

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 45 (2018)
Heft: 5

Artikel: "The contribution is a gesture of solidarity"
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906546>

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“The contribution is a gesture of solidarity”

Luzius Mader* was charged by the federal government with the “compulsory social measures” dossier. Overall, he draws a positive interim balance.

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU

“Swiss Review”: Until 1980 the state inflicted suffering on many children. Are you satisfied with what has been achieved in reparation?

Luzius Mader: Yes, very satisfied. Particularly because, in contrast to earlier attempts, it was successful in getting the political reappraisal underway. The reappraisal is completed in political terms only. The academic inquiry and individual reappraisals continue.

You had to find solutions that could be implemented politically. Can the politically feasible do adequate justice to the victims?

As we wanted to achieve something concrete, it was necessary to take the political framework into account. Another failure would have been devastating.

You sat with the victims at the round table. Was that difficult?

The key thing was that we first strove for mutual trust. At the beginning, the talk was of the side of the victim and the side of the perpetrator. I made it clear that here there were no victims or perpetrators, but people who wanted to contribute to reappraisal.

That did not change the perspective for many: as a victim they had to file a request with their abuser – that is, the state.

There was no other way around it. Some public authority would have to take on the task. And rightly so: the state itself should stand up and say that an injustice has occurred and that

it therefore wants to take on the responsibility. That is quite crucial.

Up to 20,000 persons could have proved their status as a victim. Nine thousand requests have been received.

That is completely in line with what we expected. The number shows that the hurdles to even file a request were surmountable by the victims.

Acknowledged victims receive 25,000 Swiss francs: can this amount “make good” a life of disadvantage?

No. I always avoid speaking of compensation or reparation. The contribution is a gesture of solidarity. A necessary gesture, because a written confirmation of victim status cannot suffice. Many victims understood it exactly that way. The many thank-you letters are proof of this.

Those so badly afflicted by the suffering incurred that they now live on social benefits will presumably continue to do so.

Exactly. With 25,000 Swiss francs, it is not possible to radically change a life, particularly since many of those eligible are already advanced in age. But the contribution is tax-free, it does not lead, for example, to a reduction in needs-based minimum benefits. In this case the state should not give out with the one hand and take back again with the other.

It is the federal government that has acted up to now. The measures which the victims had to suffer were enacted by municipalities and cantons. Are they now off the hook?

No, they are not. Municipalities and cantons have also already done a great deal, for example, in their archives or



in setting up contact points. Additionally, municipalities such as Bern and Köniz have made substantial contributions to emergency aid.

Eight cantons up to now have also made contributions to the financing of the solidarity contribution. The fact that they have participated is more important than the amount.

You retired at the end of May, and are therefore no longer the deputy director of the Federal Office of Justice. Are you then finished with this issue?

I will continue to concern myself with this issue. I will continue to preside over the advisory commission on the solidarity contributions and will continue to look after the academic inquiry in the interest of the federal government.

* Luzius Mader was the deputy director of the Federal Office of Justice and headed the round table in favour of the victims of the compulsory social measures.

Luzius Mader:
“The reappraisal is completed in political terms only.”
Photo: Keystone