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Autor: Engel, Barbara

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Fukushima: warning sign and wake-up call

The conservative parties and right-wing journalists always focus on costs when it comes to the issue of abandoning nuclear power. Whatever the cost of decommissioning a nuclear power plant, that is only part of the problem. The permanent disposal of nuclear waste still has to be resolved, but the advocates of nuclear power do not tell us about that, let alone what a disaster would cost Switzerland. The right-wing and conservative groups are also reticent to reveal how many new jobs withdrawal from nuclear power would create.

Progress means demonstrating the courage and desire to embrace innovation. A responsible government finds this courage and desire for the good of the people. Perhaps it is not by chance that the Federal Council is dominated by female members at this time. Perhaps it is providence that Switzerland has a government able to read the signs of the times.

JACQUELINE ZWAHLEN,
AMLAPURA, INDONESIA

"Swiss Review" and the nuclear debate

Rene Lenzin's article on nuclear power in Switzerland in your September issue was interesting but didn't really tackle what it means for an energy policy to work in the medium to long term. The only way to seriously slash transport emissions is to massively increase the production of clean electricity and electrify transportation. The same applies to heating oil emissions. So electricity production in Switzerland must increase not just a little, but probably double or even triple in the next few decades. Germany's flirta-

tion with solar has been so deep and dismal a failure that it's hard to understand people taking it seriously.

GEOFF RUSSELL, AUSTRALIA

Offensive

It is fantastic that "Swiss Review" keeps us up to date about the latest developments and events in Switzerland. However, I was outraged at the picture on page 19 in the September 2011 edition. It is not only offensive and distasteful towards our female Federal Councillors but also towards women in general. This was very inappropriate for "Swiss Review" and indeed any other magazine.

MARGRET ZINGG, TAIWAN

Scapegoats

I unfortunately have to correct you with regard to the article on the Germans being the new scapegoats. The Germans have always been scapegoats, this is nothing new. This may not have been expressed so publicly and vociferously in the past but they have always been "die chaibe Dütsche" or "d Sauschwobe". When I married a German almost 50 years ago, it was seen as disastrous not only by my family but also by the wider community. If you look at Swiss history, this has been the case since time immemorial. The Swiss fought the Habsburgs hundreds of years ago. This deep-seated attitude will never change.

On that note, greetings from beautiful Ravensburg,

ANNA HELLERMANN

Charges for bank customers domiciled abroad

Without prior warning, Credit Suisse has charged account management fees of CHF 192 for three months for my nine-year-old son, a Swiss

From inside the circle of power

A FEDERAL COUNCIL SPOKESMAN AND A JOURNALIST – two people who are extremely familiar with the workings of the Federal Palace in Berne – have written a book together. However, this is not a title full of anecdotes about Bernese political life. Instead, Oswald Sigg and Viktor Parma focus on the mechanisms behind Swiss politics that few know about. The book's final chapter begins: "Whether we are talking about lobbying, sleaze or the political class, anxiety over the corruptibility of democracy is spreading." Even the Federal Council is concerned about democratic deficits, otherwise why would it have declared the "challenges to democracy in the 21st century" a national research priority? The chapter on the Federal Council's meetings and the meeting room makes entertaining reading (see page 16). Few people have better knowledge of this than Sigg, who first worked under several Federal Councillors before later becoming Vice-Chancellor and Spokesperson for the Federal Council. In his view, the tradition of open debate where joint solutions are sought and decisions taken collegially has been completely eroded in recent years. Voting has become increasingly commonplace on the Federal Council, like a small-scale parliament, and everyone is eager to conclude meetings before lunch if possible.

In the chapter entitled "Parliament", Viktor Parma provides an astonishing insight into the lengths the business community goes to in order to exercise influence over politicians in Berne. The business federation Economiesuisse and the Trade and Industry Group, to which 130 of the 246 Council members belong but which is not officially registered, play a key role in this. Through these two organisations, Members of Parliament apparently receive clear instructions on how to vote. Voting is closely observed and anyone who flouts the instructions must explain why, writes Parma. This practice violates the prohibition of voting instructions enshrined in the Federal Constitution, which states: "No member of the Federal Assembly may vote on the instructions of another person." The 2008 referendum on corporate tax reform also highlights the Federal Council's willingness to submit to the wishes of the business community. The referendum documents of FDP Federal Councillor Rudolf Merz said at the time that the loss of tax revenue would be

limited, totalling less than a billion Swiss francs. It is now evident that the true figure is at least seven billion. The Federal Supreme Court is now looking into the statements that Merz made against his better knowledge.

The authors also take a critical view of popular initiatives. Today, this instrument is primarily used for commercial purposes and to generate media attention. Indeed, Sigg believes a "pseudo-democratic

coup attempt by the SVP" lies behind the recently submitted initiative for the election of the Federal Council by the people. The title of the book, "Die käufliche Schweiz" (Corruptible Switzerland), is not particularly subtle, and the authors' indignation is a little too obvious in some passages. It is nevertheless well worth reading, especially in an election year.

BARBARA ENGEL



VIKTOR PARMA, OSWALD SIGG. "Die käufliche Schweiz", Für die Rückeroberung der Demokratie durch ihre Bürger; Verlag Nagel & Kimche 2011; CHF 23.90.