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[Wolfgang Koydl]

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Highest compliments

I want to compliment you and your staff on the outstanding recent issues of the "Swiss Review". I find them to be so much improved. As a retired transportation engineer and researcher, I especially appreciated the cover photo and pictures of the Rhaetian Railway in the August Review. More important is the coverage you give to issues of importance to Swiss people. Swiss newspaper articles cover daily happenings, but the comprehensive overview you give an issue is refreshing and helps me to understand Swiss people's views. Thank you for the superb job you are doing.

CAMPBELL GRAEBER
WASHINGTON, DC, USA

Deeply offended

We are deeply offended by your article "Voluntary military service?". In it you write and I quote: "Maurer also points to the enormous recruitment problems of volunteer armies. He says Spain has to draft in people from South America, and the UK recruits its volunteers from prisons." That, my dear man, is totally untrue and extremely offensive to our volunteer soldiers who lay their lives on the line for their country. The UK does not recruit from prisons. This is a slander to say the least by Mr. Maurer, and disrespectful to British soldiers.

EDITH MASON, VIA EMAIL

Unconditional Basic Income

I am very pleased the Swiss will be voting on unconditional basic income UBI in an upcoming referendum. UBIs will be crucial to sustaining societies in future, calling for immense change in government, work, education, and families, but they can/will succeed – if kept simple. The Manitoba Social

Experiment, a pilot UBI that was buried, demonstrated that some did not work – as has been and will be the case in every society – some continued with the same work, and some chose entirely different work!

SELMA NUSSBAUMER-ROTH
DEEP RIVER, CANADA

Basic income, seriously...

An interesting article but, honestly, receiving money for nothing in return? I might have old-fashioned views but this simply will not work. Someone earning 6,000 Swiss francs is to suddenly receive just 3,500? What is the point of that? It equates to a 42% pay cut. And who is going to meet all the costs? I can't imagine that prices in Switzerland will fall to the same extent. Be realistic, people – forget this nonsense and start doing a proper job instead of filling the minds of the public with such pipe dreams.

RENE SCHNEIDER,
MANLY VALE, AUSTRALIA

Switzerland plans its post-nuclear energy future

Many thanks for this extremely informative article. So, Switzerland is now also planning to enter the age of so-called "renewable" energies after the shock of the Fukushima disaster. Having read the article, I get the impression that this is taking place in true Swiss fashion based on objective debate between the various interest groups. I trust and hope for Switzerland's sake that decisions will ultimately be taken without the ideological blinkers that have led to ridiculous, billion-euro bad investments by Switzerland's northern neighbour and consequently to undesirable developments and additional costs that nobody foresaw due to their political blindness.

WERNER GEISER,
GELSENKIRCHEN, GERMANY

DO YOU REALLY have to walk through the Gotthard railway tunnel with two railway linesmen in order to understand Switzerland? Of course not, even if the book's title is: "33 things you must do in Switzerland". But the example illustrates the lengths gone to by the author Wolfgang Koydl, Switzerland correspondent for the "Süddeutsche Zeitung". The book's subtitle is "A Teutonic Self-Experiment". Koydl had never visited Switzerland before taking up his post in 2011. This is now his second book on the subject of his journalistic observations.

This German writer is clearly fascinated by Switzerland. He finds the country inexhaustible and "richer than some larger countries that have long since lost many traditions and peculiarities to the uniformity of the global mainstream", as Koydl writes in the foreword. He has gathered together well-known and little-known facts about politics, culture, business, sport and traditions and has not shied away from looking at clichés either. He has produced a collection of short pieces of reportage in which he is often the main protagonist. The reader accompanies the author when he visits the major Swiss bank UBS on Zurich's Paradeplatz to open an account and gets the bank employee all flustered by adopting a feigned naivety. We go with him to the nearby Bahnhofstrasse where he enters a luxury watch shop to ask seemingly inappropriate questions ("Why are these watches all so chunky?"). We look over his shoulder when he observes goings-on on the Jungfraujoch and when he does voluntary work in the remote Val Calanca. Koydl also sits behind the steering wheel of a large Swiss Postbus, discovers what it is like to be overpowered during a bout of Swiss wrestling, and attends a course on Swiss dialect. He is present during the recruitment of Swiss guards, spends a day lounging around the Federal Palace, studies the architecture and symbolic language of the parliament building and concludes: "The Swiss



Parliament's setting is rather theatrical, but its members are less so."

With an at times almost ethnological approach, he outlines the country's peculiarities – always with a comic touch and sometimes with deliberate exaggeration. Each piece of reportage also contains some well concealed basic information. Despite the extensive use of humour in his writing, the author goes on record as saying that he has come to admire and greatly respect his host country. The polished and expert writing and elegant and ironic use of language make this book a very enjoyable read. It not only lends itself as introductory reading for foreigners living in Switzerland but also provides sophisticated insights for Swiss at home and abroad. What could enhance your perception of your own country more than an outsider's clever and mischievous observations? Probably very few Swiss have made such strenuous efforts to personally experience so many different facets of their own country.

JÜRG MÜLLER