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Fiscal justice?

When I saw that Schumacher was paying less tax than me, I left. I don't see why I should have to put in 60 hours of work a week, sometimes more, plus the army (yes, the army) and not start earning my living until August (the first seven months of the year going on tax) so that the wealthy can benefit almost scot-free. I now pay my taxes in California with the added bonus of the sunshine.

FABIEN HUG, USA

Watchmaking internships

I was absolutely delighted to see an article about watchmaking in Switzerland. I was an employee of Piaget in the 1970s and now live in Lincoln, Nebraska, where I provide the official after-sales service for Maurice Lacroix, Louis Erard, Louis Chevrolet, Revue Thommen, Grovana, Charmex, Pilo Genève, David Van Heim and Ernest Borel. We have also set up an internship programme for Swiss watchmaking apprentices who have completed the 3rd or 4th year of their apprenticeship in the industry. We currently have six interns with us. This is an outstanding opportunity for them to leave Switzerland and practise their profession, study new calibres, learn English and learn how an after-sales service works.

SAMUEL GRANDJEAN, BY EMAIL

Most things I learned in Switzerland

I am grateful for this detailed history of one of the industries Switzerland is most famed for, and I am very impressed with its tenacity to survive. It does not come as a surprise to me. I had the privilege myself to work in Switzerland (although in the heavy engineering industry) and have no qualms to state that most of the things that I have ever learned in my profession, I learned in Switzerland. Good on you!

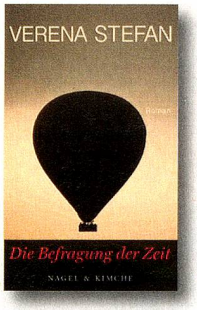
EDWARD WECHNER, BY EMAIL

Nation of sailors

In your article on Switzerland as a nation of sailors, you could perhaps have mentioned the fact that Switzerland has (or had?) a merchant navy on the high seas. It was established to ensure the supply of provisions to Switzerland during the 1939–1945 war. Using the port of Genoa and based in Basel, it carried out its mission to perfection and continued to exist after 1945. In 1974, I photographed the cargo ship "Zinal" (?) in the port of Lagos, as can be seen on my website of old photographs. I was even invited to dine there one evening with the Swiss consul. I believe this merchant fleet still existed until at least 10 years ago.

LUC SAUGY, BEZIERS, FRANCE

A tale of illiberality and double standards



VERENA STEFAN: "Die Befragung der Zeit". Verlag Nagel und Kimche, Munich 2014. 224 pages. CHF 27.90, EUR 23

The author has spared no effort trawling through an 800-page file on the abortion cases of a village doctor at the Bernese state archive. The doctor was her grandfather, and the author is Verena Stefan. She lives in Canada today. In 1975, she wrote the book "Häutungen" (Shedding), which gained cult status among the feminist movement. It would be wrong to now conclude that her latest documentary novel entitled "Die Befragung der Zeit" (The Test of Time) is some kind of heroic epic about a doctor committed to female sexual self-determination. Julius Brunner, the main character, is neither an idealist nor an ideologically motivated criminal. However, he is not a villain seeking to exploit the desperation of women for personal enrichment either. He becomes involved in the affair rather reluctantly during the 1940s because he "simply gave in too easily" when the women "begged and pleaded".

The book combines documentation and fiction in riveting storylines. It looks at an aspect of Swiss legal history when the courts still dealt with abortion with inquisition-like severity. Abortion only became legal in Switzerland in 2002. Verena Stefan quotes extensively from the case records which illustrate how demeaning the questioning was. Documentary material is woven into a largely fictitious and far from idyllic family story. The relationship between Julius Brunner and his wife Lina especially remains fraught throughout their lives.

Brunner's bond with his little granddaughter Rosa is stronger. The way in which the four-year-old attempts to deal with the events she cannot understand involving her dearly loved grandfather is especially touching. The situation becomes complicated when the elderly doctor is arrested by the police one day and admitted to a psychiatric unit to assess his soundness of mind. A young waitress has set the judicial machinery rolling. She used the doctor's services in her desperation but was unable to keep her secret after the procedure.

Verena Stefan has written a multi-layered book where she is more of an empathetic chronicler than an advocate of feminism. This leaves the reader with an even stronger impression of a narrow-minded society which practises double moral standards. In the words of Doctor Brunner: "Abortion remains the most reliable means of contraception, as those in authority well know. After all, they use it often enough for their wives and mistresses."

JÜRG MÜLLER