

# 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*

## A domestic terrorism law in the USA? War on dissent will proceed full speed ahead

by Philip Girdaldi

President *Joe Biden* has already made it clear that legislation that will be used to combat what he refers to as “domestic terrorism” will be a top priority. That means that his inaugural speech pledge to be the president for “all Americans” appears to apply except for those who don’t agree with him. Former *Barack Obama* CIA Chief *John Brennan*, who is clearly in the loop on developments, puts it this way in a tweet where he describes how the new Administration’s spooks “are moving in laser-like fashion to try to uncover as much as they can about [the] insurgency” [that includes] “religious extremists, authoritarians, fascists, bigots, racists, nativists, even libertarians.”<sup>1</sup>

### Fundamental rights are inalienable

The United States Constitution’s Bill of Rights, which includes freedom of speech and association, has been under siege for some time now. Government has always used its assumed powers conferred by a claimed state of emergency to deprive citizens of their rights. During the American Civil War *Abraham Lincoln* imprisoned critics of the conflict. *Woodrow Wilson*’s First World War administration brought in the *Espionage Act*, which has since been used to convict whistleblowers without having to present the level of evidence that would be required in a normal civil trial. During the Second World War, *Franklin D. Roosevelt* erected concentration camps that imprisoned Japanese Americans whose only crime consisted of being Japanese.

But perhaps the greatest attack on the Bill of Rights is more recent, the *Patriot and Military Commissions Acts* that were passed into law as a consequence of the “Global War on Terror” launched by President *George W. Bush* in the wake of 9/11. Together with the secretive *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)*, which includes a court designed to speed up the warrant approval process, ordinary citizens found themselves on the receiving end of surveillance for which there was little or no justification in terms of probable cause. The FISA process was even notoriously abused in the national security apparatus attempt to derail the campaign

of *Donald Trump*. The tools are in place for ever more government mischief and no one should doubt that the Democrats are just as capable of ignoring constitutional safeguards as the Republicans have been.

### Politisation endangers national security apparatus

What makes the current state of war against “terrorism” so dangerous is that the national security apparatus has been politicised while the government has learned that labeling someone or some entity terrorist or even a “material supporter of terrorism” is infinitely elastic. That is precisely why Secretary of State *Mike Pompeo* has frequently called out opponents and attached to them the terrorist label, since it then permits other steps that might otherwise be challenged.

And there is also the fact that the playing field has changed since the First and Second World Wars. The government has technical capabilities that were never dreamed of in most of the twentieth century. *Edward Snowden* and other whistleblowers have demonstrated how the government routinely ignores constitutional limits on its ability to interfere in the lives of ordinary citizens. Not only that, it can monitor the lives of millions of Americans simultaneously, giving the police and intelligence agencies the power to mount “fishing expeditions” that literally invade the phones, computers and conversations of people who have not been guilty of any crime.

### Laws against dissenters

The authorisations that already exist will be further weaponised to go after dissenters as identified by the new regime. A bill introduced by House intelligence committee chair *Adam Schiff* “would take existing War on Terror legislation and simply amend it to say we can now do that within the U.S.”<sup>2</sup> It would be combined with previous legislation, including former president *Barack Obama*’s infamous 2012 *National Defense Authorisation Act*, which allows the military to indefinitely detain American citizens suspected of terrorism without a trial. *Obama* and *Brennan* also assumed an illegal and uncon-



(Picture Wikimedia)

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stitutional right to act as judge, jury and executioner-by-drone of American citizens overseas. Given those precedents, a bill like *Schiff*’s would free the national security community’s hands even more.

### It is meant to sound like totalitarianism

The new body of legislation would mean increased secret legal surveillance, suppression of free speech, indefinite incarceration without charges, torture, and even perhaps assassination. If it sounds like totalitarianism it should. There ought to be particular concern that the plan of the *Biden* Administration to go after so-

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**"A domestic terrorism law ..."**

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called domestic terrorists will be this generation's version of either Pearl Harbor or 9/11. The incident that took place at the Capitol Building on January 6<sup>th</sup> (already being referred to as 1/6 in some circles) has been exaggerated beyond all recognition and is now being regularly referred to as an "insurrection," which it was not, by both politicians and the mainstream media. The language used to vilify what are alleged to be "right wing" and "white supremacist" enemies of the state is astonishing and the technology is keeping pace to turn the United States and other countries into police states to ensure that citizens will do the bidding of government.

To cite only one example of how technology can drive the process, Biden has several times threatened to initiate and enforce something like a nationwide lockdown to defeat the coronavirus. Can he do it? Yes, the tools are already in place. Facial recognition technology is highly developed and deployable in the numerous surveillance cameras that are being installed. Wrist bands are being developed overseas<sup>3</sup> that are designed to compel compliance with government dictates on pandemic measures enforcement. If you have been told to stay home and are instead walking the dog your wrist band will tell the police and they will find and arrest you.

And, as the old saying goes, the Revolution is already beginning to devour its own children. Universities and schools are insisting that teachers actively support both publicly and privately the new "equity and diversity" order while police departments are purging themselves of officers suspected of being associated with conservative groups, meaning that something like a loyalty test might soon become common. Recently the Defense Department has begun intensive monitoring

of the social media of military personnel to identify dissenters, as is already done in some large companies with their employees. The new Director of National Intelligence hardliner *Avril Haines* has already confirmed that her agency will participate in a public threat assessment of QAnon<sup>4</sup>, which she has described as America's Greatest Threat.

### Scandals to cover up the violations of fundamental rights

Haines has also suggested that intelligence agencies will "look at connections between folks in the U.S. and externally and foreign" while Biden on his first full day in office has pledged to thoroughly investigate claims about Russian hacking of U.S. infrastructure and government sites, the poisoning of *Putin* critic *Alexei Navalny*, and the story that Russia offered the Taliban bounties to kill U.S. troops in Afghanistan. It could be *Russiagate* all over again, with a claimed foreign threat being used to conceal civil rights violations being committed by the federal government at home.

And, of course, the new policies will reflect the biases of the new rulers. Right wing "terror" will be targeted even though the list of actual right-wing driven outrages is embarrassingly short. Groups like Black Lives Matter will be untouchable in spite of their major role<sup>5</sup> in last year's rioting, arson, looting and violence that caused \$2 billion damage and killed as many as thirty because they are in all but name part of the *Democratic Party*. *Antifa*, which rioted in Portland last week, will also get a pass – the media routinely describes leftist violence as "mainly peaceful" and only sometimes concedes that some "property damage" occurred.

It is Trump supporters and conservatives in general who are being shown the exit door, to include calls for "deprogram-

ming them"<sup>6</sup>. The "Washington Post's" *Jennifer Rubin* recently declared that "We have to collectively, in essence, burn down the *Republican Party*. We have to level them because if there are survivors, if there are people who weather this storm, they will do it again."<sup>7</sup> She also echoed calls for making them unemployable, "I think it's absolutely abhorrent that any institution of higher learning, any news organisation, or any entertainment organisation that has a news outlet would hire these people."<sup>8</sup>

As the notably clueless Secretary of State *Condoleezza Rice* said in 2006 while Lebanon was getting bombed and shelled by Israel, "We are seeing the birth pangs of a new Middle East ..."<sup>9</sup> so too are we Americans seeing something new and strange emerging from the ruins of Trumpdom. It will not be pretty and after it is over Americans will enjoy a lot fewer liberties, that is for sure.<sup>10</sup> •

<sup>1</sup> <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/peace-and-prosperity/2021/january/20/fmr-cia-director-biden-intel-community-moving-in-on-pro-trump-libertarians/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lawfareblog.com/rep-schiff-announces-domestic-terrorism-bill>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52409893?fbclid=IwAR09EJ2TZx-hbt410IPkyzG-39MgyB7nBOI47hfzHQ-EhP0XvdEPPdfTppk>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/19/us/in-auguration-day-biden#avril-haines-pick-for-national-intelligence-director-says-shell-help-with-a-public-threat-assessment-of-qanon>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/whatever-happened-to-the-populist-left/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/media/howard-kurtz-reacts-katie-couric-deprogram-trump-supporters>

<sup>7</sup> <https://earthfmwrth.com/content/national-news/washington-posts-rubin-says-we-have-to-burn-down-the-republican-party>

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/7/22/rice-sees-bombs-as-birth-pangs>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nypost.com/2021/01/17/the-left-wants-to-silence-conservatives-all-of-them/>

Source: <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2021/01/28/a-domestic-terrorism-law-war-on-dissent-will-proceed-full-speed-ahead/> of 28 January 2021

## Current Concerns

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# The 30 Years War in the Gulf

by Manlio Dinucci



Manlio Dinucci  
(Picture ma)

On January 17, 1991 at 2:30 am (Gulf time), US helicopters penetrated Iraqi territory, destroying two radar stations with Hellfire missiles. Immediately thereafter, Tomahawk cruise missiles and F-117A

stealth fighters hit other nerve centers, blinding the capital's air defense. CNN broadcasted images of the Baghdad sky illuminated by blind-firing anti-aircraft tracers around the world, a "spectacle" that the reporter compared to the festive fireworks of July 4th. Thus, what the Pentagon described as the most destructive military action ever carried out in such a short time with non-nuclear weapons began, it was a model for future wars.

Paradoxically, war breaks out when "peace breaks out" (according to the slogan of the time). After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union are about to dissolve. "The cold war is over, we have entered a new era that offers great hope," announced President Bush, but "the Gulf crisis reminds us that there are still autonomous sources of turbulence in the world." In reality, the "turbulence" was triggered by Washington to take full advantage of the fact that, with the breakup of the Soviet bloc, the United States, as it officially declared, remained "the only State with strength, scope and every dimension - political, economic and military - truly global: there is no substitute for American leadership."

After supporting Saddam Hussein's Iraq in Khomeini's war against Iran in the 1980s, the US pushed Kuwait – which helped Iraq fight Iran – to demand

immediate repayment of a billions dollar loan from Baghdad and to exploit beyond measure the oil field that extended under both territories, damaging Iraq. As the tension between the two countries grew, on 25 July 1990, the US ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, assured Saddam Hussein that she "had direct instructions from the President to seek better relations with Iraq" and that "we have no opinion on your border dispute with Kuwait." A week later, with a colossal political miscalculation Iraq invaded Kuwait, later proposing to withdraw in exchange for certain concessions including access to the Gulf that Great Britain denied when redesigning the Middle East in the 1920s.

The trap sprung. The United States – which had long been preparing for war, observing the deployment of Iraqi forces with military satellites and identifying the targets to be hit – formed an international coalition that sent a large 750,000 manned army to the Gulf under the orders of US General Schwarzkopf. In November 1990 the UN Security Council approved – with 12 votes in favor (including USSR), 2 against (Cuba and Yemen) and the abstention of China - Resolution 678 which authorized the use of "all necessary means" against Iraq.

The Gulf War was the first war in which the Italian Republic participated under US command, in violation of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution. NATO, while not participating officially as such, made its forces and bases available. Immediately after the war, NATO launched, along the new US strategy lines, the "new strategic concept of the Alliance," which Italy copied with the "new defense model." Thus, we went from war to war, presenting them as "humanitarian operations for the export of democracy": Yugoslavia 1999, Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Libya 2011, Syria 2011, and others.

This was the war that, according to what President Bush declared in 1991, would open "a better future – a new world community brought together by the growing consensus that force cannot be used" and for this reason "the Gulf crisis will go down in history as the crucible of the new world order." This is testified by the millions of deaths, invalids, orphans, refugees caused by the Gulf War, in addition to one and a half million deaths, including half a million children, caused by the subsequent 12 years of embargo on Iraq and by the long-lasting effects of depleted uranium bullets, plus many others caused by the new war in

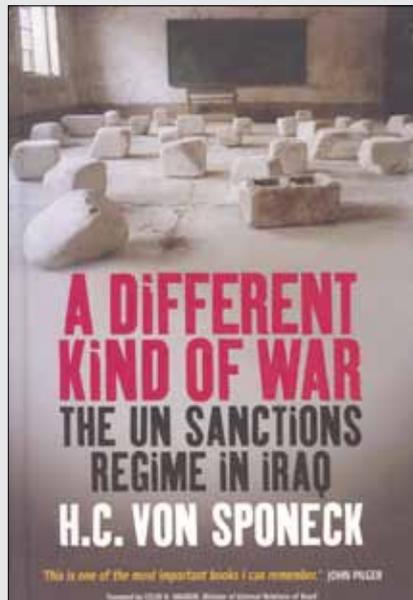
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## Sanctions – a different kind of wars

cc. "The fate of a nation could have been different – more humane and consistent with internationally defined standards of life – had the protagonists opted for dialogue and honest intentions. The United Nations could have emerged as a winner by helping to solve a crisis. International law would have been confirmed as the universally acceptable basis for international relations. The world would have been less confused and a more secure place today."

So reads the introduction to the book published in 2005 by Hans-C. Sponeck "A Different Kind of War: The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq". Hans-C. Sponeck was UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq and Assistant UN Secretary-General responsible for the "Oil for Food" programme in Iraq from 1998 to 2000. In 2000, he resigned from his post in protest against the sanctions imposed by the UN on Iraq.

The spine of the book (German edition) reads: "The United Nations has failed Iraq. Its sanctions regime has contributed to the current catastrophic situation in the country, disregarding basic human rights such as those to food, health or education for years. The 'Oil for Food' programme was supposed to secure humanitarian aid for the Iraqi people during



ISBN 1-84545-222-4

the period of the economic embargo from 1996 to the end of 2003. Instead, structural problems such as budget constraints and programme delays, a heavy-handed apparatus and, above all, the policies of some permanent members of the UN Security Council have caused the rapid impoverishment of the Iraqi people and the death of many innocent people."

## « There was no war. No combat. There was only a deliberate systematic genocide of a defenceless population»

Excerpts from the text by Ramsey Clark "Fire and Ice. The Destruction of Iraq by War and Sanctions»



(Picture: mcy)

William Ramsey Clark (\*18.12.1927) served as Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice under President Kennedy, became Deputy Attorney General in 1965 (administration Johnson) and served as

Attorney General from 1967-1969.

After working for the Ministry of Justice he became a human rights lawyer. His involvement included peace, disarmament, human rights, civil rights, voting rights, health, education and others. In 1991 he founded the International Action Center. Under Clark's leadership, a tribunal of 21 judges from a wide range of ethnicities and religions was formed in February 1992 to indict the United States on 19 counts of committing crimes against humanity in the Gulf War against Iraq.

In 2008, he received the United Nations Human Rights Award.

### The fire this time. (The Gulf-war from 1991)

At 2:30 a.m. on 17 January 1991 the bombs began to fall, and for forty-two days U.S. aircraft attacked Iraq on an average of once every thirty seconds. U.S. technology smashed the cradle of civilization, and George Bush called it liberation.

Without setting foot on Iraqi soil, or engaging Iraqi troops, U.S. aircraft and missiles systematically destroyed life and life-support systems in Iraq over a period of six weeks. There were two thousand air strikes in the first twenty-four hours. More than 90 percent of Iraq's electrical capacity was bombed out of service in the first few hours. [...] Multimillion-dollar missiles targeted power plants up to the last days of the war, to leave the country without power as economic sanctions sapped life from the survivors. [...]

By the end of the aerial assault, 110 000 aircraft sorties had dropped 88 500 tons of bombs on Iraq, the equivalent of seven and a half atomic bombs of the size that incinerated Hiroshima. [...] Weapons included five-ton fuel-air explosive bombs that create pressures approaching those of low-yield nuclear weapons. Cluster bombs, containing 250 bomblets capable of spewing 500 000 high-velocity, razor-sharp shrapnel fragments over an acre were used against Basra and on congested highways. Napalm bombs were used against people and to ignite oil-well fires.

Within days there was no running water in Iraq. For many weeks, people in Baghdad – without television, radio, or newspaper to warn them – were getting their drinking water from the Tigris in buckets. The Iraqi News Agency and Baghdad Broadcasting Station lost six wireless broadcast stations, twelve television stations, and five radio stations. Iraqa television system was

put out of service in the first few days of the war. [...]

Lack of communications frustrated attempts to conduct most organised activity, including caring for the sick and injured. The destruction of transportation links compounded the problem. In a country built around two great rivers, 139 automobile and railway bridges were either damaged or destroyed, including 26 in the Basra province alone. [...]

Iraq's eight major multipurpose dams were repeatedly hit and heavily damaged. This simultaneously wrecked flood control, municipal and industrial water supply, irrigation, and hydroelectric power. Four of Iraq's seven major water-pumping stations were destroyed. Bombs and missiles hit thirty-one municipal water and sewage facilities. Sewage spilled into the Tigris and out into the streets of Baghdad, adding water-borne disease to the list of killers. [...]

Iraq's agriculture and food-processing storage and distribution system was attacked directly and systematically. [...] all of the irrigation systems serving them [irrigated lands] – including storage dams, barrages, pumping stations, and drainage projects – were attacked. [...] At least three food warehouses in the Baghdad Province were hit, seven were struck in Asra province, and all of Iraq's General Company of Foodstuffs warehouses in Al-Qadissiya province were destroyed. [...] Iraq's factory in Abu Ghraib to produce baby milk powder, unique in the region, was attacked on January 20, 21, and 22. [...] In Al-Taji, [...] the country's biggest frozen-meat storage and distribution center was destroyed. [...]

Farm herds were decimated. [...] Ninety percent of the country's poultry production was destroyed. [...]

Grain silos across the entire country were hit methodically, and hundreds of farms and farm buildings were attacked. [...]

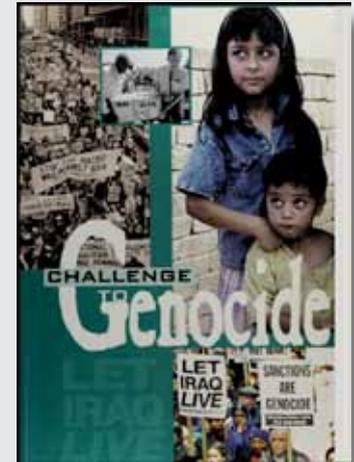
In June 1992, more than a year after Iraq was driven from Kuwait and with sanctions still in place, the United States burned grain and wheat fields with incendiary bombs near Mosul in northern Iraq.

U.S. bombing hit twenty-eight civilian hospitals and fifty-two community health centers. Zubair Hospital in Basra province totally collapsed from bombing. At the Ins Rashid Mental Hospital, southeast of Baghdad, ceilings collapsed onto patients' beds. At Ulwiyya Maternity Hospital, shrapnel and broken glass hit babies and mothers. [...]

Allied bombs damaged 676 schools; thirty-eight were totally destroyed. Eight of those hit were parts of universities. Nor were mosques, other religious buildings, or historic sites immune from U.S. attacks [...].

Bombers hit civilian government office buildings in Baghdad [...].

Many manufacturing plants were hit. Seven textile factories sustained damage, as did five engineering plants, three construction facilities, four cars assembly plants, three chlorine plants, a major ammonia export facility, and sixteen chemi-



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cal, petrochemical, and phosphate plants. A major hydrodermic syringe facility in Hilla was destroyed by laser-guided rockets. [...]

Iraq's Oil industry was a priority target. [...] Rail stations and yards, transportation hubs, bus stations, and car lots were systematically attacked everywhere.

As the infrastructure and life-support systems were being bombed, Iraqi civilians were killed by the thousands. Attacks on life-support systems assured that many more thousands would perish, even though they might be far from the line of fire. [...]

The Pentagon claimed 1 500 tanks were destroyed by F-111s alone, confirmed by video camera. Nearly all these planes employed laser-guided depleted-uranium missiles, leaving 900 tons of radioactive waste [...]. The rate of tumors, cancers, leukemia, and other fatal growths has increased alarmingly in the last few years in Iraq. [...]

At the end of the bombing campaign, tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers were simply murdered. The European Parliament heard this description in April 1991:

Hundreds, possibly thousands of Iraqi soldiers began walking towards the U.S. position unarmed, with their arms raised in an attempt to surrender. However, the orders for this unit were not to take any prisoners. [...] The commander of the unit began the firing [...]. Quite simply, it was a slaughter. [...]

With an arrogance to match its violence, the U.S. requested that the UN Security Council investigate war crimes committed by Iraq against U.S. soldiers and Kuwaiti citizens. [...]

There was no war. No combat. There was only a deliberate systematic genocide of a defenceless population while barely setting foot on Iraqi soil. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1967, «the greatest purveyor of violence on earth is my own government,» he could not have dreamed in his worst nightmare what the U.S. did to Iraq.

Source: Ramsey Clark et al. *Challenge to Genocide. Let Iraq live.* New York. International Action Center 1998. (p. 3-32)

# The Serbs take legal action against NATO

by Velimir Nedeljkovic

Let us first remember: after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expansion of NATO as a unipolar power to prove the necessity of its existence reached Kosovo on its way to Russia. The bombing of Yugoslavia, officially baptised the “Merciful Angel”, was not merciful at all. The NATO military operation against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war began on 24 March 1999 and ended on 10 June 1999. According to NATO, its pilots flew 38,000 missions in a 78-day operation, including 10,000 air strikes. According to military experts, about 3,000

cruise missiles were fired and 80,000 tons of various bombs were dropped, including cluster ammunition and depleted uranium missiles. Petrochemical plants and refineries were bombed, contaminating the country’s rivers and soil with toxic chemicals.

## NATO has dropped 10 to 15 tonnes of depleted uranium ...

Serbia estimates that between 3,500 and 4,000 people were killed and about 10,000 injured in the attacks, two-thirds of whom were civilians. The exact number of dead and wounded has never been determined. The damage to Serbia is estimated at 100

billion dollars. NATO planes dropped 10 to 15 tonnes of depleted uranium on Serbian territory. As a result, almost 5,500 cases of cancer per million inhabitants were registered.

## ... and Serbia has the most cancer deaths in Europe today

Serbia ranks first in Europe today in terms of the number cancer deaths. The long-term toxic effects manifest themselves in a veritable cancer epidemic of an ever-growing extent. The reality in Serbia regarding malignant diseases is terri-

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## “The 30 Years War in the Gulf”

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2003. The death trail, which started thirty years ago from the first post-Cold War conflict, continues to spread.

### The war figures

In the war, called the “Desert Storm,” the US and allied air forces carried out over 110,000 raids in 43 days, with 2,800 aircraft, dropping 250,000 bombs, including cluster bombs releasing over 10 million submunitions.

700-800 tons of depleted uranium shells were used by Air and Land Forces, including one million 30mm fired from airplanes and helicopters, and 14,000 120mm fired from tanks. Thousands of depleted uranium warheads were also used by cruise missiles and rockets.

The US forces are flanked by the British (36,000 men) and French (15,600); Saudi Arabia ranks 67,500, Egypt 35,600, Syria 20,800, the Emirates 14,000, Pakistan 10,000 (plus 2000 Afghan mujahideen), Canada 2,200, Bangladesh 2,000, Italy 1,300, Morocco 1,200, Australia 600, Spain 500, Holland and Belgium 400 each, Greece 200; Turkey, Denmark, Norway, Bulgaria, New Zealand, Sierra Leone, Argentina, Honduras, Senegal, Niger also participated with their military forces.

Since the Second World War onwards, an unprecedented deployment was made up of forces from all continents.

Italy participated in the war with 12 Tornado fighter-bombers, which carried out 226 raids, dropping 566 bombs in missions decided and coordinated by the US command. The US base at Camp Darby supplied the air and land forces in the Gulf from Italy.

The United States, which supplied 70% of the 750,000 men in the coalition, engaged 75% of their tactical aircraft (1950

out of 2600) in the war; 42% of their most modern tanks (2500 out of 6000); 46% of their aircraft carriers (6 out of 13); 37% of their land numbers (280,000 out of 761,000); 46% percent of Marines (90,000 out of 195300).

The cost of the Gulf War in terms of military spending, destruction and eco-

nomical losses amounted to trillions of dollars. The U.S. military expenditure alone for the second war on Iraq is estimated by the Congressional Budget Office as about 2 trillion dollars.

Source: *Il manifesto* of 17 January 2021, translated into English by *Tlaxcala*



## Hunger und Not der Kinder im Irak

Prof. Dr. Dr. Siegwart-Horst Günther

In 2007, the Verlag Zeit-Fragen published the book by Siegwart-Horst Günther “Hunger und Not der Kinder im Irak” (*Hunger and hardship of children in Iraq*) (ISBN 978-3-909234-03-5). The book describes the consequences of the use of uranium weapons in the Iraq war and shows many pictures of this, especially of the children suffering from the consequences of the war in Iraq. On the cover of the book, Professor Günther looks into the camera with glasses and headgear.

**"The Serbs take legal action ..."**

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ble. According to statistics (2018), every year 33,000 people in Serbia have fallen ill, among them 360 children. That is one child a day. Every day a new child falls ill with cancer. Southern Serbia and Kosovo are particularly affected and the population continues to suffer from the consequences of the use of depleted uranium ammunition. This is the main reason for this initiative.

**On 20 January, a first Serbian lawsuit against NATO was filed**

On behalf of the victims of the 1999 depleted uranium bombings, a team of international lawyers under the command of the law firm *Aleksic* from Nis, Serbia, sues NATO. After enough evidence had been gathered, a first lawsuit was filed in Belgrade on 20 January 2021, with more to follow by the end of the month. Then, more lawsuits will follow before the courts in Vranje, Nis, Kragujevac and Novi Sad. It was high time for this.

The lawsuit is filed after 22 years, but since war crimes never become time-barred, it is never too late to prosecute those responsible for an environmental disaster, with the consequences of an epidemic of malignant diseases and deformities and a violation of all international conventions and laws that protect human beings.

So far, this has only been discussed at international conferences, two of which took place in Nis. This is the first time that NATO is prosecuted in Serbia for civilian victims, individuals, soldiers and police officers and members of the military reserve who died and fell ill in Kosovo and Metohija or southern Serbia in 1999. The lawsuit, which had previously been filed by the Serbian state, was withdrawn with the change of government.

**Justified claims for compensation**

The lawsuit is first to prove that the cases of illness and death of our people in Kosovo and Metohija are the cases causally related to depleted uranium, and also that they are identical to the case of the Italian soldiers who succeeded with their lawsuit. For each lawsuit of Serbian victims, compensation of at least 100,000 euros is expected. The compensation for the Italian soldiers was multiple times higher.

**Example Italy**

The Italian lawyer *Angelo Fiore Tartaglia*, who was approved as a lawyer in Nis at the end of last year, was able to prove before Italian courts the causal connection between depleted uranium and the ill soldiers who were in Kosovo as part of the peace mission, and on this basis he obtained compensation. Therefore, the experience of the lawyer Tartaglia, who successfully advocated the interests of the Italian soldiers and now has 181 court decisions that have already come into force in Europe, is valuable. More than 3,000 pages of documents, including judgments, expert opinions, documents from a special commission of the government of Italy, were submitted to the Supreme Court in Belgrade. Enough evidence has been gathered to ensure that the decision of the Serbian courts will be in favour of the victims.

After having received the claim on 20 January this year, the Supreme Court in Belgrade is expected to send an official notification through diplomatic channels to NATO headquarters in Brussels within six months. NATO must respond within 30 days. The NATO press office is aware of this Serbian activity but has made no comment, except for the Secretary General's statement, who said: "Science is on our side."

**The actual state of scientific research**

But the science is clear: depleted uranium nanoparticles released by the explosion of depleted uranium ammunition are harmful to the environment and human health. Our planet is struggling for life. From the air we breathe, to the water we drink, to the land we grow our food on, our environment has many impacts on our health. It is time to recognise that the right to a healthy natural environment is essential for our survival. Only by living in harmony with nature can we prevent future disasters. As long as our society continues on its present path, we are doomed to sink deeper and deeper into destruction. We need a human right to live on a healthy planet.

**"The court is there to fight alongside the people"**

This is a matter of urgency! We expect the legal process to be a great support to us in this difficult time. We believe that with



(Picture ma)

Prof. Dr. Velimir Nedeljkovic (born 6 May 1942) from Nis, Serbia, worked for 35 years as a professor at the Faculty of Occupational Safety at the University of Nis. He specialised in the field of occupational safety at the *Institut national de recherche et de sécurité*, INRS, during a one-year professional training in Paris in 1969. He is the author of several scientific papers and professional projects, including "Ventilation of mines with underground transport in case of fire conditions" and "Industrial ventilation". He is co-author of the "Encyclopedia of Industrial Safety". He was co-initiator of the first international symposium, which took place in Nis in 2018, on "Consequences of depleted uranium bombing in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during NATO aggression in 1999".

the help of the Italian experience and the evidence presented in the cases in which the Italian lawyer was involved, as well as other evidence presented before the courts in Serbia, we will prove the causal link between malignant diseases and depleted uranium. Many of us are losing faith in the institutions and democracy and decide to give up because they think that nothing will be done. This scares me a lot, because I don't want to live in a world where no one cares about the suffering of others, where no one cares that we are victims of injustice.

The court is there to fight alongside people like me and you who, from tomorrow, may be victims of certain injustices, sometimes tragic ones. The world needs a great bond of solidarity with every victim. There is still no broader support for the lawsuit in Serbia, and the first sceptics have emerged, with the question of which legal system will force NATO to pay compensation. You may already know this, above all it is important, let me repeat: The court should be free and independent of the influence of the powerful.●

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# It is also important to separate the wheat from the chaff

## The COVID-19 pandemic, the social and other questions

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

*The Corona pandemic has also put the social question back on the agenda. Recent studies such as Oxfam's ("The Inequality Virus. How the Corona pandemic exacerbates social inequality and why we need to make our economy fairer"<sup>1</sup>) or recent statements such as that of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Olivier de Schutter ("The EU must reinvent itself to win the fight against poverty"<sup>2</sup>) are just two examples of many that have raised the issue.*

The term "social question" was originally understood to refer to the many social grievances during the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The term was coined in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and addressed the extremely harsh working conditions and inadequate workers' safety in the newly established industrial enterprises, the very low wages of the newly forming factory workforce, widespread child labour, inadequate schooling, malnutrition and early infirmity, the demise of small commercial enterprises, housing shortages in rapidly growing cities, increasing crime and so on and so forth. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially its second half, was also rich in proposed solutions, ranging from offers by factory owners (for example, building factory housing while at the same time warning workers from engaging in political activity) to social works and social teachings of the Christian churches as well as state regulations and social legislation (also with the aim of weakening social democracy) to the first trade union, socialist and communist movements (including class struggle slogans striving for power).

Since then, much has improved in the lives of workers and the workforce of industrialised countries in general. The term "welfare state" still stands for the many concrete regulations and efforts to approximate what is commonly called "social justice". What "social justice" entails, however, is controversial – views differ widely, depending on the world view and the idea of man. And the question of the aspects of the "social question" today, in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and what characteristics are at stake, leads to multi-faceted considerations that cannot all be mentioned here, but which urgently need to be talked about again – broadly and with all people.

Since the beginning of the Corona pandemic and the accompanying state meas-

ures to contain it, not only those directly affected have spoken out, but also renowned representatives of the economic elites have presented analyses and proposals on the modern social question.

For example, in mid-2020, after the "first wave" of the pandemic in Europe, the founder and current CEO of the *World Economic Forum* (WEF) *Klaus Schwab* and the economic consultant *Thierry Malleret* published a book "Covid-19: The Great Reset", in which they also go into detail about what they believe constitutes the social question today.

### Social upheaval and ...

In the book chapter "Social upheaval" there are formulations that so far would not have been expected from *Klaus Schwab*. Here are just a few samples: "One seriously misleading cliché about the coronavirus resides in the metaphor of COVID-19 as a "great leveller". The reality is quite the opposite. COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing conditions of inequality wherever and whenever it strikes. [...] This situation, of course, predates the pandemic but, as we observed for other global issues, the virus acted as an amplifier, forcing us to recognize and acknowledge the severity of the problems relating to inequality, formerly brushed aside by too many for too long. [...] The second effect of the pandemic and the state of lockdown that ensued was to expose the profound disconnect between the essential nature and innate value of a job done and the economic recompense it commands. Put another way: we value least economically the individuals society needs the most. The sobering truth is that the heroes of the immediate COVID-19 crisis, those who (at personal risk) took care of the sick and kept the economy ticking, are among the worst paid professionals – the nurses, the cleaners, the delivery drivers, the workers in food factories, care homes and warehouses, among others. It is often their contribution to economic and societal welfare that is the least recognised. And: "Moreover, a highly accommodative global monetary policy will widen wealth inequality by driving up asset prices, especially in financial markets and real estate."

### ... social unrest

*Schwab* and *Malleret* also paint a picture of the socio-political consequences of this development: "It could be that enough people are sufficiently outraged by the glaring injustice of the preferential treatment enjoyed exclusively by the rich

that it provokes a broad societal backlash. [...] One of the most profound dangers facing the post-pandemic era is social unrest. [...] Well before the pandemic engulfed the world, social unrest had been on the rise globally, so the risk is not new, but has been amplified by Covid-19." Because: "In the post-pandemic era, the numbers of unemployed, worried, miserable, restless, sick and hungry will have swelled dramatically."

### Youth – a source of the great change?

*Schwab* and *Malleret* also propose a few solutions. Above all, they call for a "new social contract", which, however, remains rather vague. They assign a special role to "youth". The chapter on "The social contract" ends with the following words: "The young generation is firmly at the vanguard of social change. There is little doubt that it will be the catalyst for change and a source of critical momentum for the Great Reset." And what are supposed to be the burning issues of the "youth"? "climate change, economic reforms, gender equality and LGBTQ rights."

*The question remains: How is it to be understood when precisely those who have contributed quite significantly to the social imbalance in the world today now claim that they want to solve the problems? And what can we really make of the proposed solutions, which sound very much like the zeitgeist?*

Around this year's digital WEF meeting, a number of other voices have also spoken out that in many ways fit well with *Klaus Schwab* and *Thierry Malleret*.

### Timothy Garton Ash

On 19 January 2021, *Timothy Garton Ash*, one of the most renowned neoliberal thinkers, advisor to *Margret Thatcher*, founding member of the *European Council on Foreign Relations* and recipient of numerous established highest prizes and decorations, was permitted to present his thoughts for the "future of liberalism" on three newspaper pages in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung". He diagnoses a failure of liberalism since 1989 and suggests that in future liberals should also show themselves as "conservative-socialist liberals". To explain, he writes, among other things: "It is a commonplace that we see a dramatic growth in inequality in many developed societies. [...] To diminish the inequity of life chances, starting with that most basic chance to go on living, liberals must simultaneously tackle multiple in-

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**"It is also important ..."**

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equalities: most obviously those of wealth, healthcare, education and geography (Rust Belt versus the coasts of the US, north of England versus Greater Londonia), but also that between generations, and less visible inequalities of power and attention. To redress this multidimensional inequality will require us to support more radical measures than most liberals have been prepared to contemplate over the 30 years since 1989. [...] Measures that could contribute here include a negative income tax (as proposed long ago by *Milton Friedman*); a universal basic income [...], a universal taxpayer-funded minimum inheritance [...], and universal basic services such as healthcare, housing and social security."

**The gap between rich and poor ...**

On 23 January, the editorial of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" had the title "Corona, the Non-leveller". The diagnoses sounded like Schwab's and Malleret's, and the conclusion also sounded quite unusual for NZZ readers: "Learning from this crisis – and preparing better for the next one – means going beyond the day to finally recognise social inequality as a central political challenge of our time and to act accordingly. Those for whom morality is not impetus enough should be guided by reason – and they will come to the same conclusions: The pandemic and its consequences will not be over until they are over everywhere. And the next crisis will come less quickly and will be less far-reaching if the gap between rich and poor does not widen but narrows".

**... and capitalism as the solution?**

And on 27 January, the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" reported about the annual letter from *Blackrock's* CEO, *Larry Fink*, to the CEOs of large companies around the world. Blackrock manages and distributes around nine trillion US dollars worldwide, which is almost thirteen times the total Swiss value added, the Swiss gross domestic product of 2020. With all this money, Blackrock influences corporate and investment decisions – and very likely political decisions – around the world. In his letter to the CEOs of major companies, Larry Fink identified three major problems facing the world: "the pandemic that has enveloped the entire globe; secondly, inequality, which has grown again and is contributing to social polarisation; and thirdly, climate change, which is increasingly felt even in the western industrialised countries". Further down, the newspaper article on Larry Fink says: "His confidence in the future and his optimism are based on the trust that capitalism will prove to be the problem-solving authority that can

"The question of the essence of the social question must dig deeper. This is the question of a well-founded image of man and its consequences for the active shaping of the conditions of life and the becoming and acting of every mortal. [...] So, it's about more than – moreover, questionable – retouching. A fundamental discussion would be desirable – especially for the post-pandemic era and afterwards: How do we want to live together? The search for humane answers to this question and concrete progress cannot be abandoned to the 'elites', it is a profoundly democratic task."

bring these threatening developments back on a sustainable track".

**"To set a fox to keep the geese"?**

It is very likely that one is making things too easy for oneself if one only thinks of the phrase: "To set a fox to keep the geese"? Maybe some corporate leaders really do have a kind of "bad conscience" about the consequences of an economic and financial system that they themselves helped to shape for decades. Maybe some corporate leaders really do fear counter-productive social unrest if they continue as before. Or maybe it is just about new investment, turnover and profit expectations adapted to the "zeitgeist".

Even more important is the following question: Can the state of the analysis and the proposed solutions to the problems mentioned be convincing at all? Question marks are appropriate! For example: In the 19th century, capitalism did not solve its own problems. Nor in the 20th century. Gradual concessions were usually only made after long, often fierce and sometimes sacrificial struggles. This shows the history of the labour movement. Switzerland's direct democracy has helped to mitigate these struggles and seek solutions in a civilised manner. Every European country has its own history. Not to mention the other continents.

And what do we do with the logical contradictions when, for example, on the one hand everything is to be mobilised to bring new technologies into use that further pave the way to the 20:80 society, and on the other hand their consequences are lamented? In their book "Die Globalisierungsfalle. Der Angriff auf Demokratie und Wohlstand" (The Globalisation Trap. The attack on Democracy and Prosperity), published already 25 years ago, in 1996, *Hans-Peter Martin* and *Harald Schumann* had reported on a meeting of leading business representatives and world-renowned retired politicians in a posh US hotel at the end of

September 1995. There, the business representatives made short statements explaining that with the widespread use of modern technologies, only 20 per cent of workers will be needed for skilled jobs in the future, while 80 per cent of the current workers will be practically superfluous. They could be offered low-paid jobs, but above all, *Zbigniew Brzezinski* suggested at the time, "tittytainment", a modern kind of Roman "bread and circuses". Today, one would probably speak of unconditional basic income and "social media".

**Do not abandon the questions to the "elites"**

Even more: the question of the essence of the social question must dig deeper. This is the question of a well-founded image of man and its consequences for the active shaping of the conditions of life and the becoming and acting of every mortal. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as of 1948 formulated the basis with its Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". What does this mean for human coexistence, for the fundamental right to the free development of the personality in a social context and for the demands on economic order, profession and economic life that do justice to human nature? So, it's about more than – moreover, questionable – retouching. A fundamental discussion would be desirable – especially for the post-pandemic era and afterwards: How do we want to live together? The search for humane answers to this question and concrete progress cannot be abandoned to the "elites", it is a profoundly democratic task. •

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.oxfam.de/system/files/documents/oxfam\\_factsheet\\_ungleichheitsvirus\\_deutsch.pdf](https://www.oxfam.de/system/files/documents/oxfam_factsheet_ungleichheitsvirus_deutsch.pdf) of 25 January 2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID%3D13073%26LangID%3DE> of 29 January 2021

Federal referendum of 7 March 2021

## Agreements with other countries must benefit all parties

### No to the free trade agreement with Indonesia

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

On 7 March 2021, we Swiss will vote on an “Economic Partnership Agreement” with Indonesia. The CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) is intended to newly regulate trade in goods between the EFTA states (Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland) and Indonesia and replace previous agreements. It was signed by the contracting parties in December 2018, and the National Council and Council of States approved it on 20 December 2019.

The CEPA is a free trade agreement, which means that trade in goods is to be largely exempted from mutual customs duties. However, for the import of palm oil, which is controversial in Switzerland, the tariff is not to be abolished, but only reduced. In addition, a sustainability clause has been added to the text of the agreement – for the first time in a Swiss trade agreement – which Swiss importers must prove they are complying with.

Sounds good – nevertheless, the farmers’ trade union Uniterre and the well-known Geneva organic winegrower Willy Cretegnny, together with around 50 other environmental and farmers’ associations and political parties, submitted a referendum against the agreement on 22 June 2020 with more than 61,000 valid signatures. Why?

#### Main criticism:

##### Sustainability only on paper

According to Article 8.10 of the Agreement, the Parties commit themselves to:

- effectively apply laws, policies and practices aiming at protecting primary forests, peatlands, and related ecosystems, halting deforestation, peat drainage and fire clearing in land preparation, reducing air and water pollution, and respecting rights of local and indigenous communities and workers;
- support the dissemination and use of sustainability standards, practices and guidelines for sustainably produced vegetable oils; [...]
- ensure that vegetable oils and their derivatives traded between the Parties are produced in accordance with the sustainability objectives referred to in subparagraph (a).<sup>2</sup>

The control of compliance with these provisions is regulated in Article 8.13:

“The Parties shall periodically review, in the Joint Committee, progress achieved



After the clearing fire of the rainforest, with all its terrible consequences for people, animals and the primeval forest, a monoculture with oil palms is cultivated here in Indonesia. (Picture keystone)

in pursuing the objectives set out in this Chapter [...].”<sup>1</sup>

However, writing a report for the drawer every now and then is a weak instrument. The committee therefore denounces the lack of effective control: “The free trade agreement with Indonesia provides for the inclusion of sustainability provisions in environmental and trade standards. But the promise is hardly to be implemented, because effective control and sanction possibilities are missing.” Already today, there are almost 17 million hectares of palm oil crops in Indonesia – that is about 10 per cent of Indonesia’s surface area! – and more rainforest is constantly being cut down or burned. The Indonesian government is “not a reliable partner”, the committee continues: “The rule of law, sustainability and social standards are disregarded, small farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities are displaced. Inhumane working conditions, including child labour, and the use of highly toxic pesticides are widespread.” (Voting booklet, p. 50)

The movement “Stop Palm Oil!” adds why the sustainability commitment in the agreement would have little effect: “The RSPO guidelines (*Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil*) are insufficient and further fuel the destruction of peat bogs and species-rich rainforests. [...] And above all: the palm oil industry is to control itself,

because compliance is controlled by the private organisation RSPO, which is dominated by palm oil producers.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Swiss food multinationals involved in the destruction of tropical forests

In its statement of 2 March 2020, Uniterre also points out that major Swiss corporations are at least aware of the overexploitation of nature: “Leading corporations such as *Unilever*, *Mondelez*, *Nestlé* and *Procter & Gamble (P&G)*, as well as palm oil traders such as *Wilmar*, buy palm oil from producers linked to numerous fires in Indonesia, as an investigation by *Greenpeace International* in November 2019 shows.”<sup>3</sup> The Nestlé Group does state in detail on its homepage that the company is making great efforts to only source palm oil from responsible and certified deforestation-free production.<sup>4</sup> According to SECO, however, the above-mentioned and many other large Swiss companies have branches in Indonesia,<sup>5</sup> which means that their managers are on the spot and can hardly overlook the forest fires.

However, the profits of Nestlé and other multinationals are hardly affected – neither with nor without a free trade agreement; they probably import little palm oil into Switzerland because their processing plants are located all over the world.

# “Free trade is harmful to our planet”

Interview with Willy Cretegny



Willy Cretegny  
(Picture ma)

*The Swiss will vote on the trade agreement with Indonesia on 7 March 2021. The treaty is too lax on sustainability, says Willy Cretegny, the originator of the referendum. He questions the principle of free trade in general. For the*

*organic winegrower from the canton of Geneva, it is all about the big picture: the principle of free trade must be questioned, he says in an interview.*

*swissinfo.ch: Mr Cretegny, what bothers you about the principle of free trade?*

Willy Cretegny: It aims to reduce or abolish all tariff and non-tariff measures, although these are very important for fair trade and to avoid distortions of competition. Taxes equalise prices from one economy to another and have a strong impact on our consumption. Free trade gives us access to many goods at prices that have nothing to do with our purchasing power. So we consume more and more. The distortion of competition makes whole sectors disappear.

Let's take Ikea as an example. The corporation produces a large part of its cheap furniture in Asia, imports it practically tax-free to Europe and Switzerland and sells it there at low prices. This destroys domestic suppliers. The workers are paid according to the collective agreement, but their wages require state support for housing and health insurance. Finally, the family that owns the company is one of the richest in Switzerland. By abolishing customs measures, free trade has become an instrument for tax exemption.

*What do you propose instead?*

I advocate a win-win agreement that benefits everyone. Basically, I want the importance of tariff and non-tariff measures to be recognised. There needs to be protectionism. For me, it is a policy of openness because it is based on respect for the choices of each people.

In contrast to this is the principle of free trade, as propagated by the World Trade Organization (WTO), for example. All it cares about is that trade and profit grow steadily. Today, we are levelling, standardising and developing a system that is extremely harmful to our planet. Switzerland should set a good example.

Of course, we cannot change our practices overnight, as we are already involved in many contracts. But we need to give our negotiators a different mandate so that such contracts take into account these social and environmental issues and aim to enforce local standards.

*You think that the agreement is too lax with regard to sustainability. Why?*

The treaty provides for arbitration in the event of a dispute, but the article on sustainability is excluded from this. This means that the parties do not consider the issue important enough. Thus, the treaty sets requirements for sustainability, but offers hardly any guarantees or sanctions.

*You also say that there is no such thing as sustainable palm oil at all. What do you mean by that?*

Indonesia has cleared a lot of rainforest in recent years to promote the export of this product. Even if palm oil is certified organic, this is at the expense of nature. Moreover, the palm oil is transported halfway around the globe – that is anything but sustainable. Last but not least, we can meet our demand with domestic vegetable oils, for example from rapeseed and sunflowers, and with olive oil from Europe.

*Isn't the article on sustainability a first step towards a more environmentally friendly trade?*

Indonesia should produce more sustainably, but not export huge amounts of palm oil all over the world. When it comes to sustainability, you have to look at the big picture. Global food production today covers almost all its oil needs with palm oil. This is purely for financial reasons, as it costs almost nothing compared to alternatives. This is the main problem with free trade: it does not manage the resources, but only the wallet.

*The agreement with Indonesia also allows Swiss companies to export their products. Don't you want to support the Swiss economy?*

I do not support an economy that destroys. Free trade puts all states in competition with each other, so it is a race for advantages. When trade barriers exist, products and services are chosen on the basis of their quality, not just their price.

But I fully understand that the export industry and domestic production are struggling because they are under pressure from world market prices. That is not sustainable either.

I defend the economy, but only one that has margins and demands guarantees from companies for environmental protection and jobs. But today we are far from that. Local businesses are struggling, while big corporations are taking over everything. We are increasingly losing control.

*Many environmental organisations like Public Eye or Greenpeace do not support you. How do you explain that?*

As far as I know, they do not support the approach for purely political reasons. The WWF, for example, is a partner of certification bodies and also has local branches in the region. So there are dependencies there. Unfortunately, the associations are content with an agreement that cannot guarantee sustainability. They have not understood that the principle of free trade and its policy of destruction must be fundamentally questioned.

Source: *swissinfo.ch* of 26 January 2021. The interview was conducted by *Monika Vuilleumier*; <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/abstimmung-7--maerz--der-freihandel-ist-schaedlich-fuer-unseren-planeten-146315774>

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**"Agreements with other countries ..."**

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**No harm for rapeseed farmers?  
Strange naive fallacy  
of the Federal Council**

According to the Federal Council, "no negative effects [...] are to be expected on local rapeseed and sunflower oil production". Because: "The tariffs will not be lifted, but only reduced, and this by around 20 to 40 per cent. These tariff rebates are granted for a maximum of 12,500 tonnes per year". (Voting booklet, p. 47) This euphemistic formulation misses the reality in two respects:

- Enormously high maximum quantity: So far, Switzerland has imported only very minimal quantities of palm oil from Indonesia, namely an average of 2.5 % of a total of around 32,000 tonnes over the last eight years, and only around 0.1 % in 2019 (Voting booklet, p. 48). That is 35 tonnes – very little indeed. But with the free trade agreement, Swiss importers would be allowed to import up to 12,500 tonnes with the lower tariffs. From 35 to 12,500 tonnes – a real leap upwards! This would allow the Swiss agro-industry to obtain up to 40 % of the total palm oil imported today from Indonesia at more favourable prices. And the total imports are not supposed to increase? This forecast is confirmed by the fact that Switzerland's palm oil imports from Indonesia have fallen sharply since 2013 (from Malaysia somewhat less), while those from Myanmar or the Solomon Islands have risen, "thanks in particular to the duty-free access granted by Switzerland as part of its development cooperation policy".<sup>6</sup> Well, if it's part of Switzerland's development aid, then it's something else – provided that the proceeds really end up in the pockets of the small farmers of these states ...
- Large price difference between Swiss oils and Indonesian palm oil to be feared: Let's leave the floor to Uniterre: "The 12,500 tonnes of palm oil quotas are in direct and unfair competition with local oilseed production. A price comparison: Fr. 2.64/kg for rapeseed oil after processing, sunflower oil Fr. 2.59/kg face [today for palm oil] Fr. 2.51/kg (incl. customs duties). A 35 % reduction in customs duty, as stipulated in the free trade agreement with Indonesia, means a 40 centimes reduction in price. *Rudi Berli*, vegetable farmer and spokesman of the referendum committee, criticises: "The reduced tariff on palm oil imports increases the demand even more. Here, the aim of procuring agricultural raw materials as unhindered as possible and at the cheapest

price is being implemented. With fatal consequences for people and the environment – solely for the benefit of the agro-industry".<sup>7</sup>

**Swiss Farmers' Union: Yes to the agreement – but not out of conviction**

Quite strange is the reason given by the board of the *Swiss Farmers' Union* SBV why it decided (practically unanimously) to vote in favour of the free trade agreement with Indonesia: The SBV had demanded a sustainability clause and a protection mechanism for the local oilseed production from the Parliament. "Both had been included in the agreement thanks to manifold political pressure, so the SBV could hardly say no now". (*Schweizer Bauer*/Swiss farmer, 16 January 2021). Accordingly, the parliament of the SBV, the Chamber of Agriculture, voted yes by a majority in a (pandemic-related) written ballot, without the usual previous discussion.<sup>8</sup>

For the voter, it is certainly of interest how this yes vote came about – "Päckli politics" (packet policy) is what we call it in Switzerland.

**The Swiss export industry does not  
only consist of large corporations ...**

The referendum committee must be contradicted on one point: It is true that in international trade, and especially in the palm oil business, many large corporations are making huge profits, but Swiss export companies also include numerous small and medium-sized enterprises (in total, more than 99 per cent of Swiss enterprises are small and medium-sized). The Swiss export industry is an important mainstay for the small landlocked country of Switzerland, which is dependent on imports of almost all raw materials. Just as a well-positioned agricultural sector is indispensable for the security of supply, the export businesses in trade and industry also need our support – at least the smaller ones. The big ones already look after their own interests.

In this sense, the President of the *Swiss Confederation of Commerce* (sgv), National Councillor *Fabio Regazzi* (political party The Centre – formerly CVP-Ticino) points out that many small and medium-sized enterprises would also benefit from the advantages of easier market access in Indonesia: "Almost a quarter of the Swiss exports to Indonesia would be due to mechanical parts. These are industries in which the smaller and medium-sized enterprises are disproportionately active. For him, as President of the Swiss Confederation of Commerce (sgv), it is therefore hardly surprising that the Chamber of Commerce, the parliament of the sgv, has unanimously supported this agreement."<sup>9</sup>

This position of the trade association is understandable. Nevertheless, the customs duties for export companies that would be eliminated with the agreement would not be as enormous as one might think if one listens to the exponents of the trade associations.

**... but today's tariffs are not that high**

The business association *economiesuisse* is campaigning for the abolition of the "relatively high" tariffs: "This free trade agreement gives Swiss export companies and SMEs an important competitive advantage over competitors from other countries, such as the EU. For example, thanks to the agreement, 98 per cent of the existing tariffs for Swiss exporters in Indonesia will be completely eliminated in the medium term. These are currently relatively high and average eight per cent for industrial goods. Swiss companies can thus save more than 25 million Swiss francs per year in the future."<sup>10</sup>

(Parenthetical note: Here, *Jan Atte-slander*, head of foreign trade at *economiesuisse*, is suddenly pleased that Switzerland is not completely in the EU's internal market after all – perhaps the framework agreement with Brussels, when it becomes concrete, will not be so great for our economy after all? For example, with closer integration, Switzerland could no longer freely decide on trade agreements with other states.)

According to *economiesuisse* figures, the "relatively high" tariffs applied so far turn out to be rather moderate,<sup>11</sup> namely around 5 % for SME products in the machinery sector and only 4–5 % for chemical and pharmaceutical products. A relatively low 5–10 % is also added to watches. For clothes and shoes, however, Indonesian import duties are quite high – and rightly so, because in this sector the local companies produce themselves and want to sell and export their own products. Only well-heeled Indonesians can buy Swiss cookies and chocolate, so the duties can be a little higher (15–20 %), and we can't blame the government in coffee country Indonesia for adding 11 % to coffee from Switzerland – by the way, *Nespresso* capsules are expensive in their original form in Switzerland, too.

Swiss companies have been able to absorb these moderate tariffs (a total of 25 million Swiss francs per year, including large corporations) until now, and they will continue to be able to do so in the future. Switzerland has always been a cosmopolitan business centre, and our entrepreneurs are used to having to cope with competition from cheaper products from abroad. That's why most are extremely flexible and innovative and make up for higher prices with top quality.

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**"Agreements with other countries ..."**

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**Trade agreements must ensure the protection of self-sufficiency**

Trade agreements with other countries are not bad per se. But as Willy Cretegnny – who initiated the referendum – says, they should be win-win agreements. That's why they should not throw all protective provisions (tariffs and quotas) overboard: "There needs to be protectionism. For me, it's a policy of openness because it's based on respect for the choices of each people." (see interview with Willy Cretegnny on page 10 in this newspaper).

To add: Good protective regulations are indispensable, especially for agriculture, if we want to rely on the highest possible level of self-sufficiency. In Switzerland, the people approved the anchoring of food security in the constitution on 24 September 2017, with 78.7% and all the cantons voting in favour: According to FC Article 104a, the Confederation must create the conditions for "ensuring the supply of food to the population".

Because the cost of living in Switzerland (also for farming families) is very high compared to the international market prices for agricultural products, we should not conclude free trade agreements that include agriculture. This is why the 1972 Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EU was concluded with the exclusion of agricultural products and has worked perfectly well until today. But beware: If we were to approve the

framework agreement with Brussels, we would also be giving the green light for the "modernisation" of the FTA, which means, among other things, that we would have to open the gates to the cheap mass-produced products of the agro-food industry in the EU.

**FTA with Indonesia does nothing to support small farmers there**

The Indonesian population (260 million inhabitants!) and the small farmers there are also not helped by the planned free trade agreement: They do not need palm oil monocultures, but – as the World Agricultural Report demands – local production to feed their families and the rest of the population. It cannot be that Indonesia has to import rice! Thus we read at Uniterre: "Before trade liberalisation, Indonesia exported rice, and today the country is forced to import around 2 million tons." That is why the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI) calls on the government there to "transform Indonesia's agricultural model into agroecological agriculture and give priority to food sovereignty."<sup>12</sup> With an agreement that cuts down the rainforest in order to increase monocultures for the benefit of big corporate agribusiness, we are not contributing to this. •

<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the EFTA States. Concluded in Jakarta on 16 December 2018. (<https://www.efta.int/sites/default/files/documents/legal-texts/free-trade-relations/indonesia/fta-indonesia-main-agreement.pdf>)

- <sup>2</sup> "Stop Palmöl! Nein zum Freihandelsabkommen mit Indonesien." (Stop palm oil! No to the free trade agreement with Indonesia.)
- <sup>3</sup> Uniterre. *Referendum against the free trade agreement with Indonesia*. Statement of 2 March 2020. Greenpeace study: Burning down the House: How Unilever and other global brands continue to fuel Indonesia's fires. <https://www.greenpeace.org/malaysia/publication/2620/burning-down-the-house-how-unilever-and-other-global-brands-continue-to-fuel-indonesias-fires/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.nestle.com/csv/raw-materials/palm-oil>
- <sup>5</sup> Staatssekretariat für Wirtschaft SECO. "Indonesien" vom Juni 2019 (statistisches Update Juni 2020) (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO. "Indonesia" as of June 2019 (statistical update June 2020))
- <sup>6</sup> Agriculture Report 2020 of the Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG. <https://www.agrarbericht.ch/de/international/statistiken-und-modellierung/ agrarstatistiken-einiger-handelspartner>
- <sup>7</sup> Uniterre. *Referendum gegen das Freihandelsabkommen mit Indonesien*. (Referendum against the Free Trade Agreement with Indonesia) Statement of 2 March 2020
- <sup>8</sup> "Bauernverband unterstützt Abkommen mit Indonesien" (Farmers' Union supports agreement with Indonesia). *Media release of the Swiss Farmers' Union* of 25 January 2021
- <sup>9</sup> Ein Pionierabkommen für nachhaltigen und fairen Handel. (A pioneering agreement for sustainable and fair trade). *Media release of the sgv* of 12 January 2021
- <sup>10</sup> Atteslander, Jan; Ramò, Mario. Ja zum Freihandelsabkommen Efta-Indonesien: Vorsprung für Schweizer Exportnation. (Yes, to the Efta-Indonesia free trade agreement: Head start for Swiss export nation.) *Economiesuisse*, 3 December 2020, p. 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Atteslander, Jan; Ramò, Mario. Ja zum Freihandelsabkommen Efta-Indonesien: Vorsprung für Schweizer Exportnation. (Yes to the EFTA-Indonesia free trade agreement: Head start for Swiss export nation.) *Economiesuisse*, 3 December 2020, p. 8.
- <sup>12</sup> Uniterre. *Referendum against the free trade agreement with Indonesia*. Statement of 2 March 2020.

Letter to  the Editor**The Framework Agreement is threatening Swiss institutions and Swiss sovereignty**

It took the new voices of *autonomiesuisse* and *Allianz Kompass/Europa*, fledgling organisations from business circles, to finally get things moving in the messed-up debate on the framework agreement. This is a refreshing development, which in this issue, which is so important for the future of Switzerland, is outpacing the sluggish political parties and business associations such as *economiesuisse*. The supportive voices of Council of States member *Thierry Burkart* as well as SBG President and National Council member *Pierre-Yves Maillard* are gratifying. This development seems to have opened a new chapter in our direct democracy giving hope for the political future and debate culture of Switzerland. Anyone who still re-

members the debate on the EEA knows that at that time the worrying (and) questionable restrictions placed on institutional achievements determined popular opinion against the EEA; this is no different today with the framework agreement. This is the only way to guarantee the continuation of the bilateral path, which was, incidentally, the logical consequence of the EEA's rejection, because the embrace of the framework agreement, which is also poorly drafted, would fatally restrict contractual freedom in the further development of the bilateral path. The further development of the bilateral route therefore does not require a framework agreement in the future, as it has in the past. It was important that former Federal Councillor *Schneider-Am-*

*mann* had the surprising courage to publicly address the sovereignty issue. One of the most important pillars of sovereignty of a sovereign state is undeniably its independent jurisdiction. This is to be sacrificed by the framework agreement with the dynamic adoption of law, coupled with the dominant role of the *European Court of Justice* (ECJ), which must be resolutely opposed. It would be a disgrace for the Swiss judiciary to know that the ECJ is looking over its shoulder and would have a right of veto. Not so!

*Hans-Jacob Heitz, Advocate & former judge at the Swiss Federal Administrative Court, Männedorf*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Switzerland during World War II

## Preserving humanity in difficult times

### On the Swiss television DOK programme “Die Buchenwaldkinder – The Buchenwald Children” treating the historical drama “Peace”

by Diana and Winfried Pogorzelski

The DOK programme “Die Buchenwaldkinder” (*The Buchenwald Children*) by Hansjörg Zumstein<sup>1</sup> on Swiss television SRF paints a distorted picture of Switzerland and its refugee policy during and after the Second World War. This does not correspond to reality, but gives the impression that the humanitarian commitment of the Swiss Confederation was insufficient and mainly based on political calculations, rather than on humanitarian grounds. The assertion of this documentary on the prestigious six-part SRF historical drama “Peace”<sup>2</sup> is based primarily on the report of the so-called “Unabhängige Expertenkommission Schweiz Zweiter Weltkrieg” (Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland Second World War). Under the leadership of the social and economic historian Jean-François Bergier, which levelled massive criticism at Switzerland’s conduct or policy during the Second World War. The humanitarian efforts made by Switzerland under the most difficult conditions are largely ignored. Moreover, research findings from the period after the Bergier Report<sup>3</sup> are ignored, so that a one-sided and false picture of Swiss refugee policy emerges.

#### Accusations against Switzerland

The various accusations voiced against Switzerland in the documentary can be summarised as follows: Petra Volpe, scriptwriter, director and supporting figure of the entire film project, not only spent nine years researching the material – which is of particular concern to her – but also wrote the script. She speaks of a deep anti-Semitism as being considered normal and, to a certain extent, going with the territory – at least in part of the Swiss population. With her film project, she pursues the goal of shaking up the traditional – in her eyes probably too positive – image of Swiss politics that still exists in her view: Her aim is that “we should not close our mind to ugly facts”, as we did then as we do now, and not only in relation to Switzerland.

The historian Madeleine Lerf criticises Switzerland’s humanitarian commitment as being motivated primarily by political considerations: according to her, Switzerland wanted to avoid being done down by UNRRA – the relief agency of the victorious powers – if the latter were to be the only agency to provide aid to children and young people from concentration camps.

The historian Tiphaine Robert, a member of the Swiss Historical Society, speaks of an “extremely restrictive” Swiss refugee policy, especially towards Jews. Not only did the Federal Council accept the “J-stamp” in the passports of refugees, but it introduced the slogan “The boat is full” as an excuse to order civilian refugees to be turned back at the border, i.e. those fugitives who were not seeking protection for political reasons but because they were being persecuted for racist reasons. Yet it was known that they would surely be killed on their return.

A former member of the Bergier Commission, the French historian Marc Perrenoud, also had his say. On the one hand, he claimed, Switzerland had shown the humanitarian gesture of accepting refugees from the concentration camps, but on the other hand, this gesture had been impaired by political considerations. For example, the willingness to take in refugees declined just when the systematic extermination of the Jews began in 1942. The small group of the rescued stood in sharp contrast to the multitudes of those murdered. Perrenoud conceded that all the democratic states were of the same opinion, namely that there was no place for them, especially since the *Evian Conference* in 1938. The Federal Council delegate for refugee aid had suggested taking in refugees to improve Switzerland’s “international image”; but in addition, it would have to be arranged that they were “got rid of” again, so here too, we see the accusation of political calculation.

#### Extreme conditions, responsible tasks

The director of the *Swiss Red Cross*, Markus Mader, is the only expert in the documentary to point out the dilemma in which the country found itself all along. The refugees could not be treated better than the country’s own population, which had too little to eat. He is alluding to a scene in the feature film in which the Buchenwald children on the Zugerberg ask for more food and for toothpaste. The Swiss population of the war years – es-



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pecially in central Switzerland – was also very poor, suffered from hunger, had neither enough clothes nor soap, says Markus Mader. So, in each case one had to see what was feasible in the specific situation.

The situation and the task were extraordinary: it was about nothing less than taking in and looking after Jewish youths who had survived the ordeal of the concentration camps – a Herculean task. It was a matter of course that not everything went smoothly, as Charlotte Weber, the person mainly responsible for the young people on the Zugerberg, explains: For example, for financial reasons the Red Cross had not planned to educate the arrivals. By means of letters of request, the counsellors organised school materials themselves and found apprenticeships for their charges at the end of their stay. According to Charlotte Weber, it was a great challenge of an unprecedented kind to look after traumatised young people who had escaped death and to return them to normal life after the horror they had undergone.

#### Concealed facts paint a different picture

Basically, it should be noted that the majority of the Swiss population felt a deep

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**"Preserving humanity in difficult times"**

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loathing for the Nazi regime and its majority was not anti-Semitic, either.<sup>4</sup> This is also proven by the fact that General Guisan, who prepared the military and the population for resistance in the event of an occupation, enjoyed great sympathy, even veneration, among the population. Already after 1933 and before the beginning of the war, tens of thousands of refugees arrived in Switzerland, the exact number of which is not known, since visas were not yet compulsory.<sup>5</sup> Many Swiss also opposed entry restrictions for refugees. Accordingly, until 1938, the Swiss never thought of "refusing entry to any person from the neighbouring country; restrictions were only imposed on the right to take up permanent residence in Switzerland. [...] We know that in 1933 about 10,000 German Jews were registered [...] It is estimated that from 1935 to 1939 there were always about 12,000 Jewish refugees in the country. It seems that between a tenth and a sixth of the Jews fleeing Germany used Switzerland as a transit country."<sup>6</sup> From 1938 onwards, the flow of Jewish refugees swelled and the Swiss authorities were convinced that, in their small country, they would not be able to cope with this influx of refugees.<sup>7</sup> At the Evian conference on refugees – Great Britain, France and the USA were among the participants –, Switzerland therefore offered to serve as a point of departure for the exodus. However, the countries represented at the conference – with the exception of the Dominican Republic – did not declare their willingness to accept any more Jewish refugees.

The question of the so-called "J-stamp", which was affixed to the passports of German Jewish immigrants, is always a topic of discussion – so also in the TV documentary. It should be pointed out once again that the initiative for this came from Germany and not from Switzerland<sup>8</sup> and, moreover, that the realisation of this procedure would have been superfluous "if the participants in the Evian Conference had really made an effort to properly work out programmes to organise the flow of refugees to neighbouring states such as Switzerland [...]".<sup>9</sup>

When the German government began deporting Jews living in France in 1942, the Swiss authorities attempted to close their western border, but earned heavy criticism, including that by the historian *Edgar Bonjour*, the theologian *Karl Barth* and many other personalities, as well as from church-based, liberal and socialist circles.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the Federal Council was prepared to be more flexible in its decisions to expel refugees, i.e. to allow them to enter the country in emergencies.

But since so many refugees continued to enter the country, the border authorities obviously did not take the Federal Council's decision too seriously.

The *Bermuda Conference* in 1943 – only the USA and Great Britain participated in the meeting in Hamilton (Bermuda) – was inconclusive with regard to the admission of Jewish refugees. Nor were the Allies prepared to bomb the railway lines to the concentration camps, which would have been easily possible and would have saved many lives.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, one can refer to *David Wymann's* statements that apart from Palestine, "Switzerland, measured by its surface area, was the state which, at the end of the war, had taken in the most Jews of all countries i.e., 21,304 Jewish refugees."<sup>12</sup> Proportionally to the total population, Switzerland took in five times more refugees than the USA.<sup>13</sup> It should further be added that Switzerland also did an extraordinary job in helping children: during the war it housed more than 60,000 French children and after the war until 1949 it took in more than 80,000 children from several European countries.<sup>14</sup>

The serious accusations against Switzerland are not tenable, although it should be noted that: "the Swiss government did not do everything it could have done to save the Jews; that is beyond question. But this in no way justifies the claim that the Swiss authorities, through their refugee policy, contributed to 'the National Socialists being able to achieve their goals'. It would be more accurate to state that throughout the war, Switzerland took advantage of its neutrality and granted refuge and security in Switzerland to some 27,000 Jewish refugees and a further 20,000 Jews with Swiss nationality or right of settlement."<sup>15</sup> Historian *Edgar Bonjour* expresses a similar view: "Switzerland, though under much greater foreign policy pressure from the Axis as well as domestic pressure caused by food shortages and unemployment, spent more than many another state in the same situation – even if it could very well have done more ...".<sup>16</sup>

### Prejudices confirmed, opportunity missed

Conclusion: The authors and participants of the series and of the accompanying documentary would have done well to research more comprehensively and to present the actual facts and processes in a correspondingly more differentiated manner than to rely solely on the reports of the Bergier Commission, whose work already dates back eighteen years, all the more so because the TV production will continue to find numerous viewers in the future e.g., also when used for teaching purposes.

es. It is regrettable that the opportunity was missed to supplement or correct the Bergier Commission's largely one-sided view. Once again, justice has not been done to the responsible agents, including the active service generation during the 1930s and 1940s – the question is, what were the reasons? •

- <sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.srf.ch/play/tv/dok/video/die-buchenwald-kinder---eine-schweizer-hilfsaktion?urn=urn:srf:video:2b4e3ccf-3ba1-4ad7-83da-261a39ea29fd>; cf. also "Die 'Buchenwaldkinder' auf dem Zugerberg. Wie die 'Schweizer Spende' traumatisierten Jugendlichen beistand" (The 'Buchenwald Children' on the Zugerberg, how the 'Swiss Donation' helped traumatised youths) by Winfried Pogorzelski, *Current Concerns* No. 22, 16 October 2020.
- <sup>2</sup> Daniel Fuchs. "Zu gross fürs Kino" (Too big for the cinema), in: *Aargauer Zeitung*, 7 November 2020, p. 4, cf. also Zachery Z.: TV series "Peace" – "Nur die Toten haben das Ende des Krieges gesehen" – Only the dead have seen the end of war), *Schweizer Fernsehen SRF*, <https://filmpuls.info/tv-serie-frieden/>
- <sup>3</sup> This is the 25-volume report of the so-called Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War, which, under the direction of the historian *Jean-François Bergier*, examined the situation and role of Switzerland during the Second World War from 1998 to 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> cf. Jürg Stüssi-Lauterburg, Hans Luginbühl. *Freier Fels in brauner Brandung. Die Schweiz in den schwersten Jahren des Bundesstaates 1940 bis 1942* (Tower of freedom in a brown surf. Switzerland during the most difficult years of the federal state 1940 to 1942), Zollikofen und Baden 2009, p. 143.
- <sup>5</sup> cf. Ernst Leisi in accordance with Luzi Stamm. *Der Kniefall der Schweiz* (The Swiss genuflection", Zofingen 1998, p. 110
- <sup>6</sup> Angelo M. Codevilla. *Eidgenossenschaft in Bedrängnis. Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg und moralischer Druck heute* (Confederation in difficulties. Switzerland in the Second World War and moral pressure today). Schaffhausen 2001, p. 115 f
- <sup>7</sup> Herbert R. Reginbogin. *Der Vergleich. Die Politik der Schweiz zur Zeit des Zweiten Weltkriegs im internationalen Umfeld* (The settlement. Swiss politics at the time of the Second World War in an international context). Stäfa 2006, p. 114
- <sup>8</sup> cf. Jacques Picard, member of the Bergier Commission, in: Stamm, p. 96f
- <sup>9</sup> Walther Hofer, Herbert R. Reginbogin. *Hitler, der Westen und die Schweiz* (Hitler, the West and Switzerland), Zurich 2001, p. 464
- <sup>10</sup> Reginbogin, p. 114 f, Stüssi-Lauterburg, Luginbühl, p. 192
- <sup>11</sup> cf. Reginbogin, p. 119
- <sup>12</sup> cf. Reginbogin, p. 122, cf. Codevilla, p. 37
- <sup>13</sup> Codevilla, p. 37
- <sup>14</sup> Cornelio Sommaruga in the preface to: Serge Nessi. *Die Kinderhilfe des schweizerischen Roten Kreuzes 1942–1945 und die Rolle des Arztes Hugo Oltramare* (The Swiss Red Cross Children's Aid 1942–1945 and the role of Doctor Hugo Oltramare), Vienna 2013, p. 9, cf. also Joseph Mächler. *Wie sich die Schweiz rettete. Grundlagenbuch zur Geschichte der Schweiz* (How Switzerland saved itself, fundamentals of the History of Switzerland), Zollikofen, 2017, p. 269.
- <sup>15</sup> Reginbogin, p. 123
- <sup>16</sup> Edgar Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität* (History of the Swiss Neutrality), vol. VI, pp. 42, quoted in "Schweizerische Selbstbehauptung während des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Die militärischen, kriegswirtschaftlichen und humanitären Pfeiler schweizerischer Neutralitätspolitik in der Zeit schwerer Bedrohung" (Swiss self-assertion during the Second World War. The military, war-economic and humanitarian pillars of Swiss neutrality policy in a time of grave threat). *Schweizerzeit* series of publications No. 29, Flaach 1998, p. 225, cf. Stamm, pp. 108

# “Over, under, around and through, meet Mr Bunny Rabbit, pull and through”

## Overprotection is harmful – why children need challenges

by Dr Eliane Perret, psychologist and curative teacher

*Next to a classroom, in the wardrobe are the children's shoes. Nicely arranged, as is obviously required. I think it is interesting, that all the shoes have Velcro fasteners and they can be put on without opening a fastener. One single pair has laces, but even those seem more ornamental; at least they do not seem to open as the heel is squashed down. Aha, apparently it is uncommon to purchase shoes with laces, which are a bit more tedious to put on and require the child to learn the technique of tying shoes. I wonder why?*

In terms of his fine motor skills, a child is able to tie his own shoes at about four years of age. Many use a little children's rhyme for this: “Over, under, around and through, meet Mr Bunny Rabbit, pull and through.” If you are unfamiliar with this method, you should try it out, it works amazingly well!

### Is it all superfluous?

But are children supposed to learn such things at all? Isn't it all superfluous? Skills that can be learned in a given case with a *YouTube* tutorial? Presumably, these skills are not listed in the competencies of new curricula either? Well, to me it seems worthwhile to think about this, because the above observation is not an isolated case and is representative of many others. Many children today lack the basic skills they need to cope with life independently. Fortunately, in recent years this has increasingly been recognised as the consequence of an unfavourable educational/parenting trend.

### What does science have to say about this?

When it comes to the causes of such phenomena, we must look to the personal human sciences, specifically education and psychology. One of their research areas has long been concerned with the effect of different parenting styles on a child's personality development. Researchers distinguished between typological or dimensional concepts. Representatives of typological concepts were the German American psychologist *Kurt Lewin* and the American researcher *Diana Baumrind*; they distinguished between an authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting style. In the seventies of the last century, these concepts were criticised as inadequate because they would only include behaviours, but

not dimensions that could be captured in scales and their interactions. This approach was taken by the German psychologists *Annemarie* and *Robert Tausch* and distinguished between a steering dimension, which described control and authority, and an emotional dimension, which captured warmth, affection and appreciation. Thus, they added four further parenting styles to the previous categories and distinguished an autocratic, authoritarian, democratic, egalitarian, permissive, *laissez-faire* and a negating style; of course, these are never found in pure form.

### Children should have it better

And which style of education determines the educational environment today? Social developments and contemporary trends must be considered when asking such questions. In the first half of the last century, which was marked by world wars and economic uncertainty, the authoritarian educational principle prevailed in Europe. People were busy securing their livelihoods and rebuilding their lives. There was little room to consider educational issues and attempts were made to force the growing generation onto the right path with strictness, humiliation and harshness. In the sixties, there was a certain material prosperity in broad sections of the population and a pampering (permissive) style of upbringing has since become more and more common. The children were supposed to have it better. Not only materially, but also in other ways, one wanted to protect them – with the best of intentions – from the hardships of life.

A few decades earlier, in the first half of the 20th century, *Alfred Adler*, the Viennese doctor and psychologist and founder of individual psychology, had already identified the importance of parenting, and thus distinguished himself from *Sigmund Freud* who based the development of personality on the theory of drives. Adler devoted his attention to parental issues and made a name for himself by providing appropriate training and further education for parents, teachers and doctors. When he spent most of his time in the USA in the 1930s, his case studies only spoke of the pampering style of upbringing. Obviously, Adler had encountered other forms of upbringing in America than were common in Europe at the time. Today, the term “spoiling” has become accepted for this.

### Stay on the useful side of life

In his reflections on a child-appropriate style of upbringing, Adler proceeded from the anthropological fact that a child in its first period of life is dependent on the nurturing attention of its caregivers, otherwise it would not survive. If parents/caregivers respond appropriately to the child's physical and emotional needs, the child increasingly gains the confidence to grow out of this dependency according to its physical stage of development and to participate independently in life. Embedded in a relationship of trust, the child's caregivers should accompany this learning and developmental process in an encouraging manner, sharing the difficulties and successes in a supportive way. In this emotional exchange, it is important that an even give and take is created and maintained. This means taking the child seriously and not belittling it, so that the child develops the courage to continue learning and shifts its activity to the community-affirming, useful side of life. Adler classified undesirable developments based on this background.

### It is snowing – now what?

In the last few weeks, our villages and towns were temporarily submerged in snow. A kindergarten class passed by our house. They spent the morning on the nearby sledding hill. The children's pleasure and exertion were visible. How many times did they pull the sled up the hill before they whizzed down again? Some mothers and fathers were waiting in front of the kindergarten and the interesting interactions continued. One boy silently put the pull rope of the sled into his mother's hand. Side by side they made their way home. The mother pulled the sled, he trudged blithely through the snow to the left and right of the path. Another curtly greeted his father, sat on his sled and was pulled home. Soon a girl walked past me. She was obviously tired. “So, was it nice?”, I asked her. She beamed and stopped for a moment, “Yes, I went down twenty times and fell over three times and now I'm hungry!” Three children, three ways of tackling life!

### Preventing disappointment

In many families today, everyday parenting is organised so that the children experience as little (warming!) friction as

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### "The Significance of Catholicism ..."

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possible. They are surrounded by a protective wall so that real life can only penetrate them to a limited extent. Yet there are many learning opportunities to be had in and outside the parental home and school. Often, lazy compromises are made to avoid expected unpleasant reactions. This gives the child an erroneous expectation of living together, and it will have trouble settling in and finding its way in the larger community of kindergarten and school.

This also does not allow the child to develop into a reliable fellow player who makes an age-appropriate contribution to social life. On the contrary, children are tempted to avoid the demands and to give in to the relationship with previously practised behaviour in order to secure attention for themselves.

This parental flight into overprotection makes it difficult for children to accept conflicts and disappointments as part of everyday life. They avoid taking responsibility but are well versed in the main role of the "not me – him too" game. They have a low threshold for frustration and become champions in procrastinating more strenuous tasks. Procrastination, however, does not bring life satisfaction. Therefore, it is advantageous for a child to become familiar with the principle of LJAM – better now than tomorrow! – at an early age.

#### The path leads in a different direction

A spoiling parenting style therefore withholds important learning opportunities from the child because life does not work like a PlayStation. There are challenges that must be faced. You must overcome yourself to either do something or not. Waiting periods must be filled meaningfully. Disappointments and defeat can sometimes become opportunities. When there is a dispute, sometimes you have to negotiate and that may seem exhausting, because you have to take a step back from your own ideas or views. This can be tedious, and yet that is precisely why it is worthy. If these experiences are missing in the children's life, they too seldom realise that they can overcome difficult situations by their own efforts. Without these experiences children never learn what they are capable of. However, educators who make these experiences possible for their children, who also stand up and demand social norms, lay the foundation for success in school and in life.

#### Not only a pedagogical problem

Spoiled children and adolescents grow up to be spoiled adults. They bring the

### The eight year old Yuna has a heart of Gold

Yuna is eight years old, comes from South Korea and lives in Switzerland. She knows that up to now, she has had a lot of luck in life. For her eighth birthday, she had a special idea. She asked her father to contact the ICRC (*International Committee of the Red Cross*). Instead of wishing for presents from her friends, she would rather collect money to help those who are less lucky in life than herself. She decorated a box with pictures which show the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and explained to her friends why she wants to support our organisation. Yuna wants to help

to give joy to those who don't have much, because she is aware that not everyone has the possibility to celebrate their birthday. Additionally, she wants that people think more about others. Yuna could hand over the box at a personal meeting; since then she is even more motivated to support the International Red Cross Committee. We would like to thank Yuna, her friends and her family for their support. Generosity knows no age.

*From: Das internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz. In Aktion (The International Red Cross Committee. In action.) December 2020, No. 8, p. 4*

attitudes they acquired as children into the world of work. Meanwhile, master craftsmen and company bosses complain about the sense of entitlement of some of their employees, their constant need for attention, praise and recognition, but also their unwillingness to do less attractive work reliably and completely. They observe a lack of initiative and a lack of impulse to work above and beyond the call of duty, as well as a lack of teamwork and a constructive willingness to engage in conflict, and last but not least, they also complain about often careless language. This is not only true of Generation Z or "snowflakes", as those born after 1995 are sometimes called. Spoiled lifestyles and demanding attitudes have also become a problem at management level.

#### Being able to test one's own abilities

It is the heartfelt wish of most parents to give their children the best possible start for a fulfilled, self-determined life. By pampering the child, however, the parents get in the way of themselves and the child. And now? Research into the causes must always include all involved. Therefore, the focus is not only on the child, but also on its parents. The "education of the educators" has long been one of the cornerstones of education and psychology. It is never about assigning blame, but about a differentiated understanding of unfavourable or also favourable conditions for the personality development of a child, so that they can be changed if necessary and open a way out of a messy situation. With the way they approach their life questions, how they shape their relationships and their different areas of life, the parents are role models for the children. From this basic substance, they in turn develop their own individual way of being in life. If the path is to be constructive, they need tasks, real tasks, from

which they can test and develop their abilities. Parents cannot delegate this responsibility. Children need challenges for their development, wherein it is easy to recognise the word challenge.

#### Even in times of crisis

Young people who like to get involved, who find excessive care and indulgence annoying and who have not booked a room in the "Hotel Mama and Papa" for nothing in return do exist. Who does not fondly remember the engagement of young people in the first wave of COVID-19 disease?! Many of them offered unsolicited help to their elderly neighbours and took over, for example, shopping and gardening, running errands by bike or skateboard and using digital media to chat or even read a story aloud. They volunteered in hospitals and did not let themselves be lamented, as the media has been doing for some time, because they had a purpose in life other than partying and drinking. They also found ways to maintain and even deepen their social contacts with their peers without endangering themselves and others. They found a way into life that gave them support, orientation and inner satisfaction even in times of crisis – pampering stands in the way of this. •

The following sources were helpful to me in writing this article:

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