

# Kastelau [Charles Lewinsky]

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living in the EU? The loss of civil liberties owing to the submission of states to European directives, the abandonment of sovereignty and an economic slump. I live in France and will not go into the problems associated with migration. I can only say that voting no longer makes much sense. The party system distorts everything it seeks to organise. While you do not like direct democracy much, it is nevertheless the people's weapon. If the Swiss people think wrongly, you and your party friends believe they have to be changed. Continuing to call this democracy is illogical to say the least.

VÉRONIQUE D'ACORSI-DECAILLET, FRANCE

### I would like to see better representation

I am a Swiss citizen abroad and work in the UK. I do not belong to a political party, I vote regularly and keep myself informed about Swiss affairs. I actually believe I have a much better understanding of what is going on than many of my compatriots living in Switzerland! Switzerland is not an island, but despite lying at the heart of Europe it still appears very isolated and short-sighted to me. I appreciate that Swiss Abroad in Thailand have different concerns to those living in Uruguay, in the UK or wherever else. Policy on Europe and that beyond Europe differ greatly. By way of example, Swiss Abroad in the EU can no longer pay voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance (AHV) contributions from the age of 30 – they are forced to have gaps in their AHV cover – whereas outside of the EU people can continue to make voluntary contributions. This results in heavily reduced pensions for Swiss Abroad in the EU. I therefore strongly believe there is a need for the Swiss living in the EU to be represented in Parliament. It is very common nowadays for young people to spend a few years working in the EU. I would be pleased to see their and my interests and rights better represented in Parliament.

CLAUDIA STUSS, ENGLAND

### 20 % in Switzerland without the right to vote

If we consider democracy in Switzerland, the most important thing for starters is that all permanent residents of Switzerland have the right to participate in determining what happens in the country. Unfortunately, over 20 % of Switzerland's permanent resident population is excluded from political participation because they do not possess, for whatever reason, a little red booklet. This is now a much more serious issue than that of the Swiss Abroad deserving representation in Parliament. I would hope that we as Swiss Abroad would like to see an end to this infringement of the political rights of residents (which some of us almost certainly experience ourselves in our adopted countries). I believe campaigning on this issue to be even more important.

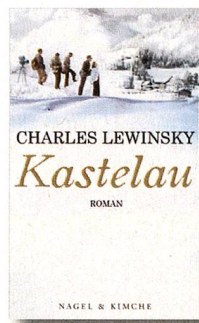
ANDREAS BÜRKI, BERLIN

### Urgently needed

Having an authority to deal with the concerns of the Swiss Abroad and to also represent them in Parliament is an absolute necessity. In his 1 August address in Thailand, Federal Councillor Berset emphasised how important the Swiss Abroad are to Switzerland and what a contribution they make on behalf of Switzerland. But this raises the question of what Switzerland does for the Swiss Abroad. In any event, parliamentary representation to take up and seriously represent the issues of the Swiss Abroad is urgently needed.

HERBERT STÄHELI, PATTAYA, THAILAND

## Surviving the winter in two senses



CHARLES LEWINSKY:  
"Kastelau". Verlag Nagel  
und Kimche, Munich 2014.  
398 pages. CHF 35.90,  
around EUR 33.70.

What do you do if you find yourself in Berlin at the end of 1944 where military collapse is imminent and the only thing you want is to save your own skin? The Swiss writer Charles Lewinsky has created an outstanding tragic, comedic novel out of this apocalyptic mood. A team from the film company UFA is commissioned to make a propaganda film in the Bavarian Alps to boost resolve. A motley film crew sets off, and it is – more or less tacitly – clear to everyone that the primary objective is not the film but escape from the witch's cauldron of Berlin.

The real challenges begin in Kastelau. This is the name given to the remote and fictitious small town where they have to survive the winter in two senses. At least they must pretend to. Nobody in the village must suspect that work is not being carried out in earnest on a film to help ensure ultimate German victory. There is also a split amongst the film crew – half are true to the regime, half are deserters. As the Americans approach, the few unenthusiastically filmed scenes must quickly be recut and supplemented so that the Nazi film entitled "Song of Freedom" becomes an heroic documentary about the opposition to the regime. They do not want to fall into the hands of the advancing Allies as a group of Nazi propagandists.

The presence of the film crew turns Kastelau, a conservative village, into a bizarre stage for all the characters found in a dictatorship: ardent Nazis, followers, opponents of the regime, those who cheat their way through and turncoats. Indeed one such turncoat plays a major part in events. Walter Arnold initially enjoyed a career as an actor in Nazi Germany and then as Arnie Walton in Hollywood. The American Samuel A. Saunders picks up the trail of this story, carries out research, discovers papers and conducts interviews. At the start of the book, Charles Lewinsky produces a rather chaotic collage of these – entirely fictitious – documents but they rapidly turn into an increasingly fast-paced novel. What is more, fundamental questions concerning human behaviour in extreme situations are dealt with sublimely and in an entertaining and exciting way despite all the tragedy and drama. Lewinsky, who has already written masterful historical novels such as "Melnitz" and "Gerron", proves himself to be one of the most imaginative authors in the German language in this double-edged work of fiction, "Kastelau", also in terms of narrative technique and plot construction.

JÜRIG MÜLLER