

Mailbag

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Election of Federal Council

The article "Will the people soon be electing the Federal Council?" is most enlightening. The upcoming debates have the potential to trigger fierce controversy. In order to avoid confrontations between certain political parties and the present Federal Council and Parliament, I have the following proposal. In the time-honoured Swiss tradition, in the future, half of the members of the Federal Council could be elected by the people and the other half by Parliament. Unfortunately the number of members in the Federal Council is an odd number. Since the Swiss are notorious for rounding up their bills, I suggest that the number of this honourable consortium be increased to the next even number which is eight.

ANTON ANDEREGGEN,
MAPLE VALLEY, USA

Federal Council elections

Switzerland's system of "consensus government" is unique, and for it to work its composition must take account of the various languages, faiths and regions. An election of the Federal Council by the people would not ensure this, and the various facets of Swiss society would no longer be represented. The outcome would be political polarisation like in the USA, and what a shame that would be.

HANS LEUTHOLD, SANTA CRUZ

Immigration policy

Immigration in the 1960s went hand-in-hand with an economic boom and salary adjustments twice a year. Salaries have now remained constant for the last 15 years in terms of purchasing power, and the average Swiss person lives on a tight budget. Women going out to work has become a normal part of family life, whereas this was the exception and frowned upon 50 years ago. Tolerance towards rivals in the labour market and benefit recipi-

ents is declining accordingly. Unrest and instability are to be anticipated.

HANSRUEDI GUT, ANGELES CITY

Immigration

Xenophobic sentiment is nothing new but comes to the fore primarily during times of economic hardship, high population density and excessive immigration. A small country like Switzerland has reached its absolute growth limit with a population of eight million. A halt to immigration is inevitable. Annual immigration quotas would regulate the problem fairly. Granting Swiss citizenship to immigrants should be made subject to the renunciation of any previous citizenship, as is the case in many countries.

DANIEL GUGGISBERG,
REDONDO BEACH, USA

Thank you

A reader complained about the bias shown by Barbara Engel, editor-in-chief, in making the "Swiss Review" left-leaning by focusing too heavily on the Greens and not enough on the Swiss People's Party. While it is right that this publication should not seek to polarise its readers, I am personally delighted to see it finally provide an accurate reflection of Switzerland after years when it seemed that the less one addressed the realities the better. Thank you for providing us once more with editorial clear-sightedness.

PHILIPPE LEMOINE, FRANCE

Wide selection of topics

I have been living abroad as long as I previously lived in Switzerland, about 34 years each. I enjoy the "Swiss Review". I often read it cover to cover, particularly since Barbara Engel has taken editorial control. Her wide selection of topics of interest is appreciated, but what I enjoy even more are her astute comments. I hope she will stay at the helm for a while yet.

HEINRICH BENZ, AUSTRALIA

All kinds of Switzerland

IF THE ORIGINAL CANTONS LEFT SWITZERLAND. Despair and happiness are often not that far apart, as is the case in caricatures and satire, for example. Both exaggerate the facts and often get closer to the heart of the matter than many an in-depth analysis. Or, in the words of Charles Lewinsky: "Caricatures can give a better reflection than mirror images." This Swiss author is a master of sardonic satire. In his latest book entitled "Schweizen: 24 Zukünfte" (Switzerland: 24 futures) he mercilessly transposes current trends into a future that is not altogether encouraging.

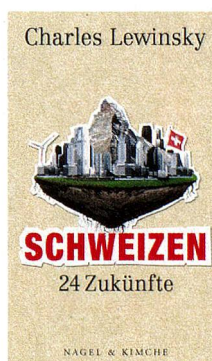
The book also provides strong evidence that Charles Lewinsky is Switzerland's most multi-talented writer. He is a director, editor, columnist and screenplay writer as well as the author of great historical novels, such as "Melnitz" and "Gerron". He displays the full gamut of his talents in his latest book. Each of the 24 stories is told in a different form of writing – readers are presented with a screenplay, a set of minutes, a school essay, a diary, a job application, a last will and testament, a memorandum and even a federal charter. Various literary styles are also deployed, including the theatre performance, the crime story, the ballad, the fairy tale, the fable and the science-fiction story. None of this is done for "some deeper reason", as Lewinsky writes in the foreword, "but quite simply because I enjoyed letting myself go stylistically".

He does not just let himself go stylistically, but thematically as well. Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden declare, by federal charter, that they will leave Switzerland "at the beginning of the month of August in the year of our Lord 2072" because it has acceded to the EU. We also experience the triumph of technical progress and the salvation of Swiss tourism thanks to the invention of artificial snow, which provides a durable top-quality blanket in summer, too, even down in the valley. We learn which qualities are required to succeed in a popular election of the Federal Council in a dialogue between a candidate and his election campaign adviser. Visitors to the Ballenberg 2 open-air museum in 2064 can see extinct animals – which produce a distinctive white-coloured liquid – brought back to life by genetic engineering. Incidentally, Ballenberg 2 "is located in the middle of the Brienz-Ballenberg city district, a region that is still very rural and sparsely populated with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants". Everything is relative, including the perception of a sparsely populated region.

Swiss democracy is also relative, at least when the country suddenly has a Federal President appointed for life. After his death he lies in state in a mausoleum which school parties are obliged to visit. Upon whom is this honour bestowed? That is not revealed. But one thing is for sure:

Charles Lewinsky's negative utopias provide amusing reading even if the humour is often somewhat caustic. It is clever entertainment, which is not just funny but also highly political.

JÜRIG MÜLLER



CHARLES LEWINSKY: "Schweizen. 24 Zukünfte". Verlag Nagel & Kimche, Munich 2013. 176 pages. CHF 25.90, EUR 21.10