

Das Imperium der Schande : der Kampf gegen Armut und Unterdrückung [Jean Ziegler]

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Swiss Review 6/05

Your above noted issue is possibly the best ever – brimful of useful information, well-balanced opinion and highly polished articles of interest to the Swiss Abroad.

The editorial, and in particular the second half dealing with homesickness, is a piece of considerable resonance to me. And the warning contained therein is well placed.

As a Swiss out of the country for over forty years, I was stunned and overwhelmed by the poster photograph of Einsiedeln monastery with Christmas market; namely so much so that torrents of tears ran freely down my cheeks repeatedly. I contemplated at length what adjective to use for this kind of immediate and immense experience. And it came to mind: Glorious!

But, notwithstanding my many memories of home, I still fail to see the aspect beneficial.

FREDERICK JENZER, TORONTO,
CANADA

Must-haves

I have lived abroad for a quarter of a century but visit my home country regularly, and over the years I have noticed that my image of Switzerland as I remember it is increasingly reflected in the number of “must-have” products which I never fail to pack in my luggage before leaving (at the risk of infringing certain regulations!) in case I never find them again.

I would be very interested to find out what sort of image of Switzerland other Swiss Abroad

harbour. I imagine your readers would also be interested. So why not ask them? Here, in descending order of importance, are my ten top Swiss products: Thomy medium hot mustard – Savoy sausage (cervelat) – self-adhesive envelopes (Coop) – white notelet cards (Coop) – self-adhesive address labels for parcels (Coop) – St.Gallen Bratwurst – paper tissues – marzipan fruits (Merkur) – chocolate bars (Lindt) – Graubünden air-dried meat. Hands off!

ERIC HAYWOOD, DUBLIN,
IRELAND

Highly interesting

Many thanks for the interview with Hanspeter Kriesi in your December 2005 issue, which I found extremely interesting.

However, I believe you left out one question: the high number of abstentions from votes.

Does this factor not threaten to falsify results, since often the people's opinion is not truly reflected by the tiny minority of the electorate who exercised their vote?

This situation is likely to create a weak level of representation in our country's institutions, and may harbour latent tensions.

BERNARD VERNES, BY E-MAIL

Romantic poster

Many thanks for the last issue of Swiss Review in December 2005. We really liked the layout and the many interesting reports, particularly the romantic poster of the Christmas market in front of Einsiedeln Monastery. With everything covered in snow and all the lights: who wouldn't want to be there? In January 1995 I visited Switzerland with my daughter. We also travelled from Zurich to Einsiedeln to see the Black Madonna and visited the splendid basilica. The Christmas market had gone, but it was nevertheless an unforgettable experience.

AGNES K. DOEBELI AND FAMILY,
ARRAIAL DA AJUDA/BAHIA,
BRAZIL

The right to happiness

He's the widest-read Swiss author abroad. His critical non-fiction can be found populating bestseller lists and his previous book, an anti-globalisation work entitled “The New Rulers of the World,” even became an international hit. Jean Ziegler's latest book “Empire of Shame” deals with the battle against poverty and oppression and is already flying off the shelves in Switzerland. Formerly a professor of sociology in Geneva and Paris, and National Councillor for the Social Democrats, Ziegler has spent the past five years tirelessly travelling through the world's famine-stricken regions as the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. The 71-year-old from Geneva considers his UN mandate “a golden opportunity to use my knowledge to benefit the world's poorest.”

In his younger years, Jean Ziegler was strongly influenced by his friendship with French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. His radical criticism and appeals rest on the “human right to

happiness.” According to Ziegler, the “Empire of Shame” resides both in the power system of politics and economics, and more particularly in the conduct of global corporations, which shirk their sociopolitical responsibilities and evade regulation in a single-minded bid to maximize profits.

Ziegler names facts: According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 12 billion people could be provided with 2700 calories every day (yet the world's population is currently 6.4 billion). Despite this, 1.8 billion people have to survive on less than one dollar a day, two billion are severely malnourished and 680 million are starving. The 500 largest multinational corporations command 52 percent of the global gross national product and control most raw materials markets, including the global market for seeds and pesticides. Swiss food concern Nestlé, for example, operates in desperately poor Ethiopia, where 95 percent of coffee beans are produced by small farmers. There, in the space of just three years, the price per kilo of beans has plummeted from three dollars to a mere 86 cents, bringing poverty and hunger to farming families.

For Ziegler, global hunger is the world's greatest scandal. Every day, 100,000 people die as the result of starvation and malnutrition – one child under the age of ten every five seconds. According to Ziegler, hunger – the world's most frequent cause of death – is a “man-made affliction”. It is “mass murder” and the cause of it is “debt.” Third-world countries are currently in debt to the tune of 2,100 billion dollars: a sum much greater than any public development aid being offered, and the nearly 400 billion dollars paid every year to service this debt is preventing essential social reforms. “The burden of debt rests on the poor, and on the poor alone.”

What needs to be done? Jean Ziegler believes that the shame felt by all well-intentioned people in light of this hunger and poverty is a revolutionary force. In the tradition of philosopher Immanuel Kant and the French revolution, he is declaring war against the prevailing world order, against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, against debt, against corporations and against the exploitation of countries that produce raw materials. “I want to help make people more aware of how necessary this revolution is.” ROLF RIBI



JEAN ZIEGLER: Das Imperium der Schande. Der Kampf gegen Armut und Unterdrückung. Pub. C. Bertelsmann Verlag, Munich 2005, 316 pages, CHF 34.90, EUR 19.90 (the original was published by Fayard, Paris in 2005 under the title “L'Empire de la honte”)