

# Current Concerns

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

English Edition of *Zeit-Fragen*

## Who is afraid of the neutrality initiative? Deliberate insinuations to replace a factual discussion

by René Roca\*

“Switzerland is facing one of the greatest challenges since the Second World War. Does it want to subjugate itself submissively with Europe to the US dictate and thus put power or force before right and humanity? Or does it want to strengthen international humanitarian law as a neutral country and actively offer a hand to end wars and reconcile opponents?”



The launch of the neutrality initiative at the beginning of November last year was successful, and the project is now in the phase of collecting signatures. Rarely does an initiative have such a topical relevance. The war in Ukraine and the demands directed at Switzerland for direct or indirect arms deliveries are putting Switzerland under intense pressure as a neutral country. Recently, however, there have been increasing indications that certain circles are actively obstructing the collection of signatures for the initiative and want to unsettle the Swiss population. The aim is to undermine the broad support for Swiss neutrality and cause it to crumble. Manipulation techniques are being used to denigrate the initiative and its authors, with the aim of preventing people from signing the initiative in the first place and causing it to fail at the collection stage. If this does not succeed, at least a carpet of misinformation has already been laid out for a future voting campaign. For example, the historian *Marco Jorio* calls the neutrality initiative the “Putin initiative”, an outrageous statement without any reference to reality. Is this meant to eliminate one’s own reflection?

A high point of such defamation is now provided by the historian *Jakob Tanner*, who makes the supporters of the initiative appear as they were ideologically related to dictators and fascists (“*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” of 22 May 2023). In doing so, Tanner reaches into the mothballs of the old-68 neo-Marxists. He wants to tear the mask off the faces of alleged “fascists” and ignores the fact that with the help of the initiative, citizens simply have an original democratic concern, namely to discuss a cornerstone of Switzerland’s understanding of the state

and to anchor it more clearly in the Federal Constitution. In addition, some statements on the neutrality initiative simply misrepresent facts. For example, Tanner claims that the Federal Council adopted the EU sanctions against Russia after a “five-day learning phase”. However, the Federal Council did not do this after a closed meeting out of “higher understanding”, but because of massive threats from the USA. In addition, the Swiss major banks – among them ironically the CS! – also put pressure on the Federal Council after the start of the Ukraine war; because for them the lucrative US business was in danger. The US government threatened with sanctions, if Switzerland did not give in. Did this course of events escape the attention of the bank critic Tanner or is he, like the FDP president, now firmly in the hands of the “transatlantics”? This also shows striking parallels to the 1990s, when Tanner was part of the *Bergier* Commission and helped to deconstruct the Swiss understanding of history. Obviously, many commentators also today are not concerned with the analysis of historical sources, but rather with the devaluation or reevaluation of Swiss values such as neutrality and humanity.

Myths about the origins of the initiative are also intensely spread, and many people are willing to disseminate them further. There is no doubt that *Christoph Blocher* [*Swiss People’s Party*, national-conservative] gave the impetus for the initiative. For some, just this name alone is enough to turn off their own critical mind. Blocher’s idea was then taken up and implemented by a non-party group. The real initiative text was developed through an interactive process. The result of this are the present articles that are to be incorporated into the Federal

Constitution. They are also based on a detailed legal expert opinion. The initiative was therefore not hatched in some back room and is not controlled by any party headquarters. All those involved, and now above all the initiative committee, are genuinely concerned to finally clarify the pending issues surrounding Swiss neutrality.

Incidentally, there are also opponents of the initiative who would like to see such a fundamental discussion on Swiss neutrality and who therefore sign the initiative. Only in this way it will be possible that the population can discuss the proposal objectively. The central question is whether Switzerland should return to integral neutrality in a democratic process. Already for thirty years, or more precisely since the First Gulf War in 1991, Switzerland has had only a “differential” neutrality. It supports economic sanctions, some of which have devastating effects on the civilian population affected, but which have practically no influence on the course of a conflict. Such an approach harms the work of the ICRC and demonstrably weakens the Good Offices. Switzerland is facing one of the greatest challenges since the Second World War. Does it want to subjugate itself submissively with Europe to the US dictate and thus put power or force before right and humanity? Or does it want to strengthen international humanitarian law as a neutral country and actively offer a hand to end wars and reconcile opponents? •

\* René Roca holds a doctorate in history and is a member of the initiative committee “Preservation of Swiss neutrality (neutrality initiative)”.

# Switzerland's agreement with Brussels recedes into the distant future

## Swiss Trade Union Federation SGB speaks plainly

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

*It is becoming increasingly obvious that a new treaty with the EU, as the people in Brussels envisage, is out of the question for Switzerland. The filigree Swiss state system, which is based on direct democracy decisions and the responsible cooperation of free citizens, can simply not be subordinated to the Brussels-controlled single market concept serving the interests of global corporations. The busy behaviour of the head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, Ignazio Cassis, who is currently drafting so-called "benchmarks" for a future negotiating mandate, is of little help. The fact is that his State Secretary Livia Leu, after ten inconclusive rounds of talks in Brussels as the fifth head of delegation throws in the sponge and prefers to become ambassador in Berlin. In Berne they are reckoning with a postponement of the EU dossier until at least after the parliamentary elections next October.*

Now the Swiss Trade Union Federation (SGB) is speaking plainly: it continues to oppose the deterioration of protection of Swiss wages and also rejects the threatening "total market liberalisation" in the public service. *Current Concerns* has interviewed SGB central administrator Reto Wyss (see page 3).

It is about time that the EU ban on state aid is finally put on the table. Until today, the Federal Council has tried to hide the fact that a new treaty with Brussels would, among many other negative effects, also result in a massive restriction of our still relatively good public service.

A recent decision by the EU Commission against the French freight railways *Fret SNCF* is also making Swiss readers sit up and take notice: The Commission condemned the subsidisation of the railways by the state as illegitimate. In order to avoid the threat of fines and repayments running into billions (!), the French government finds itself forced to split up and privatise the railways. Similar proceedings are under way against German railways *Deutsche Bahn*.<sup>1</sup>

Switzerland would suffer the same fate if it were to enter into new "negotiations" with – respectively dictates from – Brussels. This is because state financing and even more so the ownership of the Confederation (SBB, Post) or the cantons and municipalities (power plants, water sup-

ply) would contradict the anti-social EU ban on state aid.<sup>2</sup>

### Swiss Federation of Trade Unions rejects liberalisation of the public service

At its delegates' meeting of 2 June 2023, the Swiss Trade Union Federation (SGB) reaffirmed its position on European policy: "The opening up to the EU must benefit employees in Switzerland. A promising negotiating mandate requires binding commitments to maintain wage protection and guarantees against cuts in the public service"<sup>3</sup>

In its resolution, the SGB delegates' meeting stated: "With regard to the public service the discussion is going in the wrong direction. There is a threat of a complete opening of the electricity market, although liberalisation in the EU in recent years has led to an enormous price increase. In the case of the railways, too, there is the threat of a misconceived opening of the market as well as wage dumping, but also price dumping." And further: "Public transport in Switzerland (ÖV) must not be weakened. The SGB rejects the opening up of the public transport market. The same applies to a subsidy review, which would weaken public transport."

The delegates' assembly admittedly considers an agreement in the area of public health and crisis management to be positive, but rejects a "reduction of the already too low public subsidies in the health sector, enforced by subsidy jurisdiction". Why then a health agreement with Brussels? It corresponds to Switzerland's sovereignty to reach agreements with individual neighbouring countries or other European states on an equal footing, as we have always done.

### Social democrats to support the trade unions and Switzerland demanded!

It is more than disconcerting when National Councillor and SP parliamentary group leader *Roger Nordmann* declares in the press that Switzerland in a treaty with Brussels of course could not "lever out" the EU rules on wage protection or on the financing of public services. Instead, the Federal Council had to present a legislative package with "EU-compatible forms of public financing of rail transport or other public services".<sup>4</sup> Switzerland, in anticipatory obedience as a recipient of or-

ders from Brussels? On which side of the table does Nordmann actually sit? In the midst of all this EU zeal, people seem to forget that they are social and democratic. •

<sup>1</sup> von Burg, Denis; Aebi, Mischa. "Verhandlungen Schweiz–EU. EU-Vertrag gefährdet die SBB und den Service public" (Negotiations Switzerland–EU. EU treaty endangers the SBB and the public service). In: *SonntagsZeitung* of 28 May 2023

<sup>2</sup> Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) Article 107 (1). In so far as the treaties do not stipulate otherwise, any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources, which, by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods, distort or threaten to distort competition, shall be incompatible with the single market in so far as they impair trade between member states.

<sup>3</sup> Assembly of Delegates of the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions. *Media release* dated 2 June 2023

<sup>4</sup> von Burg, Denis; Aebi, Mischa. "Verhandlungen Schweiz–EU. EU-Vertrag gefährdet die SBB und den Service public" (Negotiations Switzerland–EU. EU treaty endangers the SBB and the public service). In: *SonntagsZeitung* of 28 May 2023

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# No downsizing of Swiss public service!

**“A contract with the EU which allows this to happen, is not acceptable for the trade unions”**

*Interview with Reto Wyss\*, Central Secretary Swiss Trade Union Federation (SGB)*



Reto Wyss  
(picture ma)

*Current Concerns: I am very pleased to hear that the SGB addresses public service in connection with the possible treaty between Switzerland and the EU. To my knowledge, the Federal Council overlooks public*

*service and claims that employees were only not satisfied with wage payment protection. Is that correct?*

Reto Wyss: Yes, exactly. We always hinted at public service, but that has not been quite recognised yet. There have already been cantons that commissioned an expert opinion regarding public service in recent years. They revolved around feared interventions by the EU into cantonal competences, for example regarding building insurances and other cantonal monopolies, also they revolved around the cantonal banks etc.

*How do you see the consequences of an agreement with the EU for our public service? The SGB at that time went to referendum against the liberalisation of the electricity market.<sup>1</sup>*

The former head of DETEC, *Simona Sommaruga*, wanted to conclude an agreement on the electricity market, which is in the drawer and would have to be revised. But what was always clear was that the electricity agreement would only be concluded with a complete opening of the market, that was one condition on the part of the EU. The other condition was that it would be linked to an institutional framework agreement. When this failed two years ago, it was clear that there would be no electricity agreement, and thus the justification that we had to open up the electricity market because the EU wanted that also disappeared.

*How would we benefit from such an electricity agreement? France and Germany would not give us electricity just because of said agreement if they don't have enough for themselves.*

Yes, in an acute shortage situation everyone would probably look for themselves. One could discuss the necessities and advantages of an electricity agree-

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“We (the SGB) wanted to effectively show, in the context of the news about France, what could happen if we had to adopt the EU aid regime. This is a very broad, complicated construct with which the EU can potentially or tends to intervene in all areas of public service. That is why it is so dangerous for Switzerland.”

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ment for a long time. But it is now clear that the agreement would only exist with a framework treaty. We had a glimmer of hope that the EU would tackle a real reform of the electricity market in connection with the electricity shortage, but the corresponding proposals have not surprisingly disappeared in a drawer after a few months. This is the electricity sector.

*Now on to rail traffic: The EU commission wants to penalise France massively because they did not yet privatise their traffic of goods. Which consequences do you see for Switzerland?*

This is not only what the EU Commission wants, but also the neoliberal French government. So it's the other way round: the government refers to the EU Commission and tells its own population: we'll just have to privatise now. But France is a big country, the French could stand up on the barricades and say: Let's go! We won't let you tell us that we have to break up our freight transport. But the *Macron* government says: Unfortunately, we have to do it, because the EU wants it – but it also wants it itself.

On Switzerland: we (the SGB) wanted to effectively show, in the context of the news about France, what could happen if we had to adopt the EU subsidy regime. This is a very broad, complicated construct with which the EU can potentially or tends to intervene in all areas of public service. That is why it is so dangerous for Switzerland. These questions arise with the current agreements if they are “dynamised” (made subject to EU law) and also with new agreements that may be concluded.

On rail transport in Switzerland: As I said in the *SonntagsZeitung*, a new treaty with the EU would potentially call into question the future of *SBB Cargo*, but also the public financing of passenger transport would be jeopardised to some extent. Brussels could, for example, regard the favourable federal loans for *SBB* as inadmissible subsidies and take action against

them. And at best, the support of regional rail transport with public funds would also be threatened. A treaty with the EU that allows this is not acceptable to the trade unions.

*In contrast to France, it is ultimately the people who decide, and the majority certainly does not want the EU to interfere in the public service.*

Exactly. That is the same basic consideration that we have with wage protection. We have been trying to make it clear to the Federal Council for years. Even if you don't care what we as trade unions think, you can't have certain things in a treaty if it's absolutely clear that there won't be a majority for them in a referendum.

*You also mentioned the healthcare system. What are your thoughts on a healthcare agreement with the EU?*

For example, we are thinking of the cooperation in the pandemic, where Switzerland was suddenly excluded, in the crisis intervention mechanism, in the corresponding data exchange and in the committees. As is well known, viruses do not stop at the border. In the most acute phase, however, the EU came relatively quickly and allowed Switzerland to participate provisionally, because they also realised that otherwise ultimately no one would be served. So it's positive if Switzerland is involved.

Now, however, cross-border cooperation is taking up a lot of space in the EU. There is a whole area of “cross-border health care”, where many questions arise. And as far as subsidies are concerned, it would have to be ensured that subsidies to Swiss hospitals are not objected to. And with regard to patient care, from a trade union point of view we do not want to abolish the territoriality principle. We don't want the health insurance company to suddenly come and tell me as a patient: You have to have this expensive operation in Germany because the doctor and the

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\* Reto Wyss is responsible for economics, health, public services and cantonal finances at the SGB.

# This is how the EU moves to the periphery of the world – voluntarily!

by Ivan Hoffmann

*cm. The well-known Czech journalist Ivan Hoffman – dissident under socialism, after 1989 working for “Radio Free Europe” for several years, then journalist, editor and presenter on Czech state radio – has written a short commentary on current EU policy. Ivan Hoffman hits the bull’s eye with his commentary, which is why it should also be read in German-speaking Europe.*

The world is on the move. It always has been and always will be, but sometimes the movement is associated with hope and sometimes with fear. We are now on a sine wave [with swings up and down, cm]; there have been good things, but there will not be any more in the near future. Hold on to your hats (in the storm), things are going downhill. The cause of a society’s decline is usually not a poor assessment of coming developments, but the feeling that development is triumphantly complete, that the future is certain and ours, so that it is pointless to predict the future. The longer a society vegetates in this self-deception and lives in meaninglessness, the longer it takes to get back on its feet. This applies not only to the resurrection of the real economy, but also to the resurrection of the spirit.

Had we not been too lazy in the past to recognise the trends that heralded our current decline, we might not be living in decline now. Geopolitically, the major players on the political chessboard are predictable, and their actions are logically based as much on power and economic ambition as on historical memory and experience. China will not forget the

century of humiliation by the West. Russia will not forget the interventions of the collective West led by Napoleon and Hitler. And the Americans are unshakably convinced that they are chosen by God to rule the world.

The predictable thing about China is that it is the oldest uninterrupted civilisation in the world that does nothing without reference to its past. China is conservative, homo-genic and inward-looking. That is why it has always built walls around itself. Physical walls, like the Great Wall of China, cultural walls, financial walls, or other walls, like recently when it comes to the internet, artificial intelligence and viruses. China is not aggressive, but it knows that it must be able to “dance with wolves”.

Russia is a predictable superpower that knows it must be prepared to defend its existence. Capitalist Russia, like former socialist Russia, realistically sees a war ahead that it cannot afford to lose. There is a social consensus on this, visible through the support of the army and the president. Russia knows that the West only respects strength. It is convinced that the West cannot be trusted and that it is not a serious trading partner.

The US is also geopolitically predictable. Its national interest is to benefit from world domination. The Americans have no firm allies, only firm interests. Anyone they cannot control is an enemy or a potential rival. The American tradition is one of war. The Americans have waged wars incessantly practically throughout their existence. The American doctrine in Europe is to prevent the combination of

German technology and Russian raw materials, and in world politics to prevent the strategic alliance between Russia and China.

On such a clearly defined playing field, the fate of the EU was also quite predictable. The EU was never able to find sovereign geopolitics to counterbalance the antagonism of the great powers. The EU has allowed itself to be pushed out of global business by the Chinese, has allowed itself to be dragged into the war in Ukraine by the Americans and has slammed the door on cheap raw materials and a lucrative market in Russia. The EU is now only watching a geopolitical game in which the rivalry of the USA with Russia and China is changing the political map of the world.

New perspectives, on the other hand, are opening up for Asia, Africa, the Arab world and South America. In this changing world, Europe is destined only for the periphery. The embarrassing thing is that the EU was not relegated to the periphery by the great powers. It chose it for itself! It is not entirely clear why. Simply out of stupidity?

By the way, we [Czechs] are a periphery in the EU periphery and we were not banished there by Brussels. This path was chosen by the Fiala government. And it is not entirely clear why ...

Source: Czech original: <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Dobrovolne-na-periferii-EU-Z-blbosti-Ivan-Hoffman-jiny-duvod-nevidi-735721> of 6 May 2023; in German: <https://globalbridge.ch> of 23 May 2023 (Translation into German Anna Wetlinska and Christian Müller) (Translation from German into English *Current Concerns*)

## “No downsizing of Swiss public service!”

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nurses work much cheaper there, then we have to pay less. We wouldn’t want that kind of situation.

*As the SGB wrote, our government already tries to downsize the financing of our health care supply. Even worse if our administration would work together with the EU to save funds in health care.*

Yes, effective! Today, despite all liberalisation efforts, our health system is still strongly planned by the state. And if we have huge capacities in the hospitals and (with tax money and health insurance premiums) billions in expenditure per year, then we cannot say at the other end: And

now we open everything up and see what happens.

As I said, we are not saying that all this has to happen. But as long as these questions have not been answered and such fears have not been seriously clarified, it is legitimate to raise them. Even if it means: you are alarmist, you paint the devil on the wall.

*When we read in the newspaper that the EU is threatening to impose fines in the billions if a state is not prepared to privatise, then the alarm really is sounded.*

Yes, that’s basically the way it is with non-permitted subsidies: If something is not in conformity, it has to be paid back retroactively over a period of years. There are examples where it was done that way.

*That is a strong point for Switzerland to be cautious about a new agreement.*

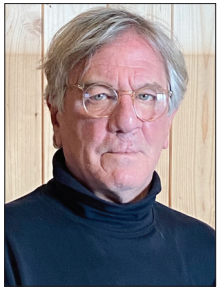
Exactly. What is happening here is highly complex. What is in the EU Treaty, what does the Commission decide? There is also a tug-of-war between the institutions. For example, in the whole area of mandatory tendering, there has been a tug-of-war between the Commission and the EU Parliament for years. And because it is so complex, there are also many dangers.

*Thank you very much, Mister Wyss, for this insightful interview.*

<sup>1</sup> The Federal Council and Parliament introduced the opening of the electricity market anyway, but only partially, for companies, not for households. [Editor’s note]

# “To be a journalist today”

by Patrick Lawrence\*



Patrick Lawrence  
(picture ef)

*The crisis in journalism today, and I am sure we agree there is a crisis in journalism, is most acute in the United States, in my opinion, but it seems evident to one or another degree throughout the West.*

## Institutional crisis of western media

This crisis has various dimensions. It is institutional. Corporate-owned media, or “mainstream media,” or “legacy media,” have reached shockingly low levels of public trust as measured by various opinion polls. The Gallup Organisation, one of the old-line polling firms, published its latest survey of trust in public institutions last summer. They do this every year. And I still find it remarkable to repeat these numbers. Gallup’s findings indicate that 16 percent of Americans believe what they read in their newspapers. The figure for television news broadcasts is even more astonishing: 11 percent of Americans take television news seriously.

I like to turn these figures upside down to get the full effect: 84 of every 100 Americans do not trust what they read in newspapers; 89 of every 100 Americans do not believe what they hear on television news programs.

This is one kind of crisis. Understanding this is very important. At the risk of reductive reasoning, at bottom I think it reflects the unhealthy, highly dysfunctional relationship of media to various kinds of power – political, administrative, corporate – financial in that these media are owned by publicly listed companies that privilege shareholders and so are concerned primarily with their stock prices and their profit margins.

\* Patrick Lawrence is a writer, a commentator, a critic, a longtime newspaper and magazine correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the “International Herald Tribune”. He is a columnist, essayist, author and lecturer and writes often on Europe and Asia. Patrick Lawrence has published five books; his most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century*. His new book *The Journalists and Their Shadows* will be published shortly by Clarity Press. His Twitter account @thefloutist has been permanently censored without explanation. His web site is [patricklawrence.us](http://patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [patreon.com/thefloutist](http://patreon.com/thefloutist). The text reproduces a lecture given by Patrick Lawrence to the readership of *Zeit-Fragen / Horizons et débats / Current Concerns* in Switzerland on 14 April 2023.

And as I think I mentioned on this occasion last year, when I was among you via Zoom, in my view this crisis is also the consequence of the defensive posture the American imperium has assumed from the time of the 11 September 2001, attacks in New York and Washington. American society as a whole, in all its dimensions, reflects this defensiveness. Ideological conformity in this circumstance becomes imperative – unless, of course, one is unwilling to abandon one’s principles for the sake of safety and security.

## What the crisis means for the individual journalist

What I want to talk about today is related to this environment: There’s no question in my mind about this. But I want to look at the crisis in Western media from a very different perspective. I want to consider what this crisis means for the indi-

vidual source of inspiration, and for this reason I look forward to explaining my thinking and discovering whether or not you see the validity of my idea for “a poor journalism” as a variant of Grotowski’s “poor theatre.”

## Initial experience

From my earliest days in journalism, and I am going back to the early 1970s, when the U.S. was still waging the Vietnam War and America was deeply divided about it, I have taken a somewhat schizophrenic approach to my profession. My first employment was with a paper called the “Daily News”, a New York tabloid that was then the largest-circulation newspaper in America. The News could not have been further to the right politically and was a firm supporter of the war. At The News I learned craft, technique, method – whatever else one may say about it, The

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“If there is any prospect that corporate media will repudiate their numerous corruptions, it will be because independent media have either inspired or required them to do so. To put this point another way, in my view – and by many years of experience – it is in independent media that I find the profession’s dynamism. It is among them that I see the opportunity for the individual journalist to regain his or her wholeness, to advance beyond the alienation I described earlier to a state of integration and integrity.”

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vidual journalist. For each of us it is a psychological question, it is a social question, and also a question of identity.

*Who am I if I serve as a journalist?*

*What is the journalist’s proper place in society?*

*Where does the journalist stand in relation to the powers he or she reports upon and the readers and viewers he serves?*

*Finally and not least, in view of the crisis I describe, how does one get good work done as a journalist in our present circumstances?*

In answer to this last question, which to me seems the most interesting and important, I want to talk a little about a book from which I have drawn much inspiration. I am thinking of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, which was written by Jerzy Grotowski, the Polish theater director and theorist, in 1968. This will probably seem an

News was well-written and well-edited – and I continue to think a good journalist must master these technical matters if his work is to be effective.

But I also began early, almost immediately after joining The News, to work on the side for independent publications – antiwar journals, anti-apartheid journals, newspapers and magazines dedicated to questions of Third World development, the North–South divide, and so on. This work mattered to me as much or more than all the learning I was doing at The News. The principal independent paper of this kind was called the *Guardian*, and it had nothing to do with the British daily. The *Guardian* was a progressive weekly newspaper when this word, “progressive,” meant much more than it does today. Its chief correspondent was named *Wilfred Burchett*, who was a much-celebrated journalist noted for, among other things, reporting the Vietnam War from

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the North: He was the only Western correspondent to do so.

It was my privilege to edit Wilfred’s pieces when they came in, as I was named foreign editor a little while after joining the *Guardian*. Wilfred became a kind of model for me in those early days. I am delighted to say I am now good friends with *George Burchett*, one of Wilfred’s sons.

It is easy now to see what I was addressing by dividing my professional life in this somewhat schizoid manner. This was my reply to the problem of alienation, which is a common, if not universal problem in mainstream journalism. Now as then, one must accept a greater or lesser degree of alienation to survive in our major media, our corporate-owned “mainstream.” The ideals that draw so many of us to the profession come to seem, in time, as quaint as the sentiments found in greeting cards.

**Alienation in mainstream-journalism**

There is no resisting this alienation, not from within the mainstream. A given publication’s perspective on and portrayal of events was the business of the publisher and his or her senior editors. Journalists wrote for them, not readers. Objectivity, the profession’s semi-sacred telos for a century, degenerated into the instrument of discipline used to force journalists to write, like ventriloquists’ dummies, in the institutional voices of their newspapers.

At bottom the journalist had two alternatives: Cultivate a very unhealthy detachment from the published fruits of one’s work, or assume, for the sake of a paycheck and possible promotion, the editorial stance of one’s employer. These are not, I should add, mutually exclusive alternatives. Many are they, in my experience, who are alienated in this way but, thoroughly unaware of their condition, defend with the convert’s conviction their newspapers’ positions on politics, economics, foreign affairs, what have you.

**“Holding to one’s principles”**

Holding to one’s principles is a third way at the question, of course, but one learns swiftly that this is very often a pricey proposition – if, indeed, it is not fatal to one’s prospects.

By and large what one found among journalists making their ways in corporate media was an immense, collective case of *mauvaise foi*, Sartre’s “bad faith.”<sup>1</sup> In philosophical terms, it was a question of *being-for-others* as against *being-for-itself*. The practice of journalism became, in other word, a matter of performance.

I understood the problem of alienation as I worked at the “Daily News”, but I didn’t wholly accept it. My response was to find my way among independent publications, where one wrote what one meant and there was no, or very little, alienation between oneself and one’s work – and, more fundamentally by far, between oneself and oneself.

I am about to publish a book taking up these questions, and I am drawing on its text here. In it I borrow from *Carl Gustav Jung*. Each of us has a shadow, he explained here and there in many of his works. It is that part of ourselves that is suppressed by convention, orthodox morality, acceptable taste, the exactions of employers, and other social and professional pressures. The casualty of these infinitely manifest forces is the integrated personality – the authentic, undivided self capable of judging and acting with certainty and without reference to the coercions of power or collective opinion.

**“Shadow selves” – When journalists divide their personalities**

The shadow selves of journalists should be of special concern to all of us. They have been among my abiding preoccupations, certainly, since my years in the mainstream press. It is when journalists divide their personalities to secure and hold positions in corporate media that judgments are compromised and the corruptions and delinquencies that beset the profession begin.

For myself, my shadow is that part of myself I kept hidden from others. For a long time I tended to hide it even from myself – if I did not, indeed, hide from it. I earned my living at mainstream newspapers and newsmagazines because that is where you could earn a living during the years I write of. My work for independent publications, in this private way, a way there was no need for others to see, amounted to my defense against the extinction of my individuality, who I truly was.

**Integrity**

If we want to think about who the journalist is in our time, I propose we begin here: The work of remediating the crisis in the profession ought to begin with each journalist’s determination to reject the alienation endemic in the craft in the name of what we may as well call wholeness of self. The pastor in my small New England village taught me not long ago the relation of “integration” to “integrity.” To reintegrate the personality of the journalist is to restore him or her to a state of integrity. I will be forever grateful to my pastor for pointing out this truth, one that lay right in front of me but that I failed to see.

Any journalist who is attentive to the question of his integrated self and therefore his integrity – being one with his shadow in Jungian terms – will also consider his place in society. The closely related but separate question is where he stands in society, as between those powers he reports upon and his audience, the readers and viewers for whom he writes or broadcasts.

**Outsider**

To address this first question, the easier of the two, I think *I. F. Stone*, the wonderful independent practitioner of the Cold War era, had it exactly right. The true journalist is by definition an outsider. He is in society, naturally, as he does not live in a cave, but not precisely of it. He has his political perspectives as we all do. And this is a fine thing. It is an expression of his civic, public self not at all to be regretted. But he has a special, perhaps unique responsibility to keep his views, proclivities, opinions, and so on, out of his work. This is an ideal, the ideal of authentic objectivity, that can never be fully achieved. But it must be striven for nonetheless, and it is a big part of what sets the journalist apart from others in society.

Izzy Stone expressed this position in every page of *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*, the publication he wrote, edited, and brought out for decades from his dining room table in Washington. Too few journalists are willing to accept this relationship with society these days. Most desire acceptance among political and social elites.

But it was Stone, after all, who observed that every generation produces but a few genuine journalists – a truth we should never let ourselves forget.

**The “Lippmann–Dewey debate”**

I have just touched upon our second question, where the journalist stands in society as against who he or she is. This is a more complex question and requires more explanation.

To make my point most clearly, I will refer to a noted exchange that took place in America a century ago – in the early to mid-1920s. The two figures who conducted what we call the “Lippmann–Dewey debate” were *Walter Lippmann*, a prominent journalist and writer on current affairs, later among the early Cold War liberals, and *John Dewey*, the philosopher and educationist.

In 1920, Lippmann published the first of three books concerning the place of the press and the task of the journalist in a democratic society. “Liberty and the New” was followed in 1922 by “Public Opinion” and by “The Phantom Public” three years later. These books were progressively more pessimistic as to the or-

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dinary citizen’s capacity to understand a world that had grown more complex than any theretofore known.

**“The manufacture of consent” ...**

Lippmann’s reply to this, the coming of the modern in a mass society, was to preach the new gospel of the expert. He devised an interesting structure wherein experts were to deploy their expertise. They had nothing to do with ordinary people and nothing to do with the making of official policy. With perfect disinterest, the expert advised the political class of scientifically determined realities, and out of this came correct policy, devoid of all special interest. The press’s task in this schema was to convey these determinations to the public. Journalists were messengers. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann defined this duty as – a famous phrase nowadays – “the manufacture of consent.”

Here is Lippmann writing of “the private citizen” in “The Phantom Public”:

*“Yet these public affairs are in no convincing way his affairs. They are managed, if they are managed at all, at distant centers, from behind the scenes, by unnamed powers.... He lives in a world which he cannot see, does not understand and is unable to direct.”*

And, two chapters on in the same volume:

*“The actual governing is made up of a multitude of arrangements on specific questions by particular individuals. These rarely become visible to the private citizen. Government, in the long intervals between elections, is carried out by politicians, officeholders and influential men who make settlements with other politicians, officeholders and influential men. The mass of people see these settlements, judge them, and affect them only now and then. They are altogether too numerous, too complicated, too obscure in their effects to become the subject of any continuing exercise of public opinion.”*

Lippmann termed these severe judgments “democratic realism,” though they seem to me neither democratic nor realistic. The press’s place in this arrangement derived from Lippmann’s idealisation of invisible experts and those they advised. “The creation of consent is not a new art,” he wrote in “Public Opinion”. “It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously...”

**... or setting out all available perspectives?**

John Dewey reviewed the latter two books of Lippmann’s triptych in *The New Republic* – a journal Lippmann cofounded, ironically – and published his own book on these topics, *The Public and Its Problems*, in 1927. These amounted to replies to Lippmann’s work. Dewey did not differ with Lippmann as to the citizen’s limitations in a mass society, but he saw more democracy, not less, as the remedy. The necessary elite must be subject to public deliberation, based on the public’s understanding of all available perspectives on a given question. Setting out these perspectives was the press’s true task. From this would emerge democratic consent or objection, and there would be no question of the press manufacturing it:

*“It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations. What is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns.”*

While we term these indirect exchanges between two of the era’s prominent thinkers the “Lippmann–Dewey debate,” the two never engaged in one. It is a figure of speech.

It is possible to exaggerate their differences, but two such differences are essential to grasp as we understand the press’s failures since the Cold War, notably its deference to power in the post–2001 years, and the crisis we are considering today.

Lippmann encouraged the thought of the public as passive, the recipient of others’ decisions. Citizens were bystanders – “spectators of action.” Dewey saw the promise of participatory democracy even while he acknowledged the complexities of making it work. Nobody spectated, for politics was not spectacle; the civic self was reasserted, not extinguished.

**“Places at high table” or “embedded in the citizens’ midst?”**

From this distinction arises a second, having to do with where journalists locate themselves in a democratic polity. Was it in the lofty towers above, as winged-footed tribunes, the messengers of those they report upon, or embedded in the citizens’ midst, agents of an informed, infinitely sided public exchange? The question comes down to distance and proximity.

This is the divide, a very lopsided divide, that now defines American journalism. In our time, mainstream media are densely populated with dedicated Lippmannites. I can think of no outstanding exception among those employed at corporate newspapers and broadcasters. Only

of those media commonly called “alternative” can one say otherwise.

This is an especially perilous position for mainstream journalists to assume in the post–2001 context. It leaves them bound in complicity with the keepers of secrets, so assigning them the task of incessant omission in the news reports they bear downward to the public. I do not think it is in any wise a wonder that a markedly high proportion of our “private citizens” now distrust the mainstream press because of these lies of omission and of secrets withheld.

It will be obvious that I think the press has made a drastic mistake in choosing Lippmann’s thinking over Dewey’s on this point. And I count correcting this error another of the tasks journalists must undertake if they are to restore their profession along with their own integrity as I am using this term.

I think it would be foolish to entertain the thought that mainstream journalism and its practitioners will take up these tasks and set about a series of fundamental reforms such that the individual journalist is restored to a state of integrity, gives up the idea that he is a member of the elite he reports upon, and stands in better relations with his audience of readers and viewers. We must of course allow for this possibility, but only as a matter of principle – as nothing is impossible – and with our eyes wide open.

**Independent media as a chance for integrity in journalism**

If there is any prospect that corporate media will repudiate their numerous corruptions, it will be because independent media have either inspired or required them to do so. To put this point another way, in my view – and by many years of experience – it is in independent media that I find the profession’s dynamism. It is among them that I see the opportunity for the individual journalist to regain his or her wholeness, to advance beyond the alienation I described earlier to a state of integration and integrity.

**Jerzy Grotowski**

Let me talk now a little about Jerzy Grotowski and *Towards a Poor Theatre*, as a poor journalism is I think the key to this crisis we are talking about today.

Grotowski’s project began with a radical stripping away. He saw modern theater as encrusted with convention, artifice, and “plastic elements” – costume, makeup, artful lighting, elaborate stage sets. Modern theatre was “rich theatre” – mere spectacle. The proscenium was a confinement for actors and audience alike. Performers were alienated not just from the house but,

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more poignantly, from their own thoughts, emotions, and bodies.

Grotowski often wrote of “life-masks,” the internalised conventions actors traditionally work within. To me, he was concerned with the difference between the presented self, the performing self, the self of bad faith, and, against these, the genuine self, “the face we never show the world because we cover it with the *persona*, the mask of the actor,” and I do not quote Grotowski here but Jung.

This is the Jungian shadow as I use this term. From Grotowski:

*“If we strip ourselves and touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, the life-mask cracks and falls away.”*

And:

*“This defiance of taboo... provides the shock which rips off the mask.”*

And:

*“In this struggle with one’s own truth, this effort to peel away the life-mask, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation.”*

To transcend the roles imposed by convention, to destroy distance in favor of closeness and the most complete authenticity humans can achieve: This is poor theatre.

The concept arose from the simplest of questions. Grotowski asked: What is theater? When all that is not essential is taken away, what remains? He replied that when rich theater’s furnishings and clutter are removed, it transforms the performer-audience relationship: They enter the rawest kind of contact possible. Grotowski trained his actors – and much of this training was psychological – to connect, above all and as honestly as possible, with themselves; then could they connect most directly and effectively with audiences.

**The journalist as seer and sayer**

I borrowed and bent Grotowski’s question long ago. Before it is anything else, journalism is at bottom seeing and saying, nothing more. Scrape away the superfluous and all the barnacles of convention and you have observation, reporting, and writing or speaking or filming. All the accreted encumbrances – the deference to official authority, the narrow limits defining “acceptable” sources and perspectives, the dense language of bureaucrats, above all the pretense to Lippmannite professionalism and membership in political and administrative elites – all are eligible

for removal. Much of this, or maybe most or all, derives one way or another from the unhealthy relations with power I have outlined. To political, corporate, and financial power I add bureaucratic power, the power of editorial hierarchies, the power of embedded ethical corruptions – altogether the inertia and lethargy draped over the profession.

The journalist as seer and sayer discards all this. The corrupting of accuracy and honesty in exchange for access is worse now than one could have imagined even a few years ago. So is the self-censorship transmitted throughout the system. A poor journalism makes it possible to withdraw all offers to bargain integrity for access or acceptance on terms other than the journalist’s own. This would mark a consequential turn in itself: It would be one step on for journalists to shed the burden of self-censorship, for the invisible mechanisms that enforce it will lose their leverage.

**Money**

Now I must talk about money.

Journalists have to get poor in the common meaning of the term if the profession is to recover itself. I do not propose monastic vows or penury. I do not refer to reporters and editors paid ordinary salaries for, the best of them, honorable work. I refer to the upper ranks, where extravagantly paid journalists are too invested in the elites they are supposed to cover but instead desire to join. Whatever they may have been as they came up in the craft, too much money and aggrandizement have ruined them.

I navigated the mainstream for decades and know the power of the money, the generous salary. But I have learned since the utility, and indeed the pleasure, of modest living. Here I will quote *Henry David Thoreau*, who said more than once, the less I want the freer I am. And then *H. L. Mencken*, the prominent iconoclast who wrote and edited at about the same time Lippmann and Dewey were having their “debate.”

“A good reporter used to make as much as a bartender or a police sergeant,” Mencken wrote. “He now makes as much as a doctor or lawyer, and probably a good deal more ... He has got a secure lodgment in a definite stratum.”

I mean to suggest, as Mencken did, that something was lost as journalists began to professionalise a century or so ago – something lost and worthy of restoration. In a single word, journalists must become and remain “unincorporated” if they are to amount to more than the clerks of the governing class, and this I mean in all senses of the term. Disenfranchised will also do.

**Staying true to oneself and one’s ethics**

I have already quoted I. F. Stone to the effect that journalists are properly outsiders. The unique place they should occupy, in society but not altogether of it, must be observed – honored, even. This requires a distance from power that allows them to remain faithful to themselves and their ethics. Money does not serve this purpose; modest living does – comfortable-enough, rent-paying, family-raising, modest living.

I wonder: Have we become so grand that this is a strange idea? It is the precondition of authentic disinterest and immunity from intimidation. The adversarial position in the face of power and a reconnection with readers and viewers require this – a kind of disinvestment. Let all aspiration and imagination soar, but the work is the reward, not places at high table.

To conclude I will ask, “Can this transformation of the journalist’s identity and place be accomplished within the confines of our most powerful media institutions?”

**Great potential of independent media**

My profound doubts should by now be plain. The current ownership structure of American media appears to make this impossible, but let us count it an outstanding question, even if it is theoretically so as things now stand. I see vastly more promise in independent publications such as those that have brought me here this week. The resources are not what one would want. In a lot of cases, we find people who have not been properly trained.

At this point many of these publications are vulnerable to the censorship digital platforms impose. All this will evolve. It is early days yet in a new era. We have to think long-term. Resources will come, one way or another, as more readers migrate away from mainstream publications in search of writing that derives from a commitment to integrity. Skill levels will improve. The censorship wave, dreadful as it is, may subside or can otherwise be overcome.

So I am hopeful about the future – not foolishly, I would say, but with a native optimism that, try as I have over the years, I cannot overcome. •

<sup>1</sup> “mauvaise foi” is a philosophical term used by the French philosopher *Jean-Paul Sartre* to describe the phenomenon of human beings adopting false values through conformity pressure and giving up their absolute freedom so that they no longer need to ask themselves the question of who they are. The French expression “mauvaise foi” (literally “bad faith”) can be translated as infidelity, disloyalty, dishonesty, even guile or insidiousness. One can assume that Sartre meant by his term exactly what is usually called self-deception today. [editor’s note according to *Wikipedia*]



# You can read: “Nothing is proven, but it should be safely assumed that the dam burst is the criminal work of the Russians” The West’s propaganda-war against Russia takes on ever more grotesque forms

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

Actually, it’s the same old story: something bad happens in Ukraine that rightly moves most people. And only a short time later, it is already clear within public opinion in the West who the culprit is: Russia – and of course *Putin* first and foremost. In 1895, *Gustave Le Bon* wrote in his book “Psychology of Crowds” a core sentence of the propaganda of the powerful: Repeat an assertion over and over again; then the crowds believe it, even if it is a lie.

Of course, at present I do not know who and what exactly is responsible for the destruction of the *Kakhovka* dam and the subsequent floods. There are even German-language mainstream media that urge caution when it comes to the question of guilt. For example, the “Badische Neueste Nachrichten”, published in Karlsruhe. They wrote on 7 June: “In the West and in Kiev there is apparently no doubt that Moscow is responsible for the dam bursting. Russia blames the Ukrainian government. However, none of these accusations were convincingly substantiated on Tuesday.” That is the actual state of affairs to this day. The Passau-based “Passauer Neue Presse” also knew this. However, this did not prevent them from formulating on 8 June exactly the sentence that is reproduced in the title of this article.

## The Russians are always to blame

What to assume in Germany was passed on by as many as three members of the government. Chancellor *Olaf Scholz* not only saw a “new dimension” in warfare, but also noted that this act “fits in with the way Putin wages war”. Explaining, he added: “This is also something that fits in with many, many of the crimes we’ve seen in Ukraine that have come from Russian soldiers.” Foreign Minister *Annalena Baerbock* also immediately knew the culprits: “There is only one person responsible for this man-made catastrophe: Russia’s criminal war of aggression against Ukraine.”<sup>1</sup> *Spiegel-Online* of 8 June then also read: “The exact background to the blowing up of the *Kakhovka* dam is still unclear. Germany’s Defence Minister [*Pistorius*] leaves no doubt as to whom he attributes the deed”: Russia and Vladimir Putin.

In the German news magazine “Focus” on 7 June, an “expert” even had his say, the holder of the *Chair of International Politics and Foreign Policy* at the University of Cologne. As if he had been there himself and was also an explosives expert, he wrote: “In the meantime it can be con-

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“All in vain? No, the person who is not a power seeker straightens up when he sees that there are other people who are intrepid and tireless advocates of the law. This orientation is indeed the best ground for a time of change.”

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sidered certain that the *Kakhovka* dam was blown up by Russia.” There is no proof of this in this article either.

Is it still permissible to doubt when three members of the German government and a professor from Cologne act so certain?

## The essence of the grotesque

What is a grotesque? Seen on their own, many scenes of a grotesque appear in such a way that one almost has to laugh. But in the overall context, the awfulness becomes apparent, so that the laughter sticks in your throat. I feel the same way when I think of the leading German media and the leading German politicians. Some of their behaviour – even when it comes to allegations about who is to blame for the dam disaster – is indeed laughable. But when you think about it, the laughter sticks in your throat. The war in Ukraine provoked by the West, which started long before 24 February 2022, also long before spring 2014 – namely with the policy of the “sole world power”, with the associated claim to power and with the associated discord, with violent changes of government, with murderous exploitation, with the wars. All of this has already meant millions of victims, enormous destruction, injustice in every respect.

A fellow German recently told me that he found it so bad that in German discussions there was only black and white. Dialogue is now only possible with a few. That is the bitter fruit of propaganda. There is only black and white, no shades in between, no weighing up, no differentiation, no responding to each other, no bridges, no historical-political thinking, no human solidarity.

## Sorcerer’s apprentices

On 6 June, the German tabloid “Bild” published the results of a flash poll by the opinion research institute INSA. According to this, the AfD and the SPD are now on a par in voters’ favour: at 19 per cent each. How can one interpret this result? It is certain that the governing party SPD has lost

a lot of prestige and that the citizens’ dissatisfaction with the government’s policies is growing. Is this not also the background of the propaganda? And how are the politically motivated restrictions on freedom of expression in Germany to be assessed? A sign of strength – or of decline? The sorcerer’s apprentices are facing a disaster – and no sorcerer far and wide.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman *Maria Zakharova* gave a two-hour interview to Russian-based publicist *Thomas Röper*.<sup>2</sup> Ms Zakharova also spoke about Germany and was deeply concerned about two things in particular: that the German chancellor had dismissed Russian warnings of genocide against the Russian-born population in the Donbass as ridiculous a few days before 24 February 2022 – and that Germany today is once again openly supporting a fascist policy, namely that of Ukraine, without any awareness of history and with all the means at its disposal. Is this all just Russian propaganda?

## Seymour Hersh

Over the past few weeks, I have been reading *Seymour Hersh’s* autobiography, “Reporter”. I highly recommend this read. For more than 50 years, Seymour Hersh has been exposing US government crimes under difficult conditions and with great care, clear mind, honest passion and much support from unnamed links within the chains of command. To date, all this has had few real consequences for US policy – it has remained true to itself; only the methods have become more perfidious.

All in vain? No, the person who is not a power seeker straightens up when he sees that there are other people who are intrepid and tireless advocates of the law. This orientation is indeed the best ground for a time of change. ●

<sup>1</sup> *Scholz* and *Baerbock* quoted from <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/scholz-staudamm-ukraine-krieg-russland-100.html> of 6 June 2023 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2023/der-komplette-text-des-interviews-mit-maria-sacharowa/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1686226121.8994510173797607421875](https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2023/der-komplette-text-des-interviews-mit-maria-sacharowa/?doing_wp_cron=1686226121.8994510173797607421875) of 28 May 2023

# Julian Assange: That piece of freedom that we are lacking

by Xavier Lasso

zf. A few days ago, a judge at the London High Court rejected two applications for appeal filed by Julian Assange against his planned extradition to the USA. *Current Concerns* reprints the commentary of the former deputy foreign minister of Ecuador, Xavier Lasso.

It has been almost ten years since *Edward Snowden* has made some special experiences by urgently wishing to come to Ecuador. Snowden chose Ecuador because *Julian Assange* had been an illustrious guest at the Embassy in London. Back then Ecuador was different; it had dreams of sovereignty, it participated in the plans for a “Patria Grande”, *Néstor Kirchner*, *Chávez*, *Evo*, *Lula*, as well as *Lugo*, and *Rafael Correa* stepped up for my country.

Julian Assange became famous for his alternate vision of journalism; he didn't want to obey to what a certain journalistic establishment – that of the mainstream media – suggested, meaning to “produce responsible journalism”, which is nothing else than packaging information and the decision by the media on how wide they would open their dossiers.

In 2010 *Chelsea Manning* provided numerous informations about the cruelties of the “Gringos” in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantánamo. Before doing so, she called on the British “Guardian” and other media, who refused to listen. That is why she ended up at *WikiLeaks* and brought global stardom for Julian Assange. Assange didn't hesitate to use other principles which lean on what he called scientific journalism: If you have the chance to have undeniable evidence to prove your

hypothesis, then go and get them, dispose of them, and publish them.

That is what Assange did, and he also used what is called a “safe mailbox” today, due to the various sources: nobody has to know where the information you publish stems from. More than that, put a mask on your source and it will tell the truth. We have always known that the mask covers something but contains the truth.

Today Assange is very weakened psychologically and physically, they are in the process of bringing about his death with so much psychological torture, with extradition to the United States, which seems to have been approved by the British courts, a country that has brought 18 lawsuits against him accusing him of betraying the people mentioned in the documents published by *WikiLeaks*.

The government of the traitor *Lenín Moreno* [Rafael Correa's successor], full of cowards, as was the then Foreign Minister *José Valencia*, handed Assange over to the British police (which basically meant handing him over to the United States) and allowed them to enter the embassy of a sovereign country and virtually kidnap the Australian by force. They took with him the ideas of dignity that we had developed from a free foreign policy that rejected the centrality of European and American interests. Moreno, who subordinated himself to the ideas of the world system built on the most ruthless capitalism, never thought of the damage he was doing to free journalism, which was slowly trying to build another view, one that also took into account our visions, our contributions, our way of understanding the same world.

What is extremely worrying is the indifference of the media conglomerate that claims to defend freedom of expression and that received the first contributions from *WikiLeaks* – “The Guardian”, “Le Monde”, *Der Spiegel*, “El País” and the “New York Times” – and used them as it pleased, keeping much of the information to itself, dosing it and infantilising its audience as if it were incapable of diving into the documents *WikiLeaks* had obtained.

*Stella Morris*, Assange's lawyer and wife, fears the worst, death included, she cries out to the world for some justice, she confronts us with the different meanings of freedom of expression. Her husband is not a “hacker”, he is a very intelligent journalist who today, during our almost total indifference, is vegetating in a high security prison in London. Two visits a week are not enough, his two children have a very sad image of their father, full of shadows, because like in caves, things are only projected without being seen in full daylight.

Assange must be released; we all need this little piece of freedom that we are so lacking. The United States should know that a large part of this planet will turn its eyes to the justice that the Assange case demands. We will be millions, streams of people, opposing this power that strikes dangerously when caught in the act. Assange has lifted many veils, that is his crime, and that is at the same time his great merit. •

Source: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/556552-julian-assange-ese-pedazo-de-libertad-que-nos-falta> of 9 June 2023

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

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# Wolfgang Bittner: State of Exception

## Geopolitical Insights and Analyses in the light of the Ukraine Conflict

by Johannes Irsiegler

*“A man who doesn’t know the truth is just an idiot, but a man who knows the truth and calls it a lie is a crook.”*  
Bertolt Brecht



“Wars have almost always started with lies. [...] The beginning of wars is usually preceded by months or even years of propaganda and smear campaigns against the opponent, who thus becomes an enemy to be attacked. [...] A particularly perfidious form of covert warfare is the sanctioning of undesirable or resistant states. That many people suffer or even die because of the resulting shortage is accepted. In doing so, ‘Western values’ are invoked, which are mostly not even adhered to in one’s own country.” (translation of all quotes Current Concerns)

With these thoughts *Wolfgang Bittner* begins his latest book “Ausnahmestand – Geopolitische Einsichten und Analysen unter Berücksichtigung des Ukraine-Konflikts”

(State of Emergency – Geopolitical Insights and Analyses in the light of the Ukraine Conflict). They are at the beginning of a portrayal and insightful analysis of the state of exception in which both Germany and the entire Western world are finding themselves.

Wolfgang Bittner is a German writer and publicist living in Göttingen (Germany). He holds a doctorate in law and has been writing for adults as well as for young people and children since the 1970s, receiving several literary awards. From 1996 to 1998 he was a member of the Broadcasting Council of the Western German Broadcasting Corporation (WDR). Furthermore, from 1997 to 2001 he was a member of the *federal board of the union Verband deutscher Schriftsteller* (Association of German Writers). He is a member of the PEN Center Germany.

### State of exception?

Wolfgang Bittner is following the tradition of Willy Brandt’s policy of *détente* in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the guiding principle was to reduce tensions in Europe and bring about change through rapprochement. Brandt established both a new East and Germany policy: “We want to be a nation of good neighbours – internally and externally.” At the international level, this triggered the Helsinki process, which resulted in the establishment of the CSCE and later the OSCE. Today’s reality, however, is a different one, an issue Bittner deplores: “The opportunities that Brandt’s

policy of *détente* offered for peaceful coexistence, not only in Europe, were squandered, and the possibilities of surveillance and regulation by the authorities were radically expanded and consolidated. [...] Thus the peace efforts of earlier generations have been betrayed and forgotten, many of the rights of the working population, which had been fought for with painstaking effort, have been gradually dismantled.”

Meticulously, Bittner traces the path from Brandt’s peace policy to today’s war policy: Germany was made the “spearhead against Russia,” which had been assigned the role of the new enemy. It is the U.S. and its vassals in Europe who are responsible for this disastrous development. From the very beginning, the goal was to lure Russia into a war from which circles in the U.S. hoped that Russia would be weakened forever. Bittner refers aptly to the US-driven separation of Western Europe and Russia as a “tragedy of the century.” The major losers are Europe and, above all, Germany. More and more, its governing elites had been adopting an aggressive policy of war against Russia, above all the *Greens*, who since the 1990s have undergone a transformation from pacifists to a party advocating war, a role for which they have received acknowledgement from their big brother on the other side of the Atlantic. The war outside was accompanied by drastic changes at home, leaving Germany almost unrecognizable. It is in a state of exception in which basic freedoms and rights are increasingly curtailed: “Who would have thought that a government would come to power in Germany that pursues the ruin of the economy and the impoverishment of large sections of society? Who could have imagined that fundamental rights be suspended by decree, that censorship and freedom of expression be restricted, that dissenters be harassed, defamed as mavericks or conspiracy theorists, that an entire society would change in such a way?”

Bittner relies on primary sources documented in detail in the appendix. He leaves it to the reader to draw own conclusions from the statements made in both East and West. To the reader, many things that happened may not have always been so obvious: For example, the fact that the Soviet Union of the time was to be driven



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into national bankruptcy by “acts of sabotage, terrorist attacks, organizing uprisings and immense rearmament costs.” It was only by exploiting the resources of the disintegrating Soviet Union that the United States succeeded in overcoming its own escalating economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. The then Swedish Prime Minister *Olof Palme*, a declared opponent of this confrontational policy, was assassinated shortly before a meeting with *Mikhail Gorbachev*. The consequences for the popula-

tion of the former Soviet Union, however, were hunger and misery. The Russians and their political representatives would never forget this.

### The basic human need is to live in peace

Bittner demands: “The first thing to strive for – quite pragmatically – is peace with Russia, China and other countries bullied by the US, as well as withdrawing from NATO and focusing on German interests, which must be upheld without falling into national egocentricity.” He is not about turning away from the US, but “the destructive forces aiming at world domination must be put in their place.” And the “German government, too, will not be able to carry on with its destructive policies forever. Things cannot remain as they are. The basic human need is to live in peace.” Bittner sketches a picture of what Germany could look like after the long overdue change of politicians: “There are ideas of a people-friendly organised economy, a more sensible financial system, and a peaceful society based on solidarity. [...] Wise and humane people have been thinking about this, and much of it is already written in constitutions or social treaties, such as the Charter of the United Nations.”

The author concludes: “Freedom, equality, humanity! It is to be hoped [...] that these ideas are permanently established. Failing this, our civilization, which for quite some time can’t be called a culture any more, will be at an end.” Otherwise, mankind is threatened by a “technologically perfectly organised totalitarianism”. A book very much worth reading, which we wish a wide distribution.

## “An honourable exit”

### A brief study in colonial arrogance: Power, greed, and profit during the French-Indochina War

by Silvia Nogradi



In his new study – *Eric Vuillard* calls his text a *récit* – a report, a narrative – Eric Vuillard uses a few precisely researched episodes from the last phase of the French-Indochina War, which France waged in Vietnam from 1946 to 1954, to illustrate the underlying forces at work here. Using selected scenes, he makes the reader understand how and which personal, psychological, financial, and (power-)political interests and motives interacted in this war – and not only in this war. Hauntingly and poignantly, Vuillard’s book (*Other Press* 2023) captures in individual scenes the elements that make the reader aware of the contempt for humanity, racist arrogance, and the arrogant striving for power that drove the late phase of France’s colonial war. Vuillard shows in a most oppressive way how this bloody slaughter is continued – even when it had long since become clear that the war could not be won and had long since ceased to be justifiable before its own population.

#### Insights into the mechanisms of power and colonial arrogance

The individual scenes follow each other according to a clear inner logic. Each situation described and each behaviour of the individual characters is illustrative of the mechanisms of power and colonial exploitation – and representative of many others. The war’s various battles were not about the honour of the French nation, or about democracy and values, but about maintaining the military-industrial presence of French interests in Indochina, which was unquestioningly considered justified. On closer inspection, the battles are fought exclusively for the economic interests of certain French industrial companies. Properly speaking, it was not, say, “the battle for Cao Bang”, which was waged in 1949, but “the battle for the joint-stock company of the ore mines of Cao Bang”. This is one example among many.

A scene from 1928 – a visit by trade inspectors of the colonial administration to a rubber plantation of the *Michelin* company – shows the cruelty of the plantation owners, who make workers slave away so mercilessly according to the Taylorist system that 30 per cent of them die in the course of one year. The slightest resistance is met with torture; suicide seems to be the only way out for many of these men. All this is well noted by the controllers and con-

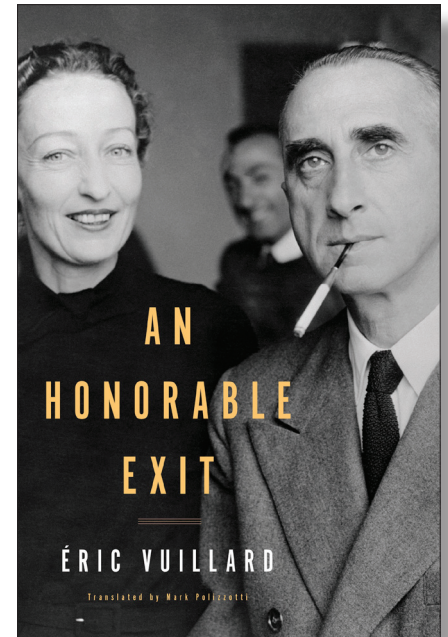
scientiously recorded, but this leads to no consequence.

In the next scene, Vuillard takes the reader to the *Assemblée Nationale* in Paris; it is 19 October 1950. The information that this war devours a billion francs a day, today about 152.5 million Euros, triggers a certain horror in the legislature, but this is quickly forgotten shortly afterward in a restaurant over a sumptuous meal. And it belongs in the colonialist context if no one listens to the originally Arab-Kabyl’ deputy who desperately points out that the soldiers in this war came mainly from the colonies. The representative of the socialist group limits his reaction to pointing out that, without exception, all “soldiers fighting over there under the French flag deserve a respectful and reverential tribute”.

#### A war that is lost continues against all logical judgement

The next speaker in the Assembly on this occasion, *Pierre Mendès France*, who would serve briefly as premier several years later, spoke plainly. He argued that the Indochina war was simply too expensive, as it would require France to triple its debt if it was to win. Mendès France follows with the logical conclusion: “The other solution is to seek a political agreement, an agreement of course with those who are fighting us” (pp. 39f.). He thus proposes peace negotiations with the *Việt Minh*, and at this moment Mendès France knows he has risked his political career for the time being. His critics attempt to invalidate his arguments with false historical parallels that reference the *Vichy* regime, but Mendès France’s position is not refuted (pp. 53f.).

Instead of ending the lost war, *Jean de Lattre de Tassigny*, appointed commander-in-chief in Indochina, subsequently travels the globe to represent “the cause of Indochina, that of the free world”. He tried to win over the United States, in particular, to gain its support for this war on Vietnamese territory. And as we know from the history, he succeeds: By promising not to ask for “American boys” as soldiers, he obtains a very substantial co-financing for the war. The US subsequently pays 40 per cent of the war costs. At a time when the president of the French Council, *René Mayer*, was already declaring, “The situation in Indochina is simply catastrophic. The war is practically lost. The only thing that can still be hoped for is *an honourable exit*”, General *Henri Navarre* is



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appointed to the now unpopular post of French commander-in-chief. In fact, Navarre’s plan, and thus that of the French military and ruling politicians, was to inflict a bitter defeat on the *Việt Minh* to create a favourable negotiating position for France to make the “honourable exit” for which Mayer called.

#### As cynically hypocritical as profitable for the “freedom” of the West

Onward from Vuillard’s title, *Une sortie honorable*, the author makes clear the full absurdity and contempt for humanity of France’s post-1945 project in Indochina. For what is honourable when thousands upon thousands of human lives are sacrificed once again solely for the sake of power and financial interests, or for personal ambition? And this while knowing that it is only a matter of delaying, of prolonging the war.

The plan was to destroy the *Việt Minh* at *Diên Biên Phu* – a plan that in fact led to the complete defeat of the French troops. Through the figure of Navarre, the author makes tangible how personal weaknesses and military misjudgements can intertwine: Vuillard shows Navarre’s ridiculous personal ambition as one of the starting points of the disaster. In no way does this man (or anyone else) think of the unspeakable sacrifices, the countless lives sacrificed for the sake of an honourable exit. The fact that the soldiers killed are

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# 25 years ago – ICE disaster in Eschede

## Memories, experiences and insights

by Winfried Pogorzelski



25 years ago, the world's worst accident involving a high-speed train happened in Germany: Due to a faulty wheel tyre, which probably broke due to a lack of maintenance, an Intercity-Express (ICE) derailed near the town of Eschede in Lower Saxony on 3 June 1998, driving under a bridge at 200 km/h. 101 passengers lost their lives, more than 100 were seriously injured. 25 years later, Heinrich Löwen, who lost his wife and daughter in the tragedy, published a book in which he addresses the lack of support for the bereaved families by Deutsche Bahn AG (DB) and the sluggish processing of the disaster. The publication, sponsored by German Railways (DB), is also an occasion to take a look at the current state of DB.

Already two months after the accident, a privy was founded by the bereaved families lead by the author, in order to better cope with the disaster, not only emotionally, but also in terms of thorough investigation of the causes, legal clarification of responsibilities and financial settlements. It soon became clear that the people affected (victims) had a thorny path ahead of them.

### The "Self-Help Eschede" takes up its work

German Rail did not approach the bereaved families, offered them a much too small amount as a kind of compensation for their pain and suffering, did not publicly apologise, offered psychosocial support, which hardly found any positive response, and did not show that it wanted to have the technical causes of the accident thoroughly investigated. After several failed talks with the railway management, "Self-Help Eschede" takes legal action. In 2001, a claim for damages is finally filed with the court, which is rejected two years later.

It was not until 2013 that the railway deeply regretted the accident and asked the bereaved families to apologise "for the human suffering caused" (p. 33). It is decided that the organisation will assist in the final design of a dignified memorial that warns "against excessive faith in technology" and urges "high awareness in the interest of people" (p. 35). From now on, all ICE trains "pass Eschede at the time of the accident at a greatly reduced speed, a nice gesture of respect" (p. 36).

### The disaster and its consequences in court – an obstacle course for those affected

As early as November 1998, suspicions had leaked out in the press that there had been safety deficiencies. But it was not until four years later that three engineers were indicted: "They were charged with negligence and thus responsibility for 101 deaths and over 100 injuries" (p. 54). They had not sufficiently tested the newly used (rubber-sprung) wheels for their load-bearing capacity and had not had them regularly checked, which had the fatal consequence that an overstressed wheel caused the disaster. It remained completely incomprehensible that no member of the DB board and no responsible person from the maintenance and servicing sector was held accountable. The legal dispute increasingly took on the character of an "expert symposium on material strength" and "on the stressing of steel tyres under load" (p. 57). The court finally came to the conclusion that the defendants were "not seriously guilty", a continuation of the trial would take "elaborate investigations of about one and a half to two years" (p. 58). The defendants agreed to a fine of 10,000 euros each, the public prosecutor's office refused to "relentlessly clarify the facts and establish the guilt [...] of DB's management board (ibid.)."

### Compensation for pain and suffering and help for survivors

A claim for compensation for pain and suffering also faced difficulties: Instead of this term, the term "special grant" was used and for cost reasons it was only pursued in one instance. Finally, the payment of 30,000 DM (15,000 Euro) for each death was achieved, without taking into account the number of survivors. But that is not all: Even the construction of a dignified memorial with the naming of all 101 fatalities on granite memorial plaques and the planting of 101 cherry trees would not have been realised without the tireless work of "Self-Help Eschede". And finally, the authorities lacked commitment when it came to obtaining rapid and unbureaucratic help for many survivors to overcome serious health damage and reintegrate into working life, albeit often under very different circumstances.

### German Railways – a disaster

DB's infrastructure is in alarming condition and not up to the demands of quality and capacity: 33,500 kilometres of track with bridges, points, level crossings and signal boxes urgently need to be renovat-



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ed because far too little has been invested in recent years (much less than in Switzerland and Austria, for example), and mind you, at the same time as traffic is increasing! Consequently, there are countless road works and diversions on the routes, which are responsible for 80% of the countless delays. In 2022, every third long-distance train was late, i.e. only 65 % of the trains were on time. Because the capacity of the rail network is nowhere near sufficient to shift heavy traffic from road to rail, the construction volume is constantly growing – a vicious circle.

In Switzerland, people are lamenting the fatal consequences for the "Neat", "The New Alpine Transversal", agreed in 1996, the aim of which is to shift transit traffic in the north-south direction to the railways. Germany is hopelessly behind schedule; the Basel-Karlsruhe link is not expected to be completed until 2041.

### Ambitious goals, Far-reaching measures

The federal government's goals are ambitious: it wants to invest 45 billion euros in the highly indebted *Bahn AG*, which it owns, by 2027. Part of the toll fees for lorries is also to flow into the expansion of rail transport. By 2030, passenger traffic is to be doubled and 25% of freight traffic is to be shifted to the railways from 19% today.

The German railways not only organise regional, long-distance and freight transport, but they also maintain the rail network. That is too much of a good thing,

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### “An honourable exit”

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mostly Arabs, Africans, Asians, and foreign mercenaries is probably included in the calculation. Last but not least, there are massive financial and power-political interests behind the whole war machinery, which Vuillard makes clear especially in his last chapter.

Vuillard’s cinematic style – committed yet precise, not a historiography in the proper sense, but a form at the transition to literature and film – makes it palpably clear to the reader how, on the basis of disregard for other cultures and peoples, on the basis of a haughty racism and the conviction of one’s superiority, the terrible injustice of the colonial wars was still possible in the middle of the 20th century, in the present. It is this ground on which personal ambition (in the examples of Navarre and *Christian de Castries*, the French commander at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, indifference toward others, refined – or, better – devious rhetoric and without interior participation (in the *Assemblée Nationale*) create the conditions to organise the greatest injustice, murder, and manslaughter. It is an injustice from which banks and the arms industry ultimately profit.

#### Because they know what they are doing ...

Vuillard makes no secret of his indignation when he uses a meeting of the board of directors of the *Banque d’Indochine* vividly to illustrate how much of the wealth of some banks is based on the rubber business in Indochina. He shows that the world of colonial finance is strongly determined by personal and familial ties – a network of influential families who are in the background of the state’s power and financial interests, pulling the strings and

### “25 years ago – ICE disaster ...”

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also in the opinion of the traffic light coalition. From 2024, the rail network, the stations and the energy sector are to be separated from the group and combined in a so-called infrastructure sector, which is to be managed by a “common good-oriented infrastructure company». It is to be wished for our northern neighbour and Europe that the measures will soon take effect ...

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Kranz, Beate. “Bahn will pünktlicher werden: Das sind die grössten Probleme” (Railways want

“Vuillard’s cinematic style – committed yet precise, not a historiography in the proper sense, but a form at the transition to literature and film – makes it palpably clear to the reader how, on the basis of disregard for other cultures and peoples, on the basis of a haughty racism and the conviction of one’s superiority, the terrible injustice of the colonial wars was still possible in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the present. It is this ground on which personal ambition (in the examples of *Navarre* and *Christian de Castries*, the French commander at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, indifference toward others, refined – or, better – devious rhetoric and without interior participation (in the *Assemblée Nationale*) create the conditions to organise the greatest injustice, murder, and manslaughter. It is an injustice from which banks and the arms industry ultimately profit.”

passing the posts to each other. It is not without irony when Vuillard, in describing the alliances of the French financial bourgeoisie, uses the terminology of the ethnologist *Claude Lévi-Strauss* to describe the “tribalism” of tribal societies. It is just as thought-provoking to learn that this bank – anticipating the impending defeat – had already withdrawn from the Indochina business long before the destruction of French troops at Diêm Biên Phu to invest in other colonies and continents.

Hopeless battles for a colony that had already been robbed of its resources, a war that, at the same time, brought enormous profits thanks to arms deals and war loans – in the end, profiteers earned money even from the demise of the French army, effec-

tively from the French taxpayer. Countless human lives on both sides were the price. This war had little to do with the alleged war aims – defence of the free world, democracy, liberation from communism – but it could be sold so cheaply and profitably.

And once again, Vuillard reveals the mental mechanisms that can enable the suppression of knowledge and the pushing aside of any honest consequence: While the president of the board of directors of *Banque d’Indochine* initially struggles with remorse because of such dishonest business dealings, the “monstrous truth” briefly before his eyes, these moral qualms are silenced at last by the advantages of his own well-being, his own privileges, small family pleasures.

After their heavy military defeat in 1954, the French are leaving Vietnam and the Americans will come in their place. The war, which was supposed to last only two years and ended for the French with a dishonourable honourable exit, turned into a thirty-year war during which four million tons of bombs were dropped, more than all the bombs used by the Allies on all fronts in the Second World War.

Vuillard’s narration in *An Honourable Exit* provides much material for discussion because, on the one hand, it brings us closer to a passage of European history that is not yet very distant but far too little known and, on the other hand, it also encourages us to examine all the mechanisms Vuillard’s récit makes vivid in the context of current events.

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<sup>1</sup> Kabyle: Language spoken in Kabylia, a region in northeastern Algeria.

# Pro memoria: What Swiss neutrality made possible

## Swiss Red Cross Children's aid campaign during and after the Second World War

by Marianne Bürkli

*In recent weeks, various articles and commentaries sharply attacking Switzerland's political stance as a neutral country have appeared in the so-called quality media. This is nothing new, but you do get the impression that the citizens of our country are to be "softened up". In order to give us a guilty conscience, we are accused of an indifferent attitude towards suffering caused by wars, a lack of solidarity with the afflicted of this world and a cowardly shirking of responsibility. This is part of the campaign that has going on in Switzerland for years – Switzerland's achievements and tasks are denied through historical distortion. Will Switzerland be no longer allowed to exist as a place of hope for many war-torn peoples?*

### Contemporary witnesses against forgetting

Fortunately, documents still exist which were drawn up by contemporary witnesses in a time when this tactic of confusion was not yet used. They testify to a deeply rooted compassionate attitude among the Swiss population, who wanted to do their bit when the need required it. An example of this are the many women who volunteered during and after the Second World War to enable children from war-torn countries to recuperate in Switzerland. One of them was my mother *Olga Bürkli-Stutz* (1911–1997). She was one of the Red Cross helpers responsible for accompanying the children's trains that, from 1942 to 1956, made it possible for 181,000 children from various neighbouring countries to spend their holidays and recuperation in Switzerland. Europe was on its knees, so that the need was great! Thus, the largest children's aid campaign during and after the Second World War was set up in Switzerland. At that time, tuberculosis infection was on the rise, especially in the cities. In order to prevent this disastrous development, many pre-tuberculous children came to the Swiss mountains. They were supposed to be able to recover in the fresh mountain air. Youth homes and hotels became sanatoriums, and at that time took in 7000 sick children. This children's aid was mainly financed by donations of money and goods from the population, also through bazaars and badge sales.

As early as 1942, trains were on their way to France and Belgium to bring children to our country. Unfortunately, it was not until 1946 that the borders were opened for children's trains to Germany and Holland. For Germany, extensive negotiations had to be conducted beforehand

with the occupying powers USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union.

Other children, too, traumatised by the war, undernourished and weakened, came to Switzerland this way. They found a place in the many host families who fed them and cared for them and gave them time to recover.

My mother left me her recorded memories of that time.

### This is my task

"I had been attending Samaritan courses at the *Red Cross* for a long time and had been passionate about it ever since. My husband was in military service, we didn't have any children yet and I had no job. But there was enough to do. At the beginning of the war, I contacted the *Swiss Red Cross* (SRC), which had put out an appeal: 'Who can take in a child from the war zones for a holiday stay of three months?' Countless families and couples, urban as well as rural, came forward. There were therefore always enough foster places.

The selection of children for a holiday stay in the host families was made by doctors on site in the respective countries according to the guidelines issued by the Swiss Red Cross, the primary reason being severe malnutrition. And indeed, we had never seen such hollow-cheeked children in our country as those on our trains. My heart was touched!

### On the train to Holland

I soon got a job and was on the first train that went through Germany to Holland. In the wagon we wore nurses' uniform, but on the road, we wore a uniform with the Swiss and Red Cross badges on the sleeves. At night we slept on the train, lying on wooden benches and covered with a woollen blanket. The stations and towns we passed through in Germany were mostly destroyed. People lived in these deserts of rubble; it was distressing. The journey took 48 hours because the main railway lines, tunnels and bridges had been destroyed or badly damaged at the end of the war and they had only been provisionally repaired. So, the train often travelled at a snail's pace.



*In the kitchen wagon on the children's train, nutritious but easily digestible soups are cooked and countless sandwiches are spread. (picture photo album Olga Bürkli-Stutz)*

### Our task in Amsterdam

We arrived in Amsterdam and spent the night on the train. The next morning, we welcomed the holiday children and escorted them to the different carriages. Their light backpacks and small suitcases were stowed in the luggage net. After a final check, the signal sounded for departure. The children leaned far out of the windows, shouted and waved to the parents who stayed behind and grew smaller and smaller. Pale, skinny children sat on the wooden benches and looked at us shyly with big expectant eyes. Siblings held each other's hands anxiously. Their clothes were poor, thrown together and patched. The boys often wore short trousers and knee socks and their skinny little legs were stuck in high lace-up shoes. The girls wore little cotton skirts and their jackets were made from worn-out adult coats. To distract the children from their homesickness, we provided them with slices of bread, cocoa and fruit soon after departure. So, our little passengers slowly thawed out and soon started chatting animatedly.

### On the way to Switzerland

The train travelled through the wide plains of Holland past the famous windmills and canals with ships disappearing behind the dams. An important part of our train was the kitchen wagon, a converted baggage car equipped with a wood cooker. Our cooking team prepared delicious soups here and spread hundreds of sandwiches, which were very popular. The soup came into the wagons in heavy metal buckets and we filled it into bowls with large ladles. The children could not tolerate heavy meals,

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**"Pro memoria: What Swiss neutrality ..."**

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they were not used to eating much, and we also made sure that they did not get sick during the journey.

After a long journey, the train rolled into Lucerne station. At the former Kuntsthaus, Red Cross helpers handed over their holiday children to the foster parents. During regular visits we found out whether the children fitted into the families and whether everyone was happy. If foster parents and children did not get along, a new place was sought. But most of the children quickly gained confidence and recovered. They got red cheeks and gained weight, up to 8 kg! Many families made lifelong friends with their holiday children.

**Back to Holland**

After three months, rested, well-fed, satisfied girls and boys went home. They had backpacks full of sweets, but also of crayons and other useful things. Their suitcases and tied together cardboard boxes, filled with clothes, shoes and many valuable things, were stored in the luggage cart. They weighed so much that the children could hardly carry them themselves.

In Amsterdam, the families were waiting to clasp their children in their arms. The joy was enormous. Beaming faces everywhere! The parents and the children thanked us from the bottom of their hearts as they said goodbye.

Then it was time for us to go home again. It was 1 August, our national day, and the wagon was decorated with Swiss flags. In the kitchen car, the cooks were preparing something good for everyone. Great gratitude filled me to be able to travel home again on this special holiday to our well-kept Switzerland, spared from the war.

**Berlin-Dortmund:  
Starved and neglected**

The sight of the German cities was distressing. For example, Dortmund had had 850,000 inhabitants before the war, but in 1946, only 85,000 were left. 80% of the city was destroyed and the ruins were slowly being overgrown by 'rubble grass'. Among the ruined houses and piles of rubble threatening to collapse, the survivors lived in cellars. Several families shared one room. People even had to be grateful to have a roof over their heads at all. The sight of this hurt my heart. The children we picked up in German towns demanded our attention every second. Many argued and some fought over the best window seat. We had to be careful that none of them fell out of the window. It was noticeable that during the war there had been little time for these children: the father was a soldier, the mother provided for the living and possibly worked in the armaments industry. Even after the war, everyday life was hard and hunger was a constant companion. And now these children were on their way to Switzerland.

When we ladled soup out of the big pots during the journey, the children enthusiastically counted the pieces of sausage floating in their soup and they marvelled at the thick slices of bread and butter before taking a bite. At night, the boys and girls slept on the benches and on the floor. We wrapped them in thick, warm woollen blankets. But sometimes a sleeping child would fall off the bench and then wake the others with its screaming. It took many a comforting word to calm these frightened war children until peace would return to the compartment. We were also challenged! We were relieved for two hours at a time and lay down on a bench in an empty wagon.

Whether sleep was possible – that was another question!

On the return journey after three months, the mood was more relaxed. The children were hardly recognisable. They sat contentedly on the benches, a few kilos heavier, and described their experiences in the Swiss families to their seat neighbours in the brightest colours. They had had a bed all by them-

selves! They were even able to speak the Swiss dialect, they said, and their siblings would not be able to understand them at all, and so they talked double Dutch in the broadest Swiss German dialect. Here too, there was great gratitude when we were able to hand the children back to the parents, complete with heavy suitcases and boxes of clothes filled by the host families.

**Also in Switzerland**

We were able to count on the strong support of the Swiss population for our work. In 1942, the "Wochenbatzen" was introduced: Swiss households could donate 10 centimes a week. Schoolchildren, Samaritans and volunteers went from house to house collecting the "Wochenbatzen". By the end of 1946, this Wochenbatzen alone had raised the impressive sum of 8.5 million Swiss francs.

More than 70,000 sponsors were recruited from the Swiss population from 1946 onwards. They sent children who could not be invited to Switzerland a package packed with food, clothes and bedding every month. In this way, they and their families were provided with the most basic necessities.

In 1944 the Federal Council initiated the *Schweizer Spende* (Swiss Donation) and made available 150 million francs. The population collected more than 50 million francs until 1948. With the Swiss Donation, children in war zones received a warm meal once a day. This relief work was mainly entrusted to the *Red Cross*. For example, it set up a milk distribution centre in Dortmund. Women came from far and wide to collect a ration of milk, milk powder or condensed milk for their children.

**Memories that remain**

I also travelled to Hamburg and Vienna. A train with 400 to 450 children was accompanied by about 40 Red Cross workers, plus the kitchen crew and the railway staff. It was not always without risk. On one journey to Vienna, our compartment was shot at. I was just scooping soup from the big pot and bending down when a shot cracked above my head and a bullet flew out of the next window. Luckily, I had bent down and the children had been sitting on the benches. No one was hurt, but the shock was great. My knees felt weak and trembled for a long time. – In this way I experienced and saw many things, beautiful things, but also unspeakably sad things. The trips with the children and the gratefulness of their parents gave me great satisfaction. The cooperation among us helpers was always very friendly. That is why working for the *Red Cross* was extremely enriching for me and for my life." •



After their stay with Swiss host families, the children return home refreshed. The joy on their arrival in a small Dutch town is written all over their faces. (picture photo album Olga Bürkli-Stutz)