928.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/nord-stream-2-widerstand-gegen-putins-pipeline-waechst-14507991.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/politik/2019/06/21/diese-grafik-ueber-die-gruenen-stimmt-groesstenteils-ist-aber-veraltet/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Die-Gruenen-Parteiferne-Anstiftung-3370415.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.franziska-brantner.de/2020/04/16/gruene-vernetzte-aussenpolitik-fuer-eine-welt-in-unordnung/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nachdenkenseiten.de/?p=60571>

# “Now is the moment to stick together”

New Year's address by the President of the Confederation Guy Parmelin



Guy Parmelin  
(Picture  
wikimedia.org)

*Dear fellow citizens in Switzerland and abroad!*

We have a dark year behind us. The health crisis has hit us hard. Many families have lost someone close to them. Many were not able to say goodbye to him or her as they would have wished. For them, the past year will be forever linked to this painful loss. The staff in hospitals and nursing homes came to the edge of their strength and still are today. Others were not allowed to work at all for a long time, were on short-time work or even lost their jobs. Traditional companies have disappeared. Our education system was also put to the test. In short: the pandemic has turned all our lives upside down.

Rarely have we experienced anything comparable: our activities came to a standstill. The whole of society was in unprecedented isolation. We had to learn to get along without shaking hands. This important greeting ritual suddenly endangered our health. All this was and is all the more difficult for us because – as Aristotle already said – we humans “are by nature sociable beings.”

You will understand: at the beginning of this new year, I do not want to express myself too enthusiastically. Much is uncertain and the situation remains precarious. Nevertheless, I would like to offer you my best wishes from the bottom of my heart. I think especially of those who are lonely or ill. I think of those who suffer from the loss of a close acquaintance. And I think of all those who are worried by the unfamiliarity of everyday life. I would like to assure you again today that the Federal Council supports you as best it can and is looking for solutions for today and tomorrow.

Personally, I feel something like confidence and optimism despite everything. I am not saying this because it sounds good, but out of conviction: Our country has done many things right in the past. We have brought numerous inventions to the market. For everyone, “Swiss made” is the epitome of quality and reliability. This is also reflected in the fact that 28 Nobel Prize winners come from Switzerland.

Switzerland is moving forward and will continue to do so in the future. I am convinced that our good education system helps us to do so. Education is our universal language. It is a prerequisite for dialogue and exchange. In a time of extremely unstable power relations, educa-

tion guarantees access to compromise. It paves the way for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Education is basically the key to the cohesion of our country.

We Swiss must stand together. Only in this way can we, as a country, stand up for the interests of all of us: for our health and economic well-being, for peace and solidarity, for freedom and independence, – in short, for everything we have held dear for a long time.

On this 1 January, we turn a new page in the book of our history. Admittedly, this will not improve the current situation in one fell swoop. But we must not be allowed to give up. I call on you to bear our fate as a community. Now is the moment to stick together – despite the caution that is still necessary in being together. Only if we stand together will we, as the Swiss people, one day be able to celebrate common successes again.

It is really important to me that we are a united Switzerland, united in our diversity: urban and rural, old and young, affluent and less affluent.

In this hope, I wish everyone: Buon ann. Bonne année. Bun Onn. Es guets Nöis. •

Source: <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/reden/neujahrsansprachen/2021.html>  
(Translation Current Concerns)

## Dual vocational education as an essential component of the Swiss model

On the book “Vocational education. Development of the Swiss system” by Emil Wettstein

by Dr jur. Marianne Wüthrich

*In the year just ended, there were also in Switzerland young people who complained about the “restriction” of their freedom because discos and bars were temporarily closed and neither open airs nor football matches open to the public took place. In reality, Swiss youth are privileged like perhaps no one else in the world. How happy many young people in other countries would be if they were allowed to do an apprenticeship and contribute to the alimentation of their families with their apprenticeship wages! (Most Swiss apprentices have the major part of their wages as pocket money).*

*In 2020, Emil Wettstein, for many years head of the ABB technical school and later head of the higher education unit for vocational school teachers at the University of Zurich, presents in an easy-to-understand way in a new version of his work published*

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“In order to keep up, trade and industry in resource-poor and landlocked Switzerland, relied on the high quality of their products from an early stage. Then, as now, this required vocational education that could build on solid basics in at least reading, writing and arithmetic. The prerequisite for this is a good Volksschule.”

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*over thirty years ago, how vocational education and training has developed in the history of Switzerland.<sup>1</sup> “How was Switzerland able to develop a dual vocational education model? Why are Swiss entrepreneurs willing to make such a strong commitment to vocational education for young people?” Such questions are asked by in-*

*terested people from other countries who want to learn about the Swiss system. According to the editor of the book in his foreword, these questions can only be answered by looking back into Swiss history. It should be added that the history of Swiss vocational education is interwoven*

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*with the development of democracy; the way vocational education is implemented here is part of the Swiss model. This does not mean that good vocational education cannot be introduced in other countries. However, it is advisable to spend time and care in its constitution.*

The apprenticeship is very popular among young people in Switzerland. Two-thirds of school leavers opt for an apprenticeship, and in some German-speaking cantons the figure is over 80 percent. Basic vocational education is completed after three or four years with a *Federal Vocational Education and Training Diploma* (Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis, EFZ) or after two years with a *Federal Vocational Certificate* (Eidgenössisches Berufssattest, EBA). If the young professionals want to continue their education, there are a number of options after the apprenticeship. However, many of them want to stay with their profession and, thanks to their professional and human qualities, often become the top executives who give Switzerland its good reputation as a business location.

**Almost every Swiss enterprise is an apprenticing enterprise**

What is special about dual vocational education is the little word "dual". Education takes place in two places: in the apprenticing company (usually three days a week) and in a vocational school (usually a state school, two days a week). There is the possibility to do an apprenticeship for almost every occupation; about 230 occupations are available. Almost all SMEs, but also

all large private and state-owned companies in Switzerland educate and train apprentices, as do the administrations of the municipalities, cantons and the federal government. Over fifty professions can be learned at the federal government alone! (<https://www.stelle.admin.ch/stelle/de/home/einstiegsmoeglichkeiten/schueler.html>)

Even in the Corona year 2020, almost everyone who wanted to start an apprenticeship in August found a job because the entrepreneurs did everything humanly possible to offer enough apprenticeships.

The fact that it is a matter of course for Swiss entrepreneurs today to introduce young people to working life, to share their professional knowledge and to show them the way to become capable, social and reliable adults does not come automatically. It is based on a long tradition and is also rooted in the Swiss militia model. Every young person is of importance to the whole by taking his or her place in professional life and as a citizen in the community, participating in his or her environment and exercising his or her political rights responsibly. For its part, the apprenticing company has in the educated apprentices reliable professionals who know how the business runs and who are well integrated into the team.

**The beginnings of vocational education in the guilds**

The book "Vocational Education" by Emil Wettstein begins with the historical roots of vocational apprenticeship in the guild system. Where a differentiated vocational education system later developed in Europe, crafts had often been organised in guilds since the Mid-

dle Ages (in Switzerland, mainly in German-speaking cities, but also, for example, among watchmakers in the French-speaking Jura). The guilds were professional associations and at the same time social communities, which in particular regulated and ensured the education of the next generation. At that time, the entire education took place under the guidance of a master, who passed on his craftsmanship and professional knowledge, but also the social skills that were consolidated while living together in the household of the master and his family and later enabled participation in urban society as a professional and citizen (Wettstein, pp. 57–59).

The guilds did not survive the 19th century – i. e. the legal equality of the population in town and country introduced with the Helvetic system, the freedom of trade and commerce and the emerging industrialization. Nevertheless, the guild system laid the foundations for good vocational education, which could be taken up again in the 19th and 20th century in a contemporary form.

**Good school basics as a prerequisite for vocational education and Swiss quality products**

In the 19th century, many craftsmen struggled for their existence. In addition,

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**Vocational Education:  
A step-stone to the working world  
Projects of the Directorate  
for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**

*mw.* The employees of SDC report on the Swiss experience with the dual vocational education and training in many projects around the world.

"High quality vocational education and training can make a decisive contribution in reducing poverty if it enables those who are learning with long-term and dignified working conditions and as such they can get a foothold into the labour market. Economic growth remains in the foreground for the benefit of all. In cooperation with the authorities and the private sector, SDC developed training courses which meet the needs of the labour market."

**Reports on experience**

– from Bolivia: *Dona Silvia*, baker: "I was saved when the community in-

stalled its first oven and we were invited for training."

– from Ruanda: *"Mediatrice Nyirahabimana*, hairdresser: "One month after the training, I am able to provide my basic needs. I believe in a very good future."

– from Burkina Faso: *Kader Kouanda*, tailor: "Now I know how to read, take my clients' measurements and talk to them. I'm pleased with the evening classes."

and many more ...

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/themes-sdc/basic-education-vocational-training/formation-professionnelle--developper-de-nouvelles-compences--ltemoignages.html>

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**"Dual vocational education ..."**

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tion to the industrial production of textiles and other goods, increasing competition from abroad made life difficult for them. In order to keep up, trade and industry in resource-poor and landlocked Switzerland, relied on the high quality of their products from an early stage. Then, as now, this required vocational education that could build on solid basics in at least reading, writing and arithmetic. The prerequisite for this is a good Volksschule<sup>2</sup>. From the 1830s onwards, the cantons introduced the compulsory primary school, which was not only intended to enable pupils to learn a profession. The school law of the canton of Zurich of 1832 e. g. stated that the purpose of the school was "to educate the children of all classes of people according to consistent principles to become intellectually active, civilly suitable and morally religious people." (Wettstein, p. 60).

As early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was realised that after the mostly six-year primary schools, further educational opportunities were needed in addition to the grammar schools. For this reason, many cantons established advanced training or "repetition schools", in some cases also craft or drawing schools, which were attended outside working hours in the evening or at weekends (Wettstein, p. 62).

Even after the founding of the federal state in 1848, the school system remained in the hands of the cantons (in principle until today). The revised Federal Constitution of 1874 stipulated in Article 27 that the cantons had to ensure "sufficient primary education" in compulsory and free state schools. Implementation was left to the cantons, and vocational education also continued to be regulated by the cantons. The Confederation has been promoting commercial, industrial and agricultural vocational education with subsidies since 1884. At the turn of the century, most cantons enacted laws on apprenticeship, and some stipulated the attendance at the vocational school and taking a final apprenticeship examination. (Wettstein, pp. 65–69).

**Professional education and training as a joint effort of the Confederation, cantons, training companies and professional associations**

The first Federal Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA) was passed by the Federal Assembly in 1930 after lengthy preparatory work and consultations with the cantons and employee and employer associations, and came into force on 1 June 1933. It applied to the commercial, industrial and trade professions.

In addition to the commercial professions, other professions had developed separately: the agricultural apprenticeship (Wettstein, pp. 103ff.); the commercial apprenticeship – the "KV": the schools still belong to the commercial associations KV in many cantons, but are financed by the cantons (pp. 94ff.); the non-medical health professions – the nurses' schools were for a long time run by Catholic or Reformed organizations, in 1899 the Swiss Red Cross founded the first Red Cross nurses' school, later the Confederation delegated the enforcement of legislation in this field to the SRC (pp. 118ff.).

The BBG of 1933 took up the vocational training model of the guilds. As early as 1895, the Swiss Trades Association (SGV) had decided not to go down the path of apprenticeship workshops with associated specialised instruction, but to stick to the master apprenticeship. This was an important and appropriate decision for the further development of vocational education and training – after all, it is human nature that young people can learn and grow best in a direct relationship with an older, experienced professional or master teacher – this is just as true in the enterprise as it is at school.

The 1933 law already contained the most important elements of today's vocational training. It regulated the basic training in a vocational apprenticeship (enterprise and trade school) with final apprenticeship examination and certificate of proficiency, but also the training of master teacher. The technical schools and apprenticeship workshops, which were especially widespread in French-speaking Switzerland, were included. The apprenticeship contract was and is regulated as a special form of employment contract in the Code of Obligations (OR).

"The basis for the subsequent success of the law," writes Emil Wettstein, "is the involvement of the cantons and professional associations in the design of the regulations, their further development and their enforcement" (Wettstein, p. 70). Among other things, the professional associations help determine the content of the training regulations in the individual professions and administer the practical final apprenticeship examinations. The cantons are responsible for the implementation of the BBG, they run the vocational schools and supervise the training enterprises. Legislation is the responsibility of the Confederation.

Some things have been adapted and further developed in subsequent decades to reflect changes in the world of work. But the basic principles and the cooperation model remained, because they proved to be practical.

**Permeability of the Swiss vocational education and training model – from apprenticeship to university**

The new education articles, which the sovereign inserted into the Federal Constitution in 2006, did not lead to better schooling for all – as many had hoped – but were used as a springboard for questionable upheavals (HarmoS, Lehrplan 21). As far as vocational education is concerned, the Confederation retained the competence to legislate and newly stipulated: "It [the Confederation] shall promote a broad and permeable offer in the field of vocational education and training" (Art. 63 BV).

This permeable offer looks briefly like this: Since 1994, there has been the vocational baccalaureate for those apprentices who like to put in more learning time – whether at the same time as their apprenticeship or afterwards. In 2019, around 68,000 young people completed a vocational apprenticeship, and over 14,000 acquired a vocational baccalaureate (BM).<sup>3</sup> With a BM for commercial, technical, health/social, creative/artistic, agricultural or service professions, the path to the corresponding university of applied sciences is open. Since 2005, people with a vocational baccalaureate have also been able to enter university or the ETH via a one-year additional training course with a supplementary examination (the so-called Passerelle). Just under 1200 passed the Passerelle in 2018 (Wettstein, p. 168ff.).

As Emil Wettstein notes, the introduction of the vocational baccalaureate "has made a significant contribution to increasing the attractiveness of the vocational pathway" (Wettstein, p. 172). Some high-achieving students would rather do an apprenticeship than go to high school if they can combine it with a BM. But, as education editor *Robin Schwarzenbach* writes in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung": "Those who want, can – but no one has to strive for further diplomas. Young people in particular don't have to – indeed, they can't – know today where they will be in their professional lives in five or ten years' time. They should be allowed to take one step at a time. At their own pace, according to their own inclinations and interests."<sup>4</sup>

**Matura for all – is that fairer?**

Sometimes we hear that a fair education system should make it possible for all young people to take the Matura. This demand aims past reality. On the one hand, many bright young people would rather do an apprenticeship than spend the whole week at school. On the other hand, such "fairness thinking" in no way does justice to the inestimable advantages of Switzerland's dual VET system: for the lives of individual young people (and this does not just mean their professional

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**"Dual vocational education ..."**

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future!), for the high quality of the workplace, for the extraordinarily low youth unemployment (2–4 %) and for a vibrant democracy.

The education reform of 2006 stipulates: The Confederation and the cantons "shall, in the performance of their tasks, endeavour to ensure that general and vocational education and training receive equal recognition in society" (Art. 61a para.3 BV).

However, this "equal recognition" is not achieved by packing vocational apprenticeships together with secondary schools into the new box "upper secondary level". Rather, it must take place in our minds.

One of my first profound experiences as a vocational school teacher were the essays that my electrician, machine mechanic and mechapraktiker classes (today the professions are called differently) wrote after the first months of their apprenticeship on the topic "From school to working life". The way the 15- and 16-year-olds vividly described the enormous change from the cosy life of a high school student to a strict and fully committed working day, and how they coped with it within a few months, how they (almost without exception) expressed their joy in their profession, in creating independently, their pride in the first workpieces they produced themselves and, of course, also in their first payday, shook the rest of my academic pride to the core. What a unique opportunity the dual voca-

tional apprenticeship offers most of our young people to mature and take their place in life in the important phase between 15 and 20!

This is by no means to say that the "Gymi" cannot also be a good choice. I, at least, have (mostly) enjoyed the intensive learning in the classroom and at home. It is equally clear that it is one of the tasks of us vocational school teachers to do our utmost to support every young person who would like to pursue further education after the apprenticeship, perhaps the vocational baccalaureate and a degree.

**Optimal adaptability of the apprenticeship to the requirements of the time – exception ABU**

Much has changed in the world of work since the first Federal Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act of 1933. Swiss VET has managed to adapt to this change: Occupations have been renamed or newly created, occupational regulations and school-based learning content have been revised. "This is by no means a matter of course," says Emil Wettstein. "In many countries, education has become disconnected from the needs of the world of work, leading to labour market mismatches and thus youth unemployment" (Wettstein, p. 216).

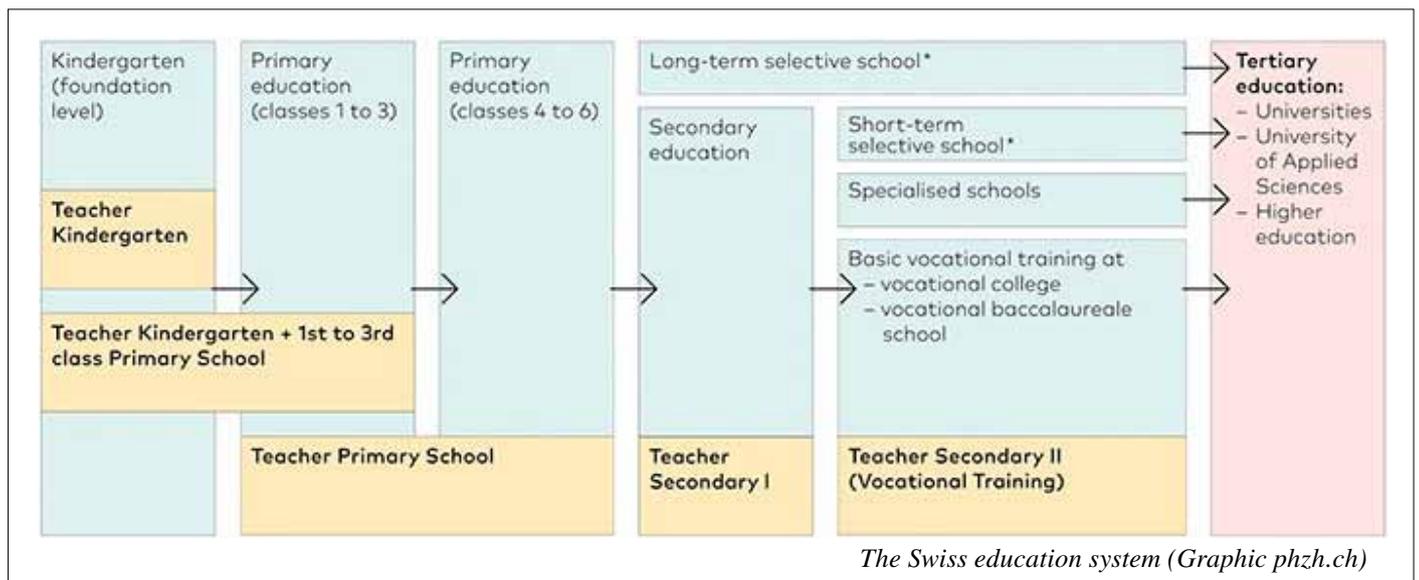
The secret of the adaptability of Swiss vocational education and training is quite simple: Because vocational education and training comes from practice and because the professional associations and the training companies bring the requirements of

reality to the cantonal and federal offices, because the vocational schools maintain contact with the apprenticeship masters, and because the specialist teachers themselves usually learned the profession the apprentices of which they teach today – for all these reasons, the learning theories and the subject teaching in the vocational school do not drift away from everyday vocational life.

Unfortunately, the exception to this reality-based approach is the *general education teaching* (ABU). When I started as a vocational school teacher in the 1980s, we had our three weekly lessons for the subjects German, business studies and political and economic studies. There was one curriculum for the entire German-speaking Switzerland with uniform learning objectives and a uniform apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) with a demanding level, in all German-speaking Swiss vocational schools on the same day at the same time.

In the nineties, school reformers used the ABU as an experimental field for their ideologies which we are also grappling with today in Volksschule: The school subjects were abolished and replaced by a mishmash called "general education". The learning objectives were "enriched" with "action, factual, self and social competences", there was only one framework curriculum, each school fabricated its own school curriculum and its own LAP according to the motto: "He who teaches, tests." This led to a massive

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Letter to  the Editor

## “And then tomorrow it will be another human being who is so afflicted”

Very many thanks for the courageous while necessary reporting on *Julian Assange*! The investigative journalist is facing so many obstacles from the British judiciary, but also from Sweden, which seems to have forgotten the Scandinavian pacifist tradition of *Olaf Palme* and *Dag Hamerskjöld*, while he is subjected to such torture in a security prison in the UK, in solitary confinement, that it is really hard to believe.

One might very well hope that there is still a corner left in the British legal system for the humanity that Mr Assange has championed. It is simply quite unjust,

quite despicable, what is being done to Mr Assange – and what is alarming to me is that the UN and its voice is no longer respected, indeed, no longer heard.

If we don't put a stop to it, the UN will soon be mocked ... And tomorrow it will be another human being with humanity, the next one to be plagued like this, who will be placed in solitary confinement, and then we will have no legal recourse and no legal means at all against it! Resist the beginnings!

Mr. Assange's legal case is a precedent, and I don't know what else can be done, if the UN has to watch help-

lessly. We shouldn't fool ourselves, the US still have full power to do what they want, as *Daniele Ganser's* books (unfortunately) confirm, but slowly, slowly, the world's attitude is changing, and many people are recognising Mr. Assange's merits for the truth. Actually, the human right to peace should be accompanied by a human right to the truth – a glimmer of hope are the private advertisements in some newspapers demanding Assange's release.

Susanne Wiesinger,  
Freiburg i.B., Germany

## Every generation has its own tasks to solve

Why are we complaining about the Corona crisis and the necessary restrictions it imposes on us? Doesn't every generation have its tasks rooted in the present? Tasks implicate school, work, securing of existence, ageing, health changes, environmental changes, world politics and ...

Each of these areas require that we learn to deal with them. Complaining things are the way they are is for some instance acceptable for a certain time (to define the situation), but in the end we have

to find a way how to deal with the changes in a meaningful manner. If mankind had not managed this for thousands of years, sometimes better and sometimes worse, no human being was still alive. During the Second World War, when the threat was imminent and the hunger was great, the problem had to be tackled by everyone, although it was uncomfortable. Even today there is need for courageous activity in order to combat the threat of Corona in solidarity. Both, young and older, eve-

ryone, should follow the AHA rules. And reduce contacts.

Last but not least, today's situation offers – or demands – the possibility for young and older, parents and children, for all of us, to get to know each other better and maybe in a new way. If we come together in a human manner, this will not harm us, but everyone and humankind itself will benefit from it.

Lutz Geisen, Trimmis, Switzerland

### “Dual vocational education ...”

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reduction in the learning material and the examination level. In addition, a lot of common learning time is lost in general education classes for the “Vertiefungsarbeit (VA)”, which every student has to write and present “self-organised” as part of the final examination. Fortunately, the reformers' ideas were thoroughly rebuffed by the specialist teachers and industry associations.

### Caring for the business location

Emil Wettstein's history of Swiss vocational education and training shows the great importance of dual vocational edu-

cation and training as one of the pillars of the economy and the cohesion of society.

In any case, we don't need to worry about the Swiss economy just because of a little thunder from Brussels. Against such behaviour, our clever people in the Federal Council and in the administration pull out of their pockets their plan B. Our entrepreneurs are flexible and innovative anyway. But if our companies want to continue to deliver top quality, they do need top skilled workers. For quite some time now, many apprenticeship masters have been complaining that their apprentices bring along from the Volksschule sufficient school basics. Also, they often

lack the willingness to work hard as well as a frustration tolerance. We have to do something about this – better today than tomorrow. •

<sup>1</sup> Wettstein, Emil. *Berufsbildung. Entwicklung des Schweizer Systems.* (Vocational education. Development of the Swiss system). © 2020 hep Verlag Bern. ISBN 978-3-0355-1675-3

<sup>2</sup> Volksschule is equivalent to a combined primary and lower secondary education.

<sup>3</sup> Swiss Federal Statistical Office, *Bildungsabschlüsse Berufliche Grundbildung/Allgemeinbildende Ausbildungen* (Educational attainment in basic vocational education and training/general education and training).

<sup>4</sup> Schwarzenbach, Robin. “An apprenticeship is just the beginning”. in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung. Education supplement* from 25 November 2020

## “Reading books is necessary ...”

by Dr Eliane Perret, special education (remedial) and psychologist

“... Stupidity shall not kill you.” This is how a poem – which is found on many internet sites – begins, which is intended to show children the importance of reading books. Even if the rest of the poem is a matter of taste, it nevertheless points to the importance of reading for the individual and for society as a whole. – Five hundred years ago since the invention of printing made reading, and with-it education, accessible to wider circles of the population. Until then, books and documents were copied by hand. In Europe, this was mostly done in the scriptoria of monasteries, where monks and nuns took on this demanding task and created handcrafted gems. So, how important are books and what is their significance for reading today?

### “When will you read to us today?”

It is just before lunch. The students in a middle school class sit quietly at their desks and listen intently while the teacher reads to them. “Do you speak chocolate?” is the promising title.<sup>1</sup> While the same children often find it difficult to concentrate, they are now very attentive. The story of a friendship that is burdened with some stumbling blocks, but also looks at current world events, captivates them. Behaviours are described and exemplified which they can identify with, which they want to make their own and from which they can orient themselves. Reading aloud leads the class into a shared world. It is not only intellectual, but also social or emotional experiences that connect them henceforth. So, it is comprehensible that they don’t want the daily reading to be cancelled.

### Reading aloud? With older Children or even teenagers?

Let’s start with the younger children. Fortunately, for many parents and grandparents, looking at picture books and reading stories together with their children and grandchildren is still part of the routine today. Through this they begin to discover the world together providing a situation to ask all their questions. Giving undivided attention, goodwill and security in cosy surroundings and diving into a story together awakens curiosity and strengthens the feeling of emotional connection.

But that’s not all! Studies show that two-year-old children who look at picture books and reading aloud together regularly speak twice as many words as children of the same age who do not have this opportunity. Their vocabulary is expanded and the formation of sentences



Pupils reading. (Picture Caro)

and different forms of language are internalised. They expand their range of expressing themselves and communicating with their fellow human beings. By reading aloud and looking at books, children improve their stamina, become more creative and improve their memory and ability to concentrate. Especially at this age, children are also very receptive to little poems and rhymes that help them discover the rhythm of language. The books by *Susanne Meier-Stöcklin* are a treasure trove for this.<sup>2</sup> When looking at a book together, a child receives many learning impulses that no TV programmes, tablet games and smartphone apps can provide. In this way, children develop a positive emotional relationship with books at an early age, which usually lasts a lifetime. This is the best foundation for a good education.

Unfortunately, many parents stop reading aloud when a child can read by himself. While this is also important and to be supported, it in no way replaces reading aloud. Older children also appreciate it when you read a book together and trade at reading aloud to each other.

### How do I “get” my child to read?

In conversations with parents, reading is always a topic. They wish their children would read more. Digital media takes up too much time for some of them. However, the opportunity to entice them to read is still there. We tried it out in our school with children of all ages. Inspired by another school, we started the *project 15x15*.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen days of reading for fif-

teen minutes each. However, we did not want to have each pupil read a book of their own choice but created our own variation and read a book to them class by class. Once a day, a pupil walked through the school building with the triangle at an unexpected moment and announced that everything should now be put aside. The reading time began; it became quiet in the school building.

The response from the pupils was positive and after that in several classes, reading aloud was integrated into the schedule.

### Why not in the family too?

Schedule reading aloud into the daily family routine, even for older children? One mother told me that for years it has been a ritual for them to lounge on the sofa with her two sons, who are now pre-adolescents. One on her left, the other on her right, to read a book together (and sometimes fall asleep comfortably). I was amazed, as I knew from her son that he was not very fluent in reading. On the other hand, I had already noticed that he had a good vocabulary and could grasp and understand the meaning of what he read very well, both intellectually and emotionally. A skill he had certainly acquired in his family reading sessions. This would not have been possible solely through everyday conversation.

### Big and small

In another reading project, we formed daily reading partnerships between older

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### “Reading books is necessary ...”

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and younger students for a fortnight. It was not difficult to get the older students to look at a picture book, read a story or read a book together with the younger children. The reading partners were carefully paired. For example, a shy older pupil took on the task of getting to know the letters with a little girl with learning difficulties. We were amazed at how patiently and unerringly she took on this task. A pupil who usually caused a lot of trouble in his class had no trouble keeping his little whirlwind, who often provoked him, in line. From then on, when they met in the school building, it was normal for them to greet each other in a friendly manner. Wouldn't this also be a good idea to implement this in the family setting?

#### What does your “hero” look like?

Of course, high-quality films also have their justification and include ways to appeal to the viewer and to address him in terms of content and emotion. (I always have a packet of tissues with me at the cinema!) Reading aloud and reading a book, however, requires a high level of other activity. The thoughts and feelings expressed in the text have to be transformed into inner images by the reader. This trains the imagination and empathy to a great extent. The readers are asked to shoot an inner film. For inexperienced readers, a clarifying conversation is often helpful, and the level of the reading text must be carefully adjusted. Where is the story set? What is happening? Who is featured? It was an exhilarating situation when I once asked my students how they would imagine the “hero” of the story. All the variations of hair, eye and skin colours, other physical features and clothing came together – determined by each child's imagination.

An impressive literary example of the power of these inner images may come from *Ernest Hemingway*. The story goes that he had made a bet with some of his writing friends. They had insinuated that he was incapable of describing a story in six words. He surprised them with the sentence: For sale: baby shoes, never worn. With this, he elicited – if the anecdote actually originated with him – not only from his friends at the time a story that was shaped against the background of personal experiences and adventures. Or what goes through your mind?

#### Entering into an inner dialogue

Part of a deeper reading is to get involved in the perspective and feelings of other people and to enter into an inner dialogue

“Reading opens up the possibility of understanding larger contexts that determine social life. It lays the foundations for free thinking and decision-making. This is the path to becoming a responsible citizen and thus the basis of every democracy.”

with them. We empathise with them and experience what it means to be desperate or happy. We enter strange worlds and experience things that were previously closed to us in our lives, or we can identify and make the experience of not being alone with our experiences and feelings. Reading includes the possibility to get a first insight into foreign cultures and countries, which is often more authentic than today's commercial tourism offers. For example, the students who listen to *Cas Lester's* book being read to them learn about the situation of refugees from Syria. *Mehrnousch Zaeri-Esfahani*<sup>4</sup> tells them how she came from Iran to Germany on arduous paths and found a new home. *Judith Hohnhold*, with a simplified version of *Karl Bruckner's* world-famous book for young people, has made it possible even for less experienced readers to learn about the fate of *Sadaki Sasaki*, who survived the first atomic bomb attack in history on her hometown of Hiroshima seemingly unscathed.<sup>5</sup> One enters the world of the other and returns enriched. This can help us build a bridge to our fellow human beings around the world – a bridge that can sustain us later in life.

Unfortunately, this ability to empathise has declined considerably over the last 40 years, especially since the turn of the millennium, as *Sherry Turkle*, a renowned researcher at MIT (*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*), has noted in her studies. One connection is assumed to be that many people are constantly on the move online, which prevents face-to-face encounters and creates interpersonal distance. But doesn't this already start with the fact that reading good books is given too little space, not only among children but also among adults?

#### Reading is more than reading technique ...

In the world of today's teaching materials, the reading process has a high priority. Curriculum 21 dissects it into the individual parts and formulates corresponding competencies. It is about better reading techniques, reading for comprehension, etc., and optimising the reading circuits in the brain. Do we want to reduce reading to that? Or would we rather

take *Olga Meyer's* idea, whose books for children and young people have helped to shape generations. According to Meyer: “The world with its highly developed technology, in which the child is placed today, can certainly arouse his interest, but never warm his heart, give him the security he needs for his inner development.”<sup>6</sup> And for this we must give our children the opportunity: To love reading; a precious tool that will accompany them on their way. This is how we grow people, who our society and every other society desperately needs. This requires more than digital reading programmes that test the appropriate skills with the hollow promise that this will optimise career opportunities.

#### ... it is a cultural technique

I hope I have made it clear: Reading enables people to communicate in a sophisticated way and to educate themselves. But not only that; in reading, man forms his personality. He gains insight into the world of his fellow human beings and learns “to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another,” as *Alfred Adler* expressed it. This allows us to see other ways of interacting with each other. But what happens to children who are never confronted with the thoughts and feelings that other people have? – Beyond the fate of the individual, we must also include the whole human family. Reading opens up the possibility of understanding larger contexts that determine social life. It lays the foundations for free thinking and decision-making. This is the path to becoming a responsible citizen and thus the basis of every democracy. •

<sup>1</sup> Lester, Cas. *Sprichst du Schokolade?* (Do you speak chocolate?) Arsedition. 2018. EAN 9783845829241

<sup>2</sup> See author's website. [www.stoecklin-meier.ch](http://www.stoecklin-meier.ch)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.condorcet.ch](http://www.condorcet.ch). Pichard, Alain. *Leseförderung: Das Projekt 15x15*. (Promoting reading: the 15x15 project.)

<sup>4</sup> Zaeri-Esfahani, Mehrnousch. *33 Bogen und ein Teehaus*. (33 bows and a teahouse.) Peter Hammer Publishers. 2018. ISBN 978-3-7795-0522-8.

<sup>5</sup> Hohnhold, Judith. *Sadako. Ein Wunsch aus tausend Kranichen*. (Sadako. A wish made of a thousand cranes.) Thienemann-Esslinger Publishers GmbH. ISBN 978-3-8489-2099-0

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, Olga. *Olga Meyer erzählt aus ihrem Leben*. (Olga Meyer talks about her life.) Rascher-Publishers. Zürich-Stuttgart.

# We want to spend a lifetime solving the riddle of the human being, because we want to be human.

## Wilhelmine von Hillern's novel "Geier-Wally"

by Moritz Nestor

*You have to read the book, first published in 1873, in the original, it is too well written. Unfortunately, its content was ideologically appropriated, flattened or distorted in numerous movie versions and in even more numerous adaptations for the stage.*



Wilhelmine von Hillern

Wilhelmine von Hillern based her novel on the life journey of the Tyrolean *Anna Stainer-Knittel* (1841-1915), a portrait and flower painter. Wilhelmine von Hillern visited her in Innsbruck to get to know her after hearing that Anna Knittel had gutted an eagle's nest in a rock face near the hamlet of Madau at the age of 17, hanging from a rope. This was a real man's job, which at that time protected the flocks of sheep. But after an almost unfortunate accident a year earlier and after no man volunteered for the venture, the idiosyncratic Anna Knittel as a woman proved to be quite equal to this man's task. In this and many other ways, she rejected the traditional image of women and is considered by some people to be an early example of female emancipation. The artistically gifted girl received private lessons at an early age, was supported by an artist, studied for a while at the Munich Art Academy and became a working mother later on. From 1873 until her old age she ran a drawing and painting school for ladies in Innsbruck.

### Growing up in a harsh and loveless upbringing

In the novel "Geier-Wally", the pretty Walburga Strominger grows up after the early death of her mother as the only daughter of the richest farmer in the valley, a domineering, hard man. The maid Luckard is a loving mother substitute for Wally. One day Wally will become the farm heir-

ess. Her father educates her harshly, like a boy. None of the men in the valley dare to clear out a lammergeier's nest in a rock face. Wally's father publicly mocks the men of the village as cowards and ropes his daughter down to the vulture's nest in the rock face. Wally clears out the nest despite the attacks of the mother animal. Scratched and bleeding, with a vulture chick back on top, the proud father kisses her for the first time in her life. Wally raises the vulture chick, hence her nickname "Vulture-Wally".

At 16, Wally falls in love at her confirmation with the handsome man *Joseph*, who has killed a bear. But Wally's father rejects "Bear Joseph", as he is called, as a son-in-law. He has already promised his daughter to the sinister *Vincent* and therefore pulls Wally away from the feast and Joseph back home prematurely. When the daughter in love cries for the first time in her life, her unloving father beats her up.

### Thanks to a sensitive eye for relationship processes ...

Wally detests *Vinzenz*. Because the father cannot conquer his daughter, he banishes her with her vulture *Hansl* to a high alp as a herdsman for sheep and goats. When Wally returns in autumn, her father is ill and *Vinzenz* is already running the farm. Before Wally's return, the old *Luckard* has been chased from the farm after a quarrel and died full of grief about it. The father forbids Wally to live in the house. She has to live as a fodder maid and sleep with the cattle. The humiliated daughter finally loses her temper when *Vincent* abuses an old farmhand brutally and knocks him down with a hatchet. As Wally is to be locked in the cellar, she hurls a burning log into the hay barn to escape while everyone is busy putting out the fire.

### ... the author awakens the understanding for Wally's inner life path

With great knowledge of human nature, Wilhelmine von Hillern shapes Wally's life journey through difficult entanglements and strokes of fate. Her *Geier-Wally* is, in the best sense of the word, a piece of folk literature of the kind that emerged at the end of the 19th century; it need not fear comparison with *Jeremias Gotthelf* and *Peter Rosegger*, to name only a few. With a precise eye for the course of relationships and conflicts between father and daughter and between *Josef* and Wally, the author creates a true education

novel centred on the inner development of a misunderstood, harshly and lovelessly brought up girl and her search and struggle for honest love and recognition. It is the classic theme of the education novel in the tradition of *Goethe's* "Wilhelm Meister" or *Gotthelf's* "Ueli der Knecht" (Ueli the farm-hand): how a person makes his way through life, works his way out of the low points of life by his own efforts, how he learns from his mistakes and conflicts, and finally how he can gain a foothold in the existing society. For the insiders: a true "anti-Adorno"! But that's just by the by.

There are tragic scenes, struggles for pride and superiority, for love and defiance. For Wally, loving has long been too much associated with being down – until *Josef* and Wally finally find each other, no longer always seeing the cause of their own feelings in the other, but genuinely forgive each other and live together on the farm for a few more happy years.

"Wally and *Josef* died early, the storms that shook them had loosened the roots of their lives", so the novel ends – a work such as is hardly ever written today. A novel of a vanished world and yet also – in its gripping descriptions of human fates and the search for love in an often cruel world – a timeless work that can make a bygone historical era empathically accessible to today's young people.

### Intuitive anticipation of individual psychological insights

In every line of Wilhelmine von Hillern's book, one notices how deeply rooted the author is in the culture of her homeland and her era, and how much she lives with the people of her homeland and how much she can empathise and sympathise with them because she knows her people. Woven into this education novel, however, is also a great character portrait, painted with an astonishing amount of psychological understanding.

When Wilhelmine von Hillern wrote her novel in 1876, depth psychology was not yet born. *Alfred Adler*, the founder of individual psychology, is only six years old and, as one of the three pioneers of depth psychology, will coin the term "male protest" before the First World War.<sup>1,2</sup>

His pupil *Otto Rühle* speaks of "protest masculinity".<sup>3</sup> What is meant is that in

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### "We want to spend a lifetime ..."

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the climate of cultural dominance of men (equal: above, toughness, strength, valuable) over women (equal: below, weakness, passive, inferior) boys and girls experience an educational climate already in the nursery in which femininity (and thus also mildness, goodness and charity) is devalued as supposedly inferior and an exaggerated "masculinity" (and thus violence, harshness, lovelessness, lust for power and severity) is glorified as supposedly superior.

In this educational climate, already in the first years of childhood – the girl – aligned with this fiction of masculinity like superiority, – toughness and strength – begins to reject her own femininity as supposed social inferiority (male protest) and adopts "male" character traits culturally considered superior in order not to be, as she feels, less "worthy" than the boys considered more valuable by the patriarchy. In this educational climate, the girl quickly develops typical male characteristics, behaves wildly like a boy to show that she is also "good" as a girl, and trains the great mental ambition to outdo all others like a man in order to be considered as woman. In doing so, however, she is driven by the need to do twice as "well" as a man in order to be able to "catch up" with the male world, which is considered to be of higher value.



Book cover of the 1921 edition.

Typical female figures from politics, culture and history remind us, even today, of this overcompensation of "male" power. More than thirty years before Adler, Wilhelmine von Hillern creates a girl's fate with her Geier-Wally, marked by the consequences of harsh beating pedagogy and "male protest". Enmeshed in a tragic struggle and protest against male superior-

ity and harshness, which she also admires, she flounders "in the net of her fiction" of the alleged superiority of men.

If one reads "Geier-Wally" also with an "individual psychological eye", it becomes quite vividly clear how much Wilhelmine von Hillern anticipated with her vivid character image of Wally Strominger, what the historically later Adlerian individual psychology describes as the tragedy of the hard beating pedagogy and sets out what consequences this can have in the mind of a girl who grows up in the educational climate of the cultural superiority of man over woman.

### Pioneer of psychological knowledge of human nature

The Russian writer *Fyodor Michailowitsch Dostojewsky* once said that one can spend a lifetime trying to solve the riddle of man and still not lose any time doing so, because one does so because one wants to be human. Wilhelmine von Hillern and many other poets, with their intuitive knowledge of human nature, anticipated the scientific findings of the depth-psychological knowledge of human nature of the 20th century to an astonishingly high degree. Therefore, they may confidently be counted among the pioneers of modern depth psychology.

It is, after all, the vivid descriptions of people like Geier-Wally who get caught up in actions of which they can say what they have done but do not understand why they have done it. – They clarify what unconscious feelings and actions are long before the scientific efforts of depth psychologists.

We admire the greatness of these poets and their compassionate power, the foreboding depth of their urgent reflection and their descriptions of the soul. Their interest in and rich knowledge of man. Their respect for even the simplest man, who has long since fallen into social contempt and has been expelled from the human community.

*Friedrich Schiller*, for example, does not accuse a "common criminal" of being the spawn of a depraved human nature and stirs up base feelings of revenge, as is presented to our children and young people every day in the mass media to an unbearable extent – permeated by the ever same monotonous idea of revenge – but allows the poor devil to be understood as one of us who has lost respect for himself – "criminal of lost honor" Schiller calls him – and thus also for others. Not least through the attitude of his fellow human beings – through our attitude.

### Broadening the human horizon

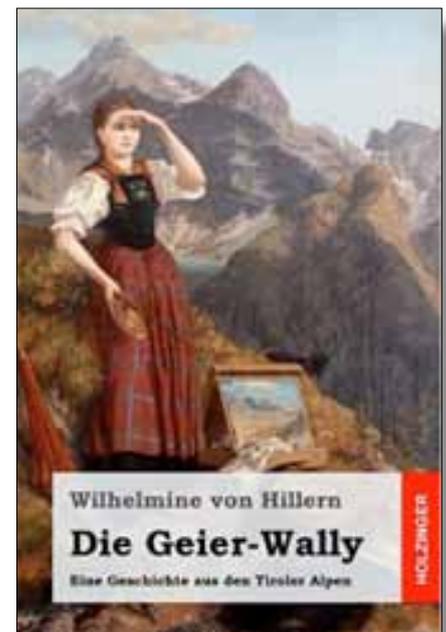
Through such reading one learns to look deeper: behind the prejudiced superficialities of the judgment of time. The poet

leads us through the forcefulness of his descriptions of the emotional entanglements to a reading in which one experiences in oneself what the true motive of a despicable act is and: what one has never thought about – and thereby integrates in one's own emotional view of man a bit more knowledge of man and fellow humanity: Had I been in the place of this novel character, had I been born and brought up and grown up under the same circumstances, had I got into the same entanglements – I would probably have acted similarly or even in the same way as this person there, whom the poet describes to us so vividly close and whom our superficial whipped-up time condemns screamingly. The reader can thus, by reading the poet, escape a bit from the base desire to want to participate in that alluring striving for power through which little souls feel a bit more imagined greatness when they cry out for revenge. Thus, the poet ultimately becomes a teacher of psychological science and of a more understanding inner view of man. Contributing to this is also the merit of Wilhelmine von Hillern, the creator of the Geier-Wally. •

<sup>1</sup> Adler, Alfred [1910]. "Der psychische Hermaphroditismus im Leben und in der Neurose" (Psychic hermaphroditism in life and neurosis), in Adler, Alfred; Furtmüller, Carl (eds.) [1914]. *Heilen und Bilden*. (Healing and educating), Frankfurt/Main 1973, pp. 85-93

<sup>2</sup> Adler, Alfred [1912, 1919]. *Über den nervösen Charakter. Grundzüge einer vergleichenden Individual-Psychologie und Psychotherapie*. (On the nervous character. Basic Features of a Comparative Individual Psychology and Psychotherapy.), Göttingen 1997

<sup>3</sup> Rühle, Otto [1925]. *Die Seele des proletarischen Kindes*. (The soul of the proletarian child.) Frankfurt/Main 1975, pp.16,52, 82ff



Edition of 2016, self-portrait of Anna Stainer-Knittel in Lechtal Traditional Costume from 1869.