

Current Concerns

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Supply crisis and food security Why a country needs its own productive agriculture and where the “green” criticism of agriculture goes wrong

by Hans Bieri*



Hans Bieri
(picture Schweizer
Bauer)

In the worsening crisis, the most obvious question is security of supply. This was and is the core concern of so-called internal colonisation, in the spirit of which the Swiss Association for Internal Colonisation and Industrial Agriculture, now the Swiss Association for Industry and Agriculture SVIL, was founded in 1918. At that time, too, Switzerland had “abandoned its agriculture to the influences of the world market”, according to Hans Bernhard, the founder of the SVIL in 1918¹, which led to serious supply shortages. This was to be countered with an agricultural and settlement policy oriented towards general welfare by developing the domestic economy.

In 1944, the Hungarian-Austrian economic historian, economist and social scientist Karl Paul Polanyi wrote: “After a century of blind ‘improvement’, man is restoring his ‘habitation’. If industrialism is not to extinguish the race, it must be subordinated to the requirements of man’s nature. The true criticism of market society is not that it was based on economics – in a sense, every and any society must be based on it – but that its economy was based on self-interest.”²

This destructive struggle of economic self-interest, which set countries against each other and also resulted in the 1918 supply crisis, awakened the internal colonising will to “restore its own dwelling”. All the writings of the SVIL from 1918 to the 1940s, from which the above quote by Karl Polanyi comes, bear witness to this.

Today, however, the conditions for “restoring one’s own dwelling” are being

shattered step by step and at an accelerating pace.

In 1996, the SVIL held a two-day symposium at the ETH on the question “Is Switzerland losing its footing?” The seriousness of the situation remained underestimated for a long time.

Not only with regard to security of supply, but also with regard to neutrality, it is now necessary to prevent further “damage to the land” and to “recultivate” it instead. The connection between security of supply and neutrality will be examined in another article.

Agriculture under pressure from deregulation, settlement growth and loss of cultivated land

The SVIL has always clearly and unequivocally opposed the decimation of productive agriculture. Since the 1980s, however, agricultural self-sufficiency has come under increasing pressure:

Internal colonisation

Colonisation originally refers to the reclamation and settlement of fallow land and, in the course of time, also to the economic subjugation of already settled countries. Internal colonisation, on the other hand, refers to the development of economic and settlement space within the country.

- as a result of the deconstruction of cultivated land for nature conservation.
- The death of farms due to low incomes and loss of land continues.
- The ecology debate has been unilaterally imposed on agriculture by the conservation organisations instead of first addressing the causes of conflict stemming from the economy as a whole. Green reform groups believe that the ecological problem can be solved by

“It is not a progressive policy to abuse these internationally created mutual interdependencies as a target for sanctions in order to launch international emergency and politically exploitable shock strategies.”

- The WTO demanded an opening of agricultural free trade. The warning voices that agriculture should not be included in the free trade negotiations – as was the case with the GATT for decades – were thrown to the wind, as was the historical experience with supply crises. What was new in the WTO was that the dismantling of trade barriers would also increase security of supply in the food sector, which is now becoming increasingly apparent as a mistake that could have been avoided.
- Loss of land and cultivated land is advancing from two sides: on the one hand, as a result of too much immigration with the resulting growth in settlement (jobs, residential areas, supply infrastructures) and, on the other hand,

reducing production and cultivating nature separately. In this way, agriculture was forced to provide additional, uncompensated maintenance services (cultivated landscape maintenance, biodiversity contributions for biodiversity and particularly nature- and animal-friendly forms of production, etc.) while overall direct payments and production services remained unchanged.

In addition, ecological critics do not want to recognise any connection between Switzerland’s population and settlement density and dwindling biodiversity, but blame this conflict solely on agriculture. Increasingly, agricultural policy has also become an object for expanded demands on the living environment. In the pro-

continued on page 2

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“Supply crisis and food security”

continued from page 1

cess, ever more drastic ecological regulations are imposed on agriculture without addressing the macroeconomic causes of environmental degradation. The label organisations of organic agriculture are also concentrating solely on marketing their unique selling points without addressing the basic macroeconomic conflict of the underpayment of agriculture.

Because of this multiplicity of conflicts, Parliament has abandoned the *AP 22 agricultural policy* and instructed the Federal Council to submit a revised concept by summer 2022.

Supply chains – the new problem

Now, in addition to the already strained relationship between population size and land base, there are once again additional uncertainties about supply through imports. Until now, against all warnings, the global supply chains – one does not have to produce everything oneself, one can import everything at any time – were the main argument for deregulation and free trade. Today, it is precisely the supply chains that are the sore point, which is reflected in significant price increases for raw materials.

As a result, the supply situation for Switzerland – with a degree of self-sufficiency of just under 55% and a high proportion of imports – has become more than uncertain against the backdrop of this increasing turmoil. For these reasons, the call for a *Plan Wahlen 2.0* (see *Plan Wahlen 1941*, to expand the potato and bread grain area and to adjust the diet) is political precaution. Today, this means: an emergency programme of re-expansion of arable land, reclamation of extensification areas and no further watercourse widening projects (through renaturation, i.e. widen-

ing of watercourses), which, according to the conservation organisations themselves, deprive agriculture of up to 50,000 ha of prime and irrigable land.

It is now a question of secure supply in the face of disrupted supply, which is what agricultural policy must be pragmatically geared to.

The same considerations also apply to the required reduction path, i.e. the political target by means of which the use of additives in agriculture is to be reduced step by step. A reduction in auxiliary materials leads to a collapse in production – the looming crisis is certainly the wrong moment for this. It is therefore also wrong to impose a reduction path on agriculture in addition to the adjustment process that is already underway, and this in the face of rising energy and raw material prices and rising production costs. In order to be able to replace auxiliary materials with ecological intensification, the current industrialisation pressure on agriculture must be eliminated. For this economic pressure prevents ecological intensification. Such an intensification requires a longer-term recultivation process. Measures that stifle production and risk “Cambodian conditions” (*Pol Pot*, relapse into poverty and hunger) – or conversely, adapting our livelihoods to economically generated conflicts – are misguided.

Recently, it has been argued against self-sufficiency that auxiliary materials such as fertiliser, diesel and animal feed would have to be imported anyway, making self-sufficiency illusory in any case. Such argumentation only contributes to further lowering the currently low level of self-sufficiency in this crisis instead of increasing it. Fuel and fertiliser from fossil sources in particular can be stored in sufficient quantities without any problems.

The fact that a few years ago, the state supply law significantly reduced stockpiling compared to the past seems to be in line with the “policy” which today is virtually causing supply bottlenecks in an inhumane manner.

The Ambivalence of the ecological critique of agriculture and industry and the danger of global famine

More and more urgently, the question arises as to which agenda “green” politics follows? Especially in the current crisis, when domestic production should be secured and expanded, these circles criticise productive agriculture and also want to stop the supply of fossil energy and auxiliary materials. Not only fertiliser production is affected, but also grain prices are skyrocketing due to interrupted supply chains as well as unprecedented property encroachments in the payment system (sanctions). According to Bloomberg, the global price of durum wheat doubled from about \$ 20 per dt (decitonne) in 2020 to \$ 38 per dt in December 2021. Meanwhile, the USA, as a net importer, is holding itself harmless on the world grain market with its self-printed dollars. Currently, the price continues to rise to \$ 45 per dt. This makes food no longer affordable for millions of people. Covid-19 has broken supply chains, India is experiencing heat waves, and a lack of rainfall in Europe is also depressing yields. Western sanctions are shockingly blocking fossil fuel energy use and with it manufacturing from fertiliser production to industrial production. Add up all these disruptions orchestrated at the monetary and legal levels, and striking supply shortages loom. In fact, the combined export shares of Russia and Ukraine in global wheat production before the crisis were about 3%. It is not the production volume that is the problem, but the explosion of prices due to sanctions and disruption of logistics.

And as if that were not enough, an energy supply emergency and destruction of the economy is being “accepted” for reasons of “ecology”. Who is served by such an approach, openly heading for a supply crisis?

Only industry can reduce entropy (environmental pollution) in the long term. The sought-after “ecological turnaround” can therefore precisely not begin with an increase in the price of energy. In reality, the reduction of raw material consumption is the long-term product of SME-supported technology development, which is now being damaged by the sanctions policy. These connections are overlooked by the protection organisations!

As far as world food is concerned, the dependencies that have arisen in the grain supply of the Near and Middle East and

continued on page 3

Swiss Association for Industry and Agriculture (SVIL)

The *Swiss Association for Industry and Agriculture* (SVIL) was founded in 1918 by Swiss industrialists and its first managing director, Professor *Hans Bernhard*, in Zurich City Hall as a consequence of the food crisis, when 150,000 tonnes of food were missing from domestic food shelves within a short period of time after the collapse of free trade as a result of the First World War – and this despite existing high purchasing power. It became clear that a highly developed industrialised country could not do without its own agriculture, even if imports from economically backward countries at lower prices had always been possible. Such a procurement option from low-wage countries is an asymmetrical trade in favour of the rich countries, which, however, turns into the opposite when shortages occur due

to wars, climate, epidemics, etc. This is why it is so important for a country to have its own agricultural sector. Shortages occur. Because the susceptibility of free trade to disruptions in the food sector has devastating effects on the economy and society, Switzerland's industrial representatives have learned the lesson and decided to rebuild their own agriculture in Switzerland, which is capable of feeding our country in the event of supply disruptions. *The Swiss Association of Industry and Agriculture*, is an association under private law that acts in the interest of food security on a non-profit basis. Its statutes state the protection of Swiss soil and its rational use as its main objectives. The focus is on the conservation and promotion of soil as a renewable resource and a secure basis for nutrition.

Turning back to the real economic and social problems

SP veteran Rudolf H. Strahm warns against excesses in the debates on identity and diversity

ts. He notes a growing gap and alienation in Switzerland between an “educated academic elite and the professionals, especially in the private sector”. A rift that runs through society, which can be explained neither by the “old class system nor by the level of income”. And: “Many are not aware of this widening gap. Unfortunately, media professionals are not either.” The one who complains about this is none other than Rudolf H. Strahm, former central secretary of the SP Switzerland (1978-1985) and National Councillor (1991-2004).

Born in Emmental in 1943 as the eldest of five siblings, Strahm got to know both sides of the now criticised divide: After his apprenticeship as a chemical laboratory technician, he completed a degree in economics.

It is mainly due to this life-history background that Strahm has been committed for decades to the appreciation of vocational training, a jewel that is often in demand abroad and that deserves careful attention: “In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, 63 percent of people first complete an apprenticeship, often followed by further tertiary education. And if Switzerland works, it’s thanks to people who have done an apprenticeship.” Strahm also points out in this context that because of this, “we have a comparatively good integration of foreigners into the employment market.” Unfortunately, the economic importance of vocational training, as well as its social importance and its role in strengthening domestic peace, is far too little appreciated today, even by his

own party. Why? Like all Swiss parties, his own has become far too elitist.

Strahm is convinced that there ought to be a rethinking. Away from a misunderstood identity policy, towards a cooperation that appreciates the other side – and above all out of one’s own opinion bubbles: “The gender and colour and climate activists who come from the universities and emphasise diversity to the extreme don’t notice in their opinion bubble that they are mocked at the gym club’s regulars’ table”. But unfortunately, vice versa, “many skilled workers also have the feeling that only they themselves will perform.” Such “mental breaks” can be observed in many places – and they need to be countered, bridges need to be built. For example, by discussing the really relevant issues – instead of gender stars and dreadlocks, for example, the ubiquitous explosion in the cost of living. Strahm also takes the media to task for supporting the “symbolic politics” with their headlines, which function according to the motto “be wilfully obstructive, then you’re a somebody.” Strahm also refers to a painful chapter in Swiss history, which even led to a civil war that was fortunately only brief and mildly fought: the Sonderbund war. Today, he says, “we are dealing with an identity politics that Switzerland has perhaps only experienced once before: in the 19th century, when the liberals and the Catholic conservatives were at loggerheads with each other.” It was thanks to the prudent actions of personalities like General Dufour that the chasm did not become too

deep, and an incredible achievement of our ancestors that the defeated were included in the young federal state, that they were accommodated with federalism and the later granting of a seat in the Federal Council. Strahm: “Today, identity and diversity are polarised to excess – and the social and other media reinforce this. Real economic and social problems get short shrift.”

This policy runs the risk of deepening a distrust of the state among broad sections of the population – they simply feel cut off. In the light of current events, Strahm adds: “That’s why I think it’s important that non-students are also represented in the Federal Council: People with practical intelligence, ‘common’ sense and understandable language, who can also offer these strata an identity.”

Strahm wouldn’t be Strahm if he didn’t tackle some very hot issues for his party. Keyword “migration”, keyword “polarisation in our party landscape”. How fast factual discussions on urgent questions are made impossible, because SVP proximity is assumed: “Since the beginning of the nineties, the motto in the SP has been: ‘Left is the opposite of Blocher’. This polarisation has prevented a pragmatic approach to delicate issues.” Thus, he said, “moderate concerns about migration have been silenced.” It’s always the same thing in the EU debate, where Strahm locates as elephants in the room the free movement of persons, including wage protection and European citizenship: “If a new agreement comes along that wants to sub-

continued on page 4

“Supply crisis and food security”

continued from page 2

North Africa are the result of previous global political wars. In Iraq and then also in Syria, a rich grain culture was destroyed, which also increased the dependence on grain imports in these countries. This in turn increased Eastern Europe’s specialisation in the production of food commodities.

It is not a progressive policy to abuse these internationally created mutual interdependencies as a target for sanctions in order to launch international emergency and politically exploitable shock strategies. Are consumers to experience painfully what it is like when the gas tap is turned off and fertiliser production is interrupted? What explains the long-standing opposition to *Nordstream 2*? Is it about “ecology and climate” or is it about access to

gas resources or about the question of who should own them “rules-based” in the future? In this way, the ecological conflict increasingly becomes a powerless appendage in the economic conflict over resource bases. The destruction of self-sustaining economies creates internationally disruptive dependencies and enormous targets for intervention, sanctions, etc. The energy embargoes are exacerbating the conflict. Energy embargoes exacerbate international crises. With supply and hunger crises, every social life is brought into dependence on global behavioural regulation. This is obviously an attempt to continue the previous colonial domination. *The fact that an energy embargo is taken in all seriousness as a contribution to sustainability shows the progressive economic and political loss of reality.*

The emancipatory power of industry and its ability to solve the entropy problem are destroyed by this supposedly “ecological” energy policy. It is a relapse into an immature society that “regulates” life, material and energy flows authoritatively and sacrificially. This process, promoted by the Great Reset, leads to an ecodictatorship.

Unless Europe summons up the revolutionary force for a confederate Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok – against the ever-increasing imperial re-feudalisation under transatlantic auspices. •

¹ Bernhard, Hans. *Die Innenkolonisation der Schweiz*. https://www.sgvs.ch/papers/sjesBack-Issues/1918_PDF/1918-1-26.pdf

² Polanyi, Karl Paul. *The Great Transformation*. p. 267 (https://inctpped.ie.ufrj.br/spiderweb/pdf_4/Great_Transformation.pdf) First Edition 1944.

Letter to  the Editor

Blackmail must be rejected without compromise

“No consent to a transfer of Swiss war material to Ukraine” – the Federal Republic of Germany has signed a treaty with Switzerland to this effect. Treaties are made for mutual security. When these could be so carelessly broken for such serious matters as participation in a war, such agreements are worthless from the start. And the respectability of Switzerland as a contractual partner goes down along with the creeping abandonment of neutrality.

Neutrality and laws for security – primarily for us, Switzerland, ought not to be on the fluctuating market of political vanities. No matter to which elite the players belong. Anyone who allows himself to be blackmailed loses all respect from potential partners and opponents.

In the article cited by *Current Concerns* (no. 24/25 of 22 November 2022), *Theodor Winkler*, “for many years as a high-ranking adviser in the military and foreign affairs department”, pleads for by no means being stingy in supporting Ukraine. The international community expected Switzerland to make “contributions of a dimension far in excess of the cohesion

billion”. What Bern offers Ukraine will set “the tone that the West adopts towards Switzerland”.

“Switzerland would have to signal its willingness to take the lead on selected strategic issues and to ensure a generous funding. Switzerland must signal that it is ready to accept responsibility!”

This sheer cynicism can hardly be increased. This also includes the often-prominent statements that not taking part in the war is a failure to help.

The “international community”, disguised in US-NATO-affiliated Germany, would like to have its morally very questionable policy backed by neutral Switzerland. The few sons of parents who probably belong to those who were directly affected by the Second World War, who now are in charge in the Federal Republic, do not seem to have the slightest moral barriers in their minds; 77 years after the end of the Second World War German weapons are again being used against Russia.

The fact that the “Ukraine problem” will not be solved at all in this way, but only may lead to even more dangerous

escalations seems to become a neglected topic. The war must be ended and not escalated.

Blackmail must be uncompromisingly rejected and condemned. The “international community” would do well to follow the example of the armed, neutral state of law Switzerland.

Are freedom and independence according to our federal constitution are sacrificed for participation in internationalist war adventures, these values are difficult to recapture and secure later. Let us keep our hands off and let us take untainted moral responsibility!

Group Giardino for a Credible Militia Army, Alexander Steinacher (Communication), Hans Rickenbacher (President)

“Turning back to the ...”

continued from page 3

mit these areas to the European Court of Justice, then you can forget it: That would be a no go!”

Who doesn’t know this from personal experience? Debates in the circle of rather urban work colleagues, friends, acquaintances, relatives, which often ended with the killer argument: “That’s Blocher, that’s SVP.” And how often was one then – nota bene as a non-SVP member – later whispered behind closed doors, “I agree with you, but I don’t want to get suspected to be too close with the SVP. As soon as the SVP puts its foot down on a topic, it is no longer debatable.”

Strahm’s call for a more objective debate on issues that affect us all, regardless of party affiliation, deserves to be taken up. Even and especially in these difficult times, even and especially when the Swiss population is once again increasingly dealing with the question of how we want to keep our neutrality. As one member of the

initiative committee of the neutrality initiative, the non-party historian and head of the *Research Institute for Direct Democracy* (FIDD), *René Roca*, emphasised at the media conference of the initiators: It is not an SVP initiative. Even if the media were already busy distributing labels. He had also had the idea of an initiative, as a non-party member.

Objective rather than polarised opinion debates not only help to ensure peaceful coexistence even in the face of opposing points of view; they and the respective results of referendums have brought Switzerland, in a Europe-wide comparison, better and, from an economic point of view, more reasonable and sustainable results than decisions by so-called expert councils. A fact that the HSG St. Gallen, which is not exactly known for its closeness to the people, also had to state in a research paper that it had initiated, albeit almost somewhat *contre coeur*.

Source: Interview with *Rudolf Strahm*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 18 November 2022

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Federal and cantonal executives undermine democratic popular decisions

Example: Electricity supply

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

The excellent analysis by SVIL (Schweizerische Vereinigung Industrie und Landwirtschaft – Swiss Association for Industry and Agriculture) Executive Director Hans Bieri on food security in Switzerland (see article on page 1ff) led me to consider his thoughts on the question of energy security, which, incidentally, the author also includes. After all, nothing works without sufficient energy, not even agricultural production. My article was also prompted by the presentation given by an expert on electricity and gas supply in the municipality where I live. What shall we citizens do to make our authorities once again unequivocally committed to the will of the people?

Switzerland is about 90 percent self-sufficient concerning electricity

Hans Bieri writes that Switzerland is only 55 per cent self-sufficient in the matter of agriculture. In contrast to this, about 90 per cent of Switzerland's electricity demand are currently produced domestically (about 55 per cent hydropower, 30 per cent nuclear power, 5 per cent new renewables). Although there is still room for improvement by increasing the height of dams, things are happening in the form of the construction of larger solar plants in uninhabited sunny high valleys or on south-facing slopes. Thanks to generous subsidies approved by parliament, several large solar plants are already being planned in Valais and Graubünden - and this is necessary considering the increasing e-mobility and high levels of immigration. If the Swiss nuclear power plants are really to be shut down, as decided by the people, we will really have to get down to brass tacks.

In view of the high proportion of self-sufficiency and the Federal Council's successful appeals for saving (There is already 10 percent less electricity consumption), it would actually be logical that Swiss electricity prices should not rise too sharply. And why are they rising anyway – even for the basic supply?

Official clarification: Ukraine war is not the main cause of the sharp rise in energy prices

Andreas Gnos, head of network and technology at Technische Betriebe Wil (TBW), confirms media reports that Swiss households and SMEs on basic supply will have to reckon with an average 30% increase in electricity costs in 2023. However, according to Gnos, the Ukraine war is not



River power plant on the Thur in Bazenhaid in the canton of St. Gallen. (picture rwt)

the main cause of the expected shortage: only since the failure of a large number of French nuclear power plants has there been a threat of shortage, and this has caused market prices to skyrocket. Prices were highest in August/September.

Many Swiss municipalities have their own power plants and are therefore less exposed to price fluctuations on the market. This means lower electricity tariffs for their population. I had read earlier on the homepage of the *Swiss Federal Electricity Commission* EICom that municipalities without their own power plants have to buy electricity “on the market”, but I was imagining (somewhat rashly) that this meant the Swiss electricity market, i.e. the power plants in our country.

Electricity bought at the Leipzig Power Exchange at volatile prices

At the presentation by Mr Gnos of TBW, I heard for the first time that the municipality where I live, and many others, buy their electricity from the Leipzig Power Exchange (!). The suppliers earn well, he remarked.

Well, darn, we did say no to the so-called “opening”, i.e. privatisation of the electricity market 20 years ago in the federal referendum on the *Electricity Market Act* (EMG) (see *Current Concerns* of 27 September 2022). A few years later, ignoring the will of the people, the Federal Council and the parliamentary majority decided to partially open the electricity market for larger companies (*Electricity Supply Act*, in force since 2008). House-

holds, and if they so wish SMEs, are still covered by the basic supply and are entitled to an adequate and cheap electricity supply. But obviously, the choice of exactly how cheap this electricity is to be is not up to the cantons and the power plants; it is decided on the so-called free market. It is noteworthy that for example in the municipality where I live, 70 % of SMEs voluntarily remained on basic supply - despite the lure of the then lower energy prices.

At least the electricity prices for households and businesses remaining on basic supply will rise less sharply in 2023 than the prices for businesses that supply themselves on the market. “Why the difference?” I asked the *Federal Electricity Commission* EICom. According to Simon Witschi, Head of the Commission Secretariat Section, tariffs are not dependent merely on wholesale market prices, but also on the procurement strategy and production portfolio of an energy supply company. “In principle, [...] electricity suppliers that produce a large proportion of their electricity themselves are less affected by price increases on the wholesale market. However, those electricity suppliers that have already purchased their electricity on the market for a longer period of time may also have lower tariffs. Those that have no or little own production and a more short-term procurement strategy are more affected by the current high market prices (especially if they bought their energy in August) and will therefore increase

continued on page 6

"Federal and cantonal executives ..."

continued from page 5

their tariffs more sharply." Simon Witschi also mentions other factors, but concludes by saying: "[...] but the fact remains that the high 2023 tariff alternations that may be observed in some cases are due in particular to the higher energy tariffs." In summary: market prices will be fluctuating even for the basic supply – the more prudent the electricity supplier, the more bearable the surcharges – if we are lucky!

Swissgrid as a "milestone on the path to electricity market liberalisation"

With the above-mentioned law of 2008, Switzerland legally separated the transmission grid from the power plant companies in accordance with EU requirements (without being obliged to do so), in order to follow through on liberalisation against the will of the voters. Our electricity grid has long been firmly integrated into the EU electricity grid, and that is by no means only to the benefit of Switzerland. So (?) we can read on *Swissgrid's* homepage: "Since 2009, *Swissgrid*, as the national grid company, has been responsible for the operation, safety and expansion of the 6700-kilometre-long extra-high voltage grid". And then they get down to business: "In 2013, *Swissgrid* took over the grid and thus set an important milestone on the path to electricity market liberalisation." (<https://www.swissgrid.ch/de/home/about-us/company/history.html>; emphasis mw)

So it becomes clear that for more than 20 years, the Federal Council and its administrative team have been trying to get the Swiss people to sign an electricity agreement with the EU. As reported in *Current Concerns* on 27 September 2022, the Federal Council recently wanted to launch the total "opening" – but it caught an unpropitious moment. Now, when many companies want to push back into the basic service because they have to pay astronomical price surcharges in the "free" market, the responsible committee of the Council of States flagged such liberalisation plans down on 9 September.

We must hold fast to certain principles

– *Cantonal representatives instead of administrative bodies in Bern*

And why does *Axpo*, which is wholly owned by the cantons of north-eastern Switzerland, not ensure cheap electricity for the basic supply? This is what I asked the responsible state councillor in my canton. She has yet to answer. It is well known that *Axpo* is a major international corporation that invests in power plants abroad. However, we expect our cantonal governments to look out for their own people first and lay down the law to *Axpo*, *BKW* or *Alpiq*. But cantonal state coun-

cillors apparently prefer to spend part of their mandate, which the electorate has handed over to them on trust, biding their time in Bern at the directors' conferences – in the "House of the Cantons", where they hear from the federal administration staff what is expected of them. It is true that they might say no once in a while, and from time to time one or the other probably does (unlike with our cantonal authorities, the principle of public access does not apply there, so we cannot always know who said yes or no to what, and when they did so).

– *Keep power plants in the hands of the citizens – preferably in the communes or in cooperatives*

The responsible federal councillors have been trying for years – with little effect – to dissuade the population from employing the numerous small-scale and democratically organised power companies that stubbornly persist alongside the big energy corporations. The Swiss system is just simply not EU-compatible! The soon to leave office head of the *Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications* DETEC, Federal Councillor *Simonetta Sommaruga*, exercised some level of restraint in this respect, in contrast to her predecessor, *Doris Leuthard*. In autumn 2017, the latter responded to the question of where politics needed to take action to ensure security of supply: "We need market opening at home and access to the EU internal electricity market. Since the partial market opening a few years ago, there has been no concentration among the 700 or so Swiss suppliers. With so many players and over 8000 tariffs continuing, things will be difficult." Additional question: "Do you fear that this federalist tangle [!] will bring down the electricity agreement with the EU?" In response, the ever-smiling *Doris Leuthard* took up the sledgehammer: "The small suppliers resist full liberalisation because their level of suffering is low. [...] We have to talk to the cantons and the Association of Swiss Electricity Companies and say: If you want to continue to be responsible and do business, you have to structure yourselves differently. That will certainly be a difficult discussion."¹

The "many players", namely the municipalities and cantons as power plant owners, are "difficult" because in the EU there is a ban on state aid. *Leuthard* therefore recommends "other structures", namely in a first step the conversion of power plants into joint-stock companies, which could then later merge and sell their shares to private investors. A few months before this interview, in May 2017, the electorate had approved the "Energy Strategy 2050", in

which the electricity agreement with the EU, though long in the pipeline, had not been mentioned at all. In October, *Leuthard* revealed: "We are ready. All that is needed is a federal decree for the complete opening."

And today?

Today, five years later, almost all hydro-power plants are indeed stock corporations, but 100% of the shares of most of them remain in the hands of the municipalities and cantons. Some mergers have taken place, but there are still hundreds of power plant companies in Switzerland. And this does not only apply in the countryside: the power plant of the largest municipality in Switzerland, the *EWZ (Elektrizitätswerk Zürich)*, is a service department belonging to the Department of Industrial Operations of the City of Zurich, i.e. part of the administration! Of its approximately 1200 employees, about 100 work in the canton of Graubünden, where Zurich has held its own power plants for many decades. The "federal decree for complete opening" mentioned by *Leuthard* was recently rejected by the responsible committee of the Council of States because it would hardly survive a referendum vote in the current situation.

And the icing on the cake: on 24 November 2022, the Federal Council announced that it wants to open a loophole for those SMEs that want to return to the basic electricity supply because they cannot afford the market prices. The conditions: They must join forces with other SMEs to form an electricity network, interconnect their lines and produce at least 10% of their electricity consumption themselves. And they must remain on basic supply for at least seven years. This makes negotiations with Brussels on a quasi-framework agreement construct recede into an even more remote distance; for the framework agreement has been hyped up by the EU since 2014 "as a basic condition for the electricity agreement" (*Doris Leuthard*).

Yes, we have gotten caught in the EU spider's web – pardon, electricity grid – rather badly, but we may still place hope in Switzerland's direct democracy ... After the two world wars of the 20th century, it was a matter of "rebuilding our own dwelling", says *Hans Bieri*. "Today," he continues, "the conditions for 'restoring our own dwelling' are, however, being shattered step by step and at an accelerating pace." It is up to us citizens to put up as much resistance as we can. •

¹ Müller, Giorgio V. and Stalder, Helmut. "Wir können eine Strommarktöffnung nicht auf ewig aufschieben" ('We can't put off opening up the electricity market forever'). Interview with Federal President *Doris Leuthard*'. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 28 October 2017.

Qatar bashing – the great media hypocrisy

by Helmut Scheben*



Helmut Scheben
(picture Journal21)

Someone burns down the houses of his neighbours. But he is not accused of arson, but of discriminating against women and homosexuals. This is exactly how the Qatar case presents itself.

In September and October 2017, *Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani*, the former prime minister and foreign minister of Qatar, said on the emirate's state television (not on *al-Jazeera* channel) that Qatar and Saudi Arabia had worked together with the US to bring about regime change in Syria: "Everything went through Turkey, in co-ordination with the US, the Turks and our Saudi brothers, all were involved through their military."

Al Thani did not mince his words. He himself had travelled to Damascus in spring 2011 and offered *Assad* 15 billion dollars if he distanced himself from Iran. Since *Assad* refused, the planned intervention in Syria was launched together with the Saudis. 1 "Qatar and Saudi Arabia were responsible for financing and arming", Al Thani explained. The *Arab League* was content with propaganda. The Syrian media, for example, was cut off from access to *Arabsat* and other satellites.

The Qatari ruling family Al Thani alone had spent several billion dollars to finance the rebellion, the sheikh said. Deserters from the Syrian army were rewarded with large sums of money. In an interview with the BBC, Al Thani describes in detail how military operations, supplies and all logistics were coordinated in Jordan and at the Turkish NATO base in Incirlik. The intelligence services of the US, France, the UK, Turkey and Jordan worked together to overthrow the Syrian government.

Crimes under international law

What the world's second largest gas supplier Qatar could actually have been accused of is a crime under international law: namely, supporting and financing a



Qatar 2022: World Cup stadium and modern buildings all around. But what should the focus actually be on? (Image keystone)

war of aggression. The fact that this was planned by the West has been confirmed many times, but rarely admitted so succinctly.

Have you been able to read anything about all this in the papers in the last few months? Not a word. Instead, a busy journalist's office has been working non-stop to prove that women's rights and the rights of LGBTQ minorities are being violated in Qatar. The evidence has been there for ten years and has been repeated ever since: The world's biggest sporting event should not be entrusted to a country as politically incorrect as Qatar. *Zeit online* writes: "Qatar is considered one of the most controversial host countries in the history of the World Cup. The emirate is accused of human rights violations, poor treatment of foreign workers and a lack of women's rights."

You only want to see what you are allowed to see

And the attempt to bring about regime change in a neighbouring country with billions of dollars? Our major Western media did not and do not find fault with this. Imperial strategies of the USA and its allies are routine political business. You only want to see what you are allowed to see without getting into trouble and getting caught up in contradictions. They won't mess with Washington because of a World Cup in Qatar.

Uncle Sam was furious that the World Cup was not awarded to the USA, and prosecutor *Loretta Lynch* left no stone unturned to get at FIFA. FIFA, mind you, but not Qatar. Al-Udeid near Doha is the most important airbase of the Americans and the British in the Middle East, and every-

thing that has been done from there since the Afghanistan war is not something they want to spread about.

"The pack journalism keeps it with the three monkeys"

Not now, not in the Ukraine war and not in the US midterms. The pack journalism keeps it with the three monkeys: hear nothing, see nothing and say nothing. On the other hand, what comes across as politically correct and guarantees applause is disseminated with great market clamour. With accident statistics on the World Cup construction site, you have the parties and the trade unions on your side, and with gender issues and women's rights, it is also easy to create public excitement. That is the calculation.

At least with the construction site hype, the shot backfired. Our newspapers fed big headlines with presumed thousands of accidental deaths among migrant workers on World Cup construction sites, with no means of manipulation appearing too questionable. Resourceful investigators had interpolated the numbers of coffins exported from Qatar and other statistics on deaths to arrive at horrendous figures. The Swiss trade union *Unia*, which investigated the issue in Qatar and visited the World Cup construction sites, found that these were largely unsubstantiated claims. Its representative recently spoke on the *SF Tagesschau* of "three deaths" during stadium construction, less than the comparable average in Switzerland.

As far as the war in Yemen is concerned, the picture is the same: Qatar was part of the military alliance that started bombing Yemen in 2015 under the lead-

continued on page 8

* *Helmut Scheben* (*1947 in Koblenz, Germany) studied Romance philology in Mainz, Bonn, Salamanca and Lima. In 1980, he received his doctorate from the University of Bonn. From 1980 to 1985 he worked as a press agency reporter and correspondent for print media in Mexico and Central America. From 1986 he was editor of the *Weekly Newspaper (WoZ)* in Zurich, and from 1993 to 2012 editor and reporter for *Swiss television SRF*, including 16 years on the *Tagesschau*.

UN expert calls for lifting of long-lasting unilateral sanctions “suffocating” Syrian people

UN *Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures and human rights Alena Douhan* today urged sanctioning States to lift unilateral sanctions against Syria, warning that they were perpetuating and exacerbating the destruction and trauma suffered by the Syrian people since 2011.

“I am struck by the pervasiveness of the human rights and humanitarian impact of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria and the total economic and financial isolation of a country whose people are struggling to rebuild a life with dignity, following the decade-long war,” Douhan said.

In a statement¹ following her 12-day visit to Syria, the Special Rapporteur presented detailed information about the catastrophic effects of unilateral sanctions across all walks of life in the country.

Douhan said 90 per cent of Syria’s population was currently living below the poverty line, with limited access to food, water, electricity, shelter, cooking and heating fuel, transportation and healthcare and warned that the country was facing a massive brain-drain due to growing economic hardship.

“With more than half of the vital infrastructure either completely destroyed or severely damaged, the imposition of unilateral sanctions on key economic sectors, including oil, gas, electricity, trade, construction and engineering have quashed national income, and undermine efforts

towards economic recovery and reconstruction.”

The expert said blocking of payments and refusal of deliveries by foreign producers and banks, coupled with sanctions-induced limited foreign currency reserves have caused serious shortages in medicines and specialised medical equipment, particularly for chronic and rare diseases. She warned that rehabilitation and development of water distribution networks for drinking and irrigation had stalled due to the unavailability of equipment and spare parts, creating serious public health and food security implications.

“In the current dramatic and still-deteriorating humanitarian situation as 12 million Syrians grapple with food insecurity, I urge the immediate lifting of all unilateral sanctions that severely harm human rights and prevent any efforts for early recovery, rebuilding and reconstruction,” Douhan said.

“No reference to good objectives of unilateral sanctions justifies the violation of fundamental human rights. The international community has an obligation of solidarity and assistance to the Syrian people.”

The Special Rapporteur also dealt with other issues showcasing the multifaceted negative impact of sanctions, including international cooperation in the areas of science, arts, sports, preservation of national cultural heritage and restitution of cultural artefacts, access to new technol-

ogies, cyberspace and online information platforms, criminality and regional/international security, as well as the issue of frozen foreign assets of Syrian financial institutions and other entities.

“I urge the international community and the sanctioning states in particular, to pay heed to the devastating effects of sanctions and to take prompt and concrete steps to address over-compliance by businesses and banks in accordance with international human right law,” she said.

“In the words of one of my interlocutors, echoing numerous others: ‘I saw much suffering, but now I see the hope die,’” Douhan said.

During her visit the UN expert met representatives from national and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations, associations, humanitarian actors, businesses, UN entities, academia, religious leaders and faith-based organisations, as well as the diplomatic community. In addition to the capital Damascus, she also visited Homs city, rural Homs, and rural Damascus.

The Special Rapporteur will present a report to the Human Rights Council in September 2023. •

¹ *Preliminary findings of the visit to the Syrian Arab Republic by the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights* by Prof. Dr. Alena Douhan

Source: UN Media Release of 10 November 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/node/104160>

“Qatar bashing ...”

continued from page 7

ership of Saudi Arabia. For our journalists, this is no reason to classify Qatar as an unserious host country. The US and its NATO allies supported this war of aggression in order to ultimately contain Iran and secure the transport of oil through the Bab-al-Mandab Strait.

When Qatar’s World Cup ambassador calls homosexuality “damage in the mind” in a ZDF interview at the beginning of November, Western Europe’s media see fire in the roof. The 370,000 dead in Yemen and the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, on the other hand, do not seem to be an argument of interest where Qatar and the World Cup are concerned.

Reasons for the great silence

The reasons for the great silence about Qatar’s foreign policy are obvious. After all, they were all in the same boat when the Syrian war began: the USA, its NATO allies, the Gulf Emirates, the West with its media, its think tanks and prominent aid agencies and human rights organisations.

A great lamentation over violations of human rights rose to the heavens. As in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, the international community was once again called upon to lead Syria on the path to democracy. And this international community also had a name: It was called *Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, David Cameron, François Hollande* and their “friends of the Syrian people”.

This group of friends, under the command of the neocons in Washington, wanted to make regime change in Syria in order to have a corridor free for the march against Iran.

Assad is shooting at his own people, that was the text module that no news presenter wanted to do without. The question of who the jihadists from far more than 50 nations were actually shooting at, who were tearing up Christian images of the Madonna in Syria, was hardly asked in our newspapers. The head cutters, who had been hailed as “rebels” in Western media, collected petrodollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The Qatari station *al-Jazira*, appreciated in the Arab world for its intrepidity,

was turned into a loudspeaker for the “rebels” at the beginning of the Syrian war. Integral journalists, such as the Berlin correspondent *Aktham Suliman*, threw in the sponge and left the station.²

Concealment of facts is increasingly becoming a method of opinion manipulation

The whole Qatar human rights hype is hypocrisy on two counts. If human rights and international law were really the criteria by which sporting events were awarded to a host country, then we would have a problem. Because of the 193 governments of this world, the majority is probably of the opinion that neither the USA nor its NATO friends have a clean slate. The wars of aggression led or supported by NATO countries in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria or Yemen, with their millions of dead and refugees, are in the eyes of most people in Africa, Asia and Latin America worse offences than discrimination against women and homosexuals in a country like Qatar.

continued on page 9

The G20 is dead – long live the G20!

by M. K. Bhadrakumar



M. K. Bhadrakumar
(picture ma)

M. K. Bhadrakumar worked as a career diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service for around three decades. Among other things, he was ambassador to the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan as well as South Korea, Sri Lanka, Germany and Turkey. His texts deal primarily with Indian foreign policy and events in the Middle East, Eurasia, Central Asia, South Asia and Pacific Asia. His blog is called *Indian Punchline*.

The seventeenth G20 Heads of State and Government Summit held in Bali, Indonesia, on 15-16 November stands out as a consequential event from many angles. The international politics is at an inflection point and the transition will not leave unaffected any of the institutions inherited from the past that is drifting away forever.

However, the G20 can be an exception in bridging time past with time present and time future. The tidings from Bali leave a sense of mixed feelings of hope and despair. The G20 was conceived against the backdrop of the financial crisis

"Qatar bashing ..."

continued from page 8

But Qatar has participated in these wars, mostly even as a military and logistical hub for the US. The second hypocrisy is that our media is hiding this and pretending today that an LGBTQ issue is the handicap that makes Qatar a "dubious host" of an international sporting event.

Ex-FIFA President *Sepp Blatter* said this week in the "Tages-Anzeiger" as well as in a documentary on Swiss television that ex-UEFA President *Michel Platini* had called him in 2010 with the information that he had been asked by President *Sarkozy* at a dinner in the Elysee to see what he could "do for Qatar" in the World Cup award.

The FIFA Ethics Committee later concluded that FIFA officials had been bribed



Non-aligned countries strive for a more peaceful, multipolar world. This is also the case for Indonesia that holds the G20 presidency in 2022. (picture G20.org)

in 2007 — quintessentially, a Western attempt to burnish the jaded G7 by bringing on board the emerging powers that stood outside it looking in, especially China, and thereby inject contemporaneity into global discourses.

The leitmotif was harmony. How far the Bali summit lived up to that expectation is the moot point today. Regrettably, the G7 selectively dragged extraneous issues into the deliberations and its alter ego, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO), made its maiden appearance in the Asia-Pacific. Arguably, the latter must be counted as a fateful happening during the Bali summit.

The G7 bloc mentality

What happened is a negation of the spirit of the G20. If the G7 refuses to discard its bloc mentality, the cohesion of the G20 gets affected. The G7-NATO

in the vote. A few weeks after the 2022 World Cup was awarded to Qatar, Platini's son *Laurent* became head of "Qatar Sports Investments" in Europe, and six months later Qatar bought French fighter jets for \$14.6 billion.

Platini said on French-speaking Swiss television in beautiful candour³ that the Qatari Crown Prince had attended the dinner in question, but that he, Platini, had not been asked directly to do anything for Qatar: "I have known the Qataris for thirty years. I don't need a president to tell me that I should do something for Qatar."

The Emirate of Qatar shares the South Pars gas field under the waters of the Persian Gulf with its neighbour Iran. The field has more recoverable gas reserves than all other fields in the world combined. With the proceeds from the gas ex-

joint statement¹ could have been issued from Brussels or Washington or London. Why Bali?

The Chinese President *Xi Jinping* was spot on saying in a written speech² at the APEC CEO Summit in Bangkok on 17 November that "The Asia-Pacific is no one's backyard and should not become an arena for big power contest. No attempt to wage a new cold war will ever be allowed by the people or by the times."

Xi warned that "Both geopolitical tensions and the evolving economic dynamics have exerted a negative impact on the development environment and cooperation structure of the Asia-Pacific." Xi said the Asia-Pacific region was once a ground for big power rivalry, had suffered conflicts and war. "History tells us that bloc confrontation cannot solve any problem and that bias will only lead to disaster."

continued on page 10

port, the *Qatar Investment Authority* buys into Western companies. In the car industry, in banks, in telecommunications, in transport, in seaports and last but not least in the *Paris Saint Germain football club*.

If Qatar won the bid for the World Cup, it was done according to the law that governs football: big money. A sport where players have long been traded like shares is unlikely to enjoy the high ethos of the Olympic idea. •

¹ cf. e.g. Raimbaud, Michel. *Les guerres de Syrie*, p. 158ff.

² *Aktham Suliman* is the author of *Krieg und Chaos in Nahost. Eine arabische Sicht*. (War and Chaos in the Middle East. An Arab Perspective.) Frankfurt 2017

³ cf. *SRF1* documentary from 10 November 2022
Source: <https://globalbridge.ch> of 11 November 2022

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"The G20 is dead ..."

continued from page 9

The DNA of the Western world hasn't changed

The golden rule that security issues do not fall within the purview of G20 has been broken. At the G20 summit, the Western countries held the rest of the participants at the Bali summit to ransom: 'Our way or no way'. Unless the intransigent West was appeased on Ukraine issue, there could be no Bali declaration, so, Russia relented. The sordid drama showed that the DNA of the Western world hasn't changed. Bullying remains its distinguishing trait.

But, ironically, at the end of the day, what stood out was that the Bali Declaration failed to denounce Russia on the Ukraine issue. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey give reason for hope that G20 can regenerate itself. These countries were never Western colonies. They are dedicated to multipolarity, which will ultimately compel the West to concede that unilateralism and hegemony is unsustainable.

Inflection point

This inflection point gave much verve to the meeting between the US President *Joe Biden* and the Chinese President *Xi Jinping* at Bali. Washington requested for such a meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit, and Beijing consented. One striking thing about the meeting has been that *Xi* was appearing on the world stage after a hugely successful Party Congress.

The resonance of his voice was unmistakable. *Xi* underscored that the US has lost the plot, when he told *Biden*: "A statesman should think about and know where to lead his country. He should also think about and know how to get

along with other countries and the wider world."³

The White House readouts hinted that *Biden* was inclined to be conciliatory. The US faces an uphill challenge to isolate China. As things stand, circumstances overall work to China's advantage.⁴

Majority of countries have refused to take sides on Ukraine

The majority of countries have refused to take sides on Ukraine. China's stance amply reflects it. *Xi* told *Biden* that China is 'highly concerned' about the current situation in Ukraine and support and look forward to a resumption of peace talks between Russia and China. That said, *Xi* also expressed the hope that the US, NATO and the EU 'will conduct comprehensive dialogues' with Russia.

The fault lines that appeared at Bali may take new forms by the time the G20 holds its 18th summit in India next year. There is reason to be cautiously optimistic. First and foremost, it is improbable that Europe will go along with the US strategy of weaponising sanctions against China. They cannot afford a decoupling from China, which is the world's largest trading nation and the principal driver of growth for the world economy.

Second, much as the battle cries in Ukraine rallied Europe behind the US, a profound rethink⁵ is under way. Much agonising is going on about Europe's commitment to strategic autonomy. The recent visit of German Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* to China pointed in that direction. It is inevitable that Europe will distance itself from the US' cold war aspirations. This process is inexorable in a world where the US is not inclined to spend time, money or effort on its European allies.

The point is, in many ways, America's capacity to provide effective global eco-

nomie leadership has irreversibly diminished, having lost its pre-eminent status as the world's largest economy by a wide margin. Besides, the US is no longer willing or capable of investing heavily in shouldering the burden of leadership. Simply put, it still has nothing on offer to match China's Belt and Road Initiative. This should have had a chastening influence and prompted a change of mindset toward cooperative policy actions, but the American elite are stuck in the old groove.

The G20's tasks in a multipolar world

Fundamentally, therefore, multilateralism has become much harder in the present-day world situation. Nonetheless, the G20 is the only game in town to bring together the G7 and the aspiring developing countries who stands to gain out of a democratised world order. The Western alliance system is rooted in the past. The bloc mentality holds little appeal to the developing countries. The gravitation of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia toward the BRICS conveys a powerful message that the Western strategy in conceiving the G20 – to create a ring of subaltern states around the G7 – has outlived its utility.

The dissonance that was on display in Bali exposed that the US still clings to its entitlement and is willing to play the spoiler. India has a great opportunity to navigate the G20 in a new direction. But it requires profound shifts on India's part too – away from its US-centric foreign policies, coupled with far-sightedness and a bold vision to forge a cooperative relationship with China, jettisoning past phobias and discarding self-serving narratives, and, indeed, at the very least, avoiding any further descent into beggar-thy-neighbour policies. •

The world is now multipolar

"The Anglo-Saxons (i.e. London and Washington) wanted to turn the G20 in Bali into an anti-Russian summit. They had first lobbied for Moscow to be excluded from the Group, as they had succeeded in doing at the G8. But if Russia had been absent, China, by far the world's largest exporter, would not have come. So, it was Frenchman *Emmanuel Macron* who was responsible for convincing the other guests to sign a bloody declaration against Russia. For two days, Western news agencies assured that the matter was in the bag. But in the end, the final statement, while summarising the Western

point of view, closed the debate with these words: "There were other points of view and different assessments of the situation and the sanctions. Recognising that the G20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, we know that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy." In other words, for the first time, the West has failed to impose its worldview on the rest of the planet. [...] All the Latin American, African and four Asian participants said that this domination was over; that the world is now multipolar."

Source: <https://www.voltairenet.org/article218426.html> of 22 November 2022

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/15/readout-of-the-meeting-of-nato-and-g7-leaders-on-the-margins-of-the-g20-summit-in-bali/>

² https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202211/t20221117_10977274.html

³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202211/t20221114_10974580.html and https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202211/t20221114_10974686.html

⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/11/14/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-before-bilateral-meeting/> and <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/14/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/> and <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/11/14/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-before-bilateral-meeting/>

⁵ <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/10/unity-states-europe-support-ukraine-00066229>

Source: indianpunchline.com of 18 November 2022

Audiatur et altera pars – also following the G20 summit in Bali

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Due to the ongoing information war since 24 February 2022 – in fact it has started earlier – we have no longer been truthfully informed about the war in Ukraine and the wider context of this war. Almost every event is presented and interpreted in such a way that it serves one's own war aims – and not the establishment of truth. The war aims also include keeping the "home front" in line. What could be better than announcing victories? The failure of the Vietnam War taught the USA in particular how important this is. The NATO states and their combatants are once again a party to the war. We cannot trust anything we read, hear, or see in our media about the war in Ukraine and the wider environment of this war. Everything must be verified. For most people this is hardly possible. It can help to observe a basic principle of finding the truth: audiatur et altera pars – hear the other side, too! Using the example of the reporting and commentary on the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, on 15 and 16 November 2022, this will be attempted here.

Ukraine war and use of nuclear weapons

The final declaration of the heads of state and government or their representatives at this year's summit comprises 19 pages

G20

km. The G20 (Group of 20) is an informal association of states (plus the European Union) existing since 1999, which consider themselves to be the most important industrial and emerging countries. The resolutions of the G20 have no binding consequences. The meetings should serve as a forum for the exchange of problems of international economic and financial systems and also for the coordination of other important global themes such as climate policy, migration or terrorism. The G20 includes representatives of the following 19 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Germany, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Russia, Saudi-Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the USA, the People's Republic of China. The European Union belongs as well. The G20 is not representative of all the countries in the world as a whole. Western and western-oriented countries are also trying to dominate the G20. More than 170 UN countries of the world are not represented.

“Many claim that the West has already won the information war because its propaganda methods are much better. But one can also ask the question whether propaganda that is almost uniform, misanthropic and aimed at destructive affects, as practised by the West, is really more successful in the long run than a way of presentation that strives for polyphony, differentiation and objectivity. *For man is also endowed with reason and conscience.*”

or 52 points in the original English version.¹ Only two of these points explicitly deal with security policy issues. These two points read:

“3. This year, we have also witnessed the war in Ukraine further adversely impact the global economy. There was a discussion on the issue. We reiterated our national positions as expressed in other fora, including the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, which, in Resolution No. ES-11/1 dated 2 March 2022, as adopted by majority vote (141 votes for, 5 against, 35 abstentions, 12 absent) deploras in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and demands its complete and unconditional withdrawal from the territory of Ukraine. Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy – constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks. There were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions. Recognising that the G20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, we acknowledge that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy.

4. It is essential to uphold international law and the multilateral system that safeguards peace and stability. This includes defending all the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and adhering to international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and infrastructure in armed conflicts. The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible. The peaceful resolution of conflicts, efforts to address crises, as well as diplo-

macy and dialogue, are vital. Today's era must not be of war.”

Quite uniform interpretation by German-language media

On 16 November, numerous German-language media published their almost uniform interpretations. For example, the “Frankfurter Rundschau”, formerly considered rather “left-wing”, wrote: “The G20 summit in Bali succeeds in further isolating Russia. That is an important signal.” “*Putin* in the pillory” was the headline of the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, which generally was considered more “bourgeois”. A commentary of the newspaper said: “Moscow could not have counted on a diplomatic triumph at the G20 summit. Otherwise, the Russian President Putin himself would have flown to Bali. In his place, his foreign minister had to try to prevent the worst from happening: Russia being pilloried in front of the world because of its invasion of Ukraine. In this, *Lavrov* was about as successful as the Russian invasion army in Kherson. [...] Even more directly than through the planned final declaration, *Lavrov* may have learned in the talks held before and in Bali that Russia is also increasingly on the defensive on the diplomatic front.” The German “taz”, which is close to the Greens, commented: “There is no question: things are not going well for Vladimir Putin and his warriors of aggression. Russia's military defeat in the battle for the Ukrainian city of Kherson was now followed by a diplomatic defeat at the G20 summit in Bali.” Not differently the Swiss “Tages-Anzeiger” on the same day: “Closing ranks against Vladimir Putin. States condemn Russia's war surprisingly clearly”, was the title of the “report”. The commentary in the same issue read: “Most people have had

continued on page 12

"Audiatur et altera pars ..."

continued from page 11

enough. At the G20 summit, Russia's war in Ukraine was strongly condemned – and a piece of predictability was returned to the world."

How did Russia react?

How did Russia react to the G20 summit and the security policy points of the final declaration? The country's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, was asked in his press conference on 15 November²: "Is Russia willing to sign the G20 final declaration and agree to all its provisions? How will Ukraine be portrayed in it? Is the wording used in this document acceptable to Russia?"

His answer: "Our Western colleagues made every effort to politicise this document and to push wording through that condemns the Russian Federation's actions on behalf of the G20, that is, including us.

We made it clear that, if they really wanted to touch on the issue which is in no way part of the G20 agenda or competence, then we should be honest about it and put our differences on this matter on record. Indeed, there's a war going on in Ukraine, a hybrid war that the West unleashed and had been planning for many years now from the time it supported the power grab in the wake of the coup by openly racist neo-Nazi forces. Since then, NATO has been intensively developing Ukrainian territory, conducting military exercises and supplying weapons. You are aware of what happened next: the sabotage of the Minsk agreements and early phases of preparations for a [Ukrainian] military operation against Donbass. So, the draft declaration refers to the exchange of views on these issues. The parties reaffirmed their positions, which have been repeatedly made known in the United Nations, the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, in particular, when adopting the latest UN General Assembly resolution, which was put to a vote and was not unanimously approved. We made it clear that all sides had their own assessments, and these assessments were included in the resolution. The West added a phrase to the effect that many delegations condemned Russia. We put in a line that alternative points of

view were included as well. We think this is enough. The G20 is not supposed to drill deep into these matters."

The Russian Foreign Minister was also asked: "Has the United States succeeded in turning the G20 into an exclusively anti-Russia platform by changing the global agenda, or did the countries that came to Indonesia to discuss the issues that really matter expressed their views and opinions behind closed doors?"

His answer: "The majority of issues on the G20 agenda were discussed at the level of experts and ministers over the past few days. The results of these discussions have been expressed in the substantive part of the declaration.

As for Ukraine, the United States and all its allies spoke quite aggressively during the discussions held today, accusing Russia of 'unprovoked aggression against Ukraine.' The more often they speak about 'unprovoked aggression,' the more clearly everybody can see that it has been provoked by them [...]"

In this context, Sergey Lavrov also commented on the sanctions against his country: "Only the West and its closest satellites have joined the anti-Russia sanctions.

Differentiated and diverse statements ...

And how did Russian media report? In its English-language press review of 16 November, the Russian news agency TASS quoted the Russian newspaper "Izvestia" as saying: "Russia has included a provision on various assessments of the Ukraine crisis in the G20's final declaration, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who headed the Russian delegation to the summit, told a subsequent press conference. In Indonesia, he held a number of bilateral meetings, among them, with German and French delegates. This time, Western participants did not boycott Russia. Despite the irreconcilable stances of Moscow and Kiev, the experts interviewed by 'Izvestia' did not diminish the significance of the signals to hold talks coming from the G20 participants. Chairman of the *Valdai Discussion Club* Andrey Bystritsky told 'Izvestia' that the G20 can become a venue to seek a resolution to the crisis. 'It is im-

portant to keep in mind that the G20 is not just Western countries by far. Of course, the Ukrainian factor concerns everyone. Many participants, including China, insist on finding a political solution and applying the use of legitimate international law which, by the way, the West is not doing,' the expert noted. [...] At talks with Joe Biden, China's leader *Xi Jinping* hinted that the US could have played a part in stopping the bloodshed if an agreement on important issues was reached,' he added.

Senior Research Fellow at the Russian *Academy of Sciences' Institute of China and Contemporary Asia* Yelena Safronova told the newspaper that currently Beijing is interested both in multi- vectored development of ties with Russia and in predictable relations with Washington. 'Over several years of confrontation with the US, China, apparently, has realised that the assertive style [...] is not always effective,' she said, adding that Beijing will try to clarify its stance in relations with Washington while maximally retaining the tonality of partnership with Moscow."

... and questions about the meaningfulness of G20

On 16 November RT published a commentary by *Karin Kneissel*. Ms Kneissel is the former Austrian non-party foreign minister and emigrated from Austria some time ago. She writes: "For months, many have puzzled over whether this conference of the twenty most important industrialised and emerging countries would see a turning point in the current stalemate. Let it be said in advance: Expectations missed the reality. International relations are stuck in an impasse of speechlessness. The capitals talk past each other. Meetings of 30 or 40 minutes are not enough to establish trust or to seriously resolve hot issues. [...] Under such conditions, the most that can be done is to 'send political signals', as it is called in current jargon. But the real tasks of diplomatic meetings, such as building trust, discreet negotiations and substantive solutions, are hardly possible."

Many claim that the West has already won the information war because its propaganda methods are much better. But one can also ask the question whether propaganda that is almost uniform, misanthropic and aimed at destructive affects, as practised by the West, is really more successful in the long run than a way of presentation that strives for polyphony, differentiation and objectivity. *For man is also endowed with reason and conscience.* •

"The NATO states and their combatants are once again a party to the war. We cannot trust anything we read, hear, or see in our media about the war in Ukraine and the wider environment of this war. Everything must be verified. For most people this is hardly possible. It can help to observe a basic principle of finding the truth: *audiatur et altera pars* – hear the other side, too!"

¹ The English original can be found, for example, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60201/2022-11-16-g20-declaration-data.pdf>

² Authorised English version at https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/1838803/?lang=en

Despite Everything: “Solidarity, Heart and Humour on the lips”

A retrospective on the Northern Ireland conflict
until the peace treaty of 2007 by Dr phil. Titine Kriesi

by Diana and Winfried Pogorzelski

With her book, Titine Kriesi has published an important work at a time when the conflict regarding Northern Ireland has almost faded into oblivion. The author developed interest in postcolonial repercussions during her six-month stay in Sri Lanka. This point in time also marked the beginning of her interest in Ireland, or Northern Ireland to be more specific, which had been separated from Ireland by the United Kingdom through arbitrary demarcation in 1920. Her motivation to write this book was to contribute to a better understanding of the “Troubles” (1969-2007) and former Irish rebellions as well as to express her despise against war in the world (p. 17). Over a timespan of three years, the author resided in Northern Ireland for three months each year.

The first part of her book consists of an outline of Irish and Northern Irish history and of the background of the Northern Ireland conflict until the peace treaty of 2007 (p. 12p.). Her experiences and encounters with those who had been affected are written down therein. This part is shaped by commiseration for the personal fates of the people affected by this conflict. The second part named “Citizens in troubled times” consists of previously unreleased interviews and documents. These are transcriptions of tape recordings, which have not been altered whatsoever (pp. 117-237). The work is rich in pictures; from the approximately 60 black and white photographs, all but two are made by the author.



Children playing war.
(Pictures Titine Kriesi)

“Regarding the background” – a historic overview

The emphasis in this part of the book (pp. 15–116) lies on the so-called “Troubles”, meaning the armed conflict from the 1960s until 2007 – a war in the eyes of the author – between the catholic republicans who took a stand for a united Ireland and therefore a disengagement from the United Kingdom and the protestant unionists and loyalists respectively who fought for remaining a part of Great Britain. A chronology depicts the history of Ireland from 3000 B.C. over the conquest of the autonomous kingdom of Ireland by *Oliver Cromwell* (1649) up to the Easter Rising (1916) and the war of Independence which leads to the division of the country in 1921: Northern Ireland with its “Irish-Catholic” population saw itself drawn into a British dominion by a two-thirds majority of previously settled-down protestants from England and Scotland – up to this very day” (p. 19). The demographic development will lead to the catholics being the majority, opening the possibility of elections going in their favour.

The “Troubles” – almost 40 years of war (1969–2007)

“‘Troubles’, that was a euphemism” (p.21), because actually, it was a war right in front of our doorstep. There was barely a family “from which members had not been shot, interned or were on the run” (p. 22p.). The British occupation forces went on against the catholic Irish population with unimaginable hardship. The inhabitants of the slums, which defended themselves fiercely against the British soldiers, were particularly affected. The population was not prepared for being confronted with British elite troops, leading to windows and doors being walled shut.

Political prisoners were common, they were interned at the “Internment Camp Long Kesh” or “Maze Prison” (p. 23), where torture also occurred.

In the following, only a few striking incidents are listed to make the character of the “Troubles” clear:

- In 1969, loyalists burned down 700 houses of Catholics in Bombay Street, Belfast. Many people were incarcerated without having any link to the IRA. The violence grew, the “Ballymurphy Massacre” took place in 1971 when eleven civil rights activists were killed by the British Army.
- The starting point of the 1972 “Bloody Sunday” was a peaceful demonstration



Two street wipers:
“Let’s take a wee break.”

of 15,000 to 20,000 citizens in Derry against Britain’s internment policy. With the untenable accusation that Irish snipers had fired first from rooftops, the British army opened “live fire on the stunned crowd fleeing for their lives” who were unarmed (p. 97). Fourteen civil rights activists, including seven youths, were killed by the British paratrooper battalion.

- In 1972, the British army destroyed the barricades in Derry and Belfast, thanks to some personalities bloodshed was prevented as they stopped the youths from pointless resistance. They were also the ones who rebuilt the destroyed centre of Derry with the youth during the IRA bombing campaign of the 1970s and 1980s.
- Political negotiations to settle the conflict were hard and tough, and the interests of the two sides diverged widely. War and peace negotiations dragged on, costing more lives; the conflict could not be resolved militarily. Agreements in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement included the disarmament of paramilitary fighters on both sides and a guarantee by London to respect a vote in Ireland and Northern Ireland for a united Ireland. A *Northern Ireland Assembly* elected in the same year represented the interests of both Protestant and Catholic populations and elected the Northern Ireland government; however, dependence on the British government remained. In 2007, a peace agreement was reached and the British troops left. The goal of a

continued on page 14

"Despite Everything: ..."

continued from page 13

united and independent Ireland remains unachieved to this day.

The author draws a mixed "preliminary balance" (p. 109): People had to get their act together and face challenges, the overcoming of which was still a dream of the future. British colonial policy had left "bitter, bloody traces" (p. 111), which rather strengthened the resilience of the Irish; the conflicts had resulted in a "seriously undertaken, successful peace process" (ibid.). However, the peace is fragile and the wounds are far from healed.

She concludes with a moving tribute to the Irish Catholic population of Northern Ireland: "A people deeply rooted in its Gaelic-Christian values, politically minded, with its own culture, historical consciousness, close social ties, a distinctive form of mutual aid and sympathy for the suffering of its neighbour and the world, public spirit, heart and humour on its lips – a people who have immeasurably enriched the world in science, literature, music and art." (S. 113)

"Citizens in troubled times – interviews and documents"

This part of the book contains numerous sources such as transcripts of interviews by the author with Catholics, letters, speeches as well as a prayer and a moving account by the author of her visit to "Her Majesty's Prison Maze". The texts, of which only a few can be presented here, are particularly representative of the poor population, who were above all harassed and suffered most directly from the conflict. Housewives, politicians, pastors, young people and others have their say.

For example, the three interviews with Father O'Bradaigh (1973) are impressive. He explains the causes of the Northern Ireland conflict, which are based on discrimination against Catholics, and the hatred of Protestants who are afraid of losing power. Catholics were disadvantaged – both in terms of jobs and university attendance – and therefore unemployment and emigration rates were high. There was a referendum on British membership, which at that time was negative for Catholics, because a majority wanted Northern Ireland to remain in the British Empire. O'Bradaigh insists that Northern Ireland belongs to Ireland. When asked about IRA bombings in London, he expresses his disapproval; they had harmed the Irish cause (pp. 119-135).

Violence by British soldiers against women and young girls occurred again and again. For example, the mother of a wanted teenager suffers an eye injury; another woman is beaten bloody with a rifle butt in the street (p. 137f.); the soldiers also do not shy away from beating children, which leaves the relatives extremely bitter (p. 149). In Armagh Women's Prison, horrif-



*Blinded by a rubber bullet.
Richard Moore with friend and dog.*

ic scenes take place, resulting in injuries to the victims. Men were repeatedly subjected to torture in "Long Kesh" (p. 172).

The author also spoke to the *Hegerty* couple, whose son was shot during "Operation Motorman". He had not belonged to any organisation and had only wanted to visit his uncle. Mrs. Hegerty and her son had previously rescued a policeman and two British officers from the hands of Catholic rebels, so her son was not a Molotov cocktail thrower, as the British army later claimed. The couple also objects to all Catholics being labelled as members of the IRA. Mrs. Hegerty vividly describes the state of the British soldiers who came to the country: "There's a young soldier out in our garden one day and the husband and Mr. Z was

standing out at the door and the British soldier went berserk and he started shouting: 'I don't want to be here! I never wanted to be sent here!' He says, 'it was them pigs sent us over!' He was shouting at us." (p. 166)

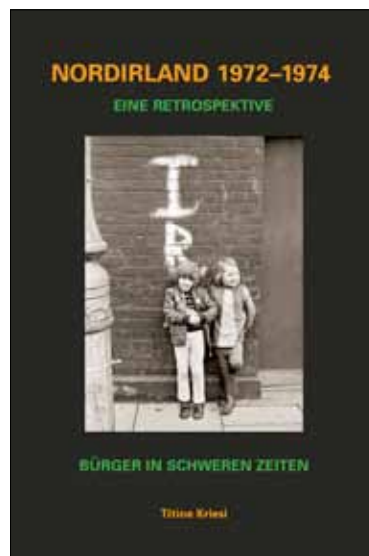
In order to be able to report authentically, the author visited the camp (she is passed off as a relative of a prisoner), which is called "Her Majesty the Queen's Concentration Camp Long Kesh" by the Irish because of the violations of human rights. Torture is no exception there. The detailed descriptions of what one has to endure during such a visit – the interrogation, being thoroughly patted down several times, rummaging through all pockets – get under the skin.

The telephone conversation with *Richard Moore*, who lost his sight as a boy due to a rubber bullet from the British army, is also moving. He never gave up, learned Braille, attended grammar school and went to university and studied social administration because he wanted to be a social worker. From the reparation payments from the British, he bought two pubs in Derry, which he ran for fourteen years (p. 235). In 1996, he founded the organisation "Children in Crossfire", which arranged partnerships in sub-Saharan countries, South America and Asia (p. 237). There, defenceless, hungry and disabled children are helped.

The photos – an expression of lived humanity

The photos in the book are impressive. They show children playing war, barricades, British soldiers in action, many ordinary citizens and seasoned personalities who are not ready to give up, who stick together and last but not least do not lose their sense of humour. Thus, one sees two street sweepers taking a break, smiling at the viewer – leaning on their tools – or an elderly woman cleaning outside her bricked-up front door, looking confidently into the camera. Numerous children's drawings document that the youngest are constant witnesses to unimaginable violence. "Saracens [armoured personnel carriers], planes and helicopters scare me!" is written under one impressive drawing (p. 65).

For those who want to understand the problem of the Northern Ireland conflict, Titine Kriesi's book is highly recommended. Pictures, descriptions and transcripts of conversations bear eloquent witness to the situation of the Catholic Northern Irish in the 1970s. It is characterised by the fact that the author knew those affected personally, so that they opened up and told their story. Anyone who has read the texts and let the illustrations sink in will not forget them so quickly. The book makes an important contribution to coming to terms with this part of our history and to peace between the parties to the conflict. •



Kriesi, Titine. Nordirland 1972–1974, Bürger in schweren Zeiten. Eine Retrospektive (Northern Ireland 1972–1974, Citizens in Troubled Times. A Retrospection), Wil 2022; ISBN 978-3-033-09286-0

Swiss spirit – indispensable especially today

A Swiss-historical reflection on a current occasion, in three parts

by Dr Peter Küpfer

My generation (the first post-war generation) grew up in the spirit of a fundamental return to the core of our state. In the parental home and in the classroom, our educators, from left to right, were united in the conviction: No more war! This also included a quiet but self-confident pride on the part of our parents and teachers (some of whom had completed active service) that Switzerland had survived the World War, albeit with privations, but without a catastrophe for our country – and this in active sympathy with the fate of less fortunate nations.

This basic national consensus, which was essentially unchallenged for 20 years, was thoroughly lost in the decades after 1960 at the latest; not just like that, as we (can) know today, but as a result of targeted, culturally politically motivated constant bombardment of everything that rightly constituted Switzerland's pride for generations: of our history, our multi-cultural population, which has always been exposed to tensions; of our direct democracy, which is still unique in the world; of our real people's army, which is just as unique (every Swiss is obliged to serve in the military, as it is even today written in our constitution); of our good school system, which is recognised worldwide; of our active solidarity in international emergencies; and our well-developed social services. This has resulted in a certain political character of

the people: the calm self-confidence of the sovereign citizen (who elects his members of parliament and his governments himself and still has the final say, even in setting the tax rate that also applies to himself), the distrust of political rhetoric and blague, even of stirred-up emotions. In the past, this also led to a corresponding style of public debate that avoids polemics and personal attacks and is oriented towards the matter in hand.

All this was neither a gift of providence nor the result of ingenious "leaders" who were out of touch with the people. This Swiss spirit has developed over centuries, it had to mature, often only in batches and dramatically, until it could bear fruit. Therefore, knowledge of the relevant historical contexts and respect for traditional achievements must be demanded (even if they were preceded by long errors and misguided attitudes). This respect for what has been and what has grown must also be shown to our present generations, and thus also demanded; the younger ones profit from the often bitter lessons of the older ones, which history has imposed on them. It is the task of the older generation to pass on this collective treasure (it is what in the real sense is conceptualised as culture) to the younger generation, modern anthropology calls this cultural transfer (cf. Nestor, Moritz. *Man as Creator and Creature of Culture*, *Current Concerns* No. 3/4 of 16 February 2022).

To curtail, dilute, falsify and belittle this collective spiritual heritage is an act of self-destruction. Those in our times who carry it out, politicians, historians, teachers, journalists, "creative artists" (unfortunately, they are today often the opposite of their self-given title, namely destructive artists) should be so honest as to say with what aim they are carrying out this systematic cultural erosion of Switzerland and its spirit, which has grown in constant conflicts. And there should be even more people who put a brief and objective stop to these goings-on with a conciliatory (freundeidgenössisch) but firm veto.

Especially nowadays, when serious public debate is increasingly being replaced by rhetoric, the stirring up of mere emotions and a simplistic "good/evil" scheme, qualities like those mentioned are of fundamental importance. These qualities, which historians used to call "Swiss spirit" without reserving it only for Swiss people, should also be given more attention and practised again in our schools, our associations, in the media and in political events.

That is why in this text I would like to recall three promoters and preservers of the Swiss spirit and call on us to engage with them, to respect their spiritual heritage and to use it for our present. The essence of their kind of Swiss spirit should blow increasingly today again, not only within our borders. •

Niklaus von Flüe prevents an imminent Civil War in the Early Confederation (Part I)

pk. The first person to be discussed here is *Niklaus von Flüe* (1417–1487), a hermit in Flüeli above Sarnen who was already famous and respected far and wide in his days. In his "first life", the ascetic hermit was a far-sighted, capable farmer from Obwalden and a caring family father, a respected citizen, chief justice and soldier, who took part in all the federal campaigns of his time (including the cruel battles of the Old Zurich War, the first "fratricidal war" of the Confederation), soon reaching the rank of captain due to his merits. The later hermit in the Ranft was also an Obwalden delegate to the Federal Diet. Many would have liked to see him as Obwalden Landammann, an office he declined out of modesty. Gifted early on "with a second face", as contemporary witnesses assured us, turned to inner piety, prayers and fasting, his desire to leave his secure existence and live "entirely to God and faith" became overriding. He came to an agree-

ment with his much younger wife after a lengthy, mutually honest and calm discussion. So "Brother Klaus", as he called himself from then on, said goodbye to her and his ten children in mid-life and withdrew to his nearby yet secluded hermitage, where he often received visits from those seeking advice and those in despair. Soon he was known far beyond his traditional circle of influence and his advice was sought after. Pilgrims from and to Einsiedeln often made a diversion via "Flüeli" to seek advice and spiritual support from the famous hermit, including magistrates and even potentates, as the chronicler (*Diethelm von Schilling*) reports.

After the victorious battles against the House of Habsburg (Morgarten, Sempach), the fratricidal war against the powerful city of Zurich in the Confederate alliance (Old Zurich War), which was victorious for the Confederates, and the fight

of the Confederates against the equally ambitious and powerful Duke *Charles the Bold* of Burgundy (Burgundian War), parts of the war-tested rural populations had become overconfident and were eager for easy conquests. From central Switzerland, armed bands formed more or less spontaneously as bands of irregulars who attacked the neighbourhood, besieged towns and demanded justified delayed or even imaginary payments from them. The most famous example was the so-called "Saubannerzug" of 1477, in which an army of high-spirited peasants from central Switzerland marched up to the proud city of Geneva and terrified it because of allegedly missing protection payments. Although the Confederates themselves were able to stop this procession of more than a thousand irregulars and bring their agitators to their sens-

"Swiss spirit ..."

continued from page 15

es, such selfish acts of violence jeopardised the Confederates' previous "guiding principle" of defending their rights, handed down from time immemorial and guaranteed by the Empire, against unjustified claims by princes.

When, after the victory over Burgundy, the urban localities, especially Bern, wanted to admit the cities of Fribourg and Solothurn, which were allied with Bern, to the Confederation, this wish met with decisive resistance from the rural localities of Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Zug at the Federal Diet (1481 in Stans). Whereas in the then still 8-city Confederation the relationship between city and country towns had been balanced, the country towns feared that in future they would be outvoted by the cities. Soon, threatening tones from the countryside against the towns became unmistakable. Negotiations and attempts at conciliation could not soften the stalemate at the repeatedly reconvened session in Stans. For this reason, some of the participants in the session had already attempted to consult the hermit in nearby Flüeli. Tradition has it that the hermit's advice was finally accepted at the last minute by the parish priest in Stans, Father *Heini am Grund*, when many of the delegates were already preparing to leave for good under all the signs of a conflictual breakdown in the talks, which could easily have led to a new fratricidal quarrel among the Confederates. The hermit encouraged the



Niklaus von Flüe. Charcoal drawing, after the original by Leo Samberger intended for the retreat house Bad Schönbrunn near Zug. (picture Die Woche im Bild of 8 September 1929)

deputies of the country towns not to insist on their maximum restrictions towards the new town candidates, but to agree to a compromise that contained concrete and finally also accepted points of agreement.¹

The result of Brother Klaus' successful mediation has gone down in Swiss history as the "Stans Agreement" of 1481. It was not only Niklaus von Flüe's own great deed, it was also a decisive step in the development of democratic consciousness in the consolidating Confed-

eration. In the sense of the wise counsellor, everything revolved around the fact that genuine federal unity could never simply be the result of a mere numerical outvote of "the others", but rather the at least partially accepted, co-realised and thus at least to some extent also taken into account "other opinion". The conflict between the country and the city, which had appeared here in an impressive way as a threat dividing the confederation's network of alliances, continued to be virulent in the following centuries, above all as a confessional conflict (Reformation). It was dramatically intensified in the years before and after the founding of the modern Confederation in 1848 (industrialisation) and worked off its destructive potential in the long-lasting so-called "culture war" between progressives and traditionalists (see Part 2 of this article). The extremely sharp tones that emerged there have not yet been overcome to this day. A decisive step towards at least a partial calming of the situation came centuries after the "Stans

Agreement" from an unexpected source: the military. This is presented in the second part, which is dedicated to General *Guillaume Henri Dufour*, a general of the Swiss Tagsatzung troops in action against the "Sonderbund" in 1847. •

¹ Specifically, this concerned the passage that the two "new" cities were only allowed to enter into limited military alliances with outsiders (cf. Holzherr, Georg. *Niklaus von Flüe*, in: Jaekle Erwin and Eduard Stäubli, *Grosse Schweizer und Schweizerinnen*, Stäfa (Th. Gut & Co. Verlag) 1990, p. 23f.).

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