

# Mailbag

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## A story from Germany

I would like to highlight one detail in relation to the fascinating article on John Knittel. Knittel interwove the case files of the murder of a tyrannical sawmill owner into his novel "Via Mala". The sawmill was located in the modern-day municipality of Kirchensittenbach near Nuremberg. John Knittel shifted the novel's plot to the gruesome Via Mala for greater effect. However, the most recent film version was shot in the canton of Berne. By coincidence, the Swiss Society in Nuremberg has held its Swiss National Day celebrations in Kirchensittenbach for over 40 years. This is how we found out about this story.

VRENI FENSKE-GMÜR, CHAIRPERSON OF THE SWISS SOCIETY IN NUREMBERG

## The brain has to be fed

Since I started reading the "Swiss Review", I have been better informed than when I was still living in Switzerland. I wish to thank and congratulate you on your high standards. The article on our national languages in December 2014 proved thought-provoking both locally and globally. I would like to add two points. Neuropsychologists and "neuro experts" tell us that the brain has to be fed even before birth and, above all, that babies' brains need to be fed with our and other languages. We should therefore begin as early as possible and take advantage of our privileged position of having four national languages by offering them at school together with English from the outset. The latter is necessary to give our children the best opportu-

nities on the international stage. These days, when Swiss professionals meet in the various parts of the country, they use English to communicate. Fighting against the times is unfortunately sometimes destined to end in failure.

PIERRE SAUBERMANN, DOCTOR, HUNINGUE, FRANCE

## Please spare us

It is simply cynical to write such an article about Verena Stefan's book "Die Befragung der Zeit" (The Test of Time). I was particularly taken aback by this part: "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." How can anyone refer to abortion as "the most reliable means of contraception"?! Abortion is murder – all of the academically superior debates are irrelevant because a human life is created in the first seconds of cell division. Please spare us such biased feminist nonsense in future. Thank you.

RENÉ LÜTOLD (DIPL. ING.), CHIANGMAI AND BERNE

## Five-star bunkers

I was deeply shocked by the transformation of alpine military installations into theme parks for the privileged of this world. Using them for another purpose is all well and good but once again bowing down to the wealthy is deplorable. Who can afford an overnight stay or an

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XXL vault in these deluxe bunkers and how much have these revamps cost? The clichéd image of wealthy Swiss will be further entrenched in the minds of our friends abroad. One line from your article would make a good subject for philosophical debate: “The old fortifications are therefore no longer being used for the protection of the population and the state but instead for safeguarding worldly goods.” Cause for reflection, isn’t it?

ROLANDE MICHOU, PLUDUAL, FRANCE

### The “NZZ” is the mouthpiece of the FDP

“The liberal outlook and differentiated criticism of the “NZZ”! Wow, Ms Engel – who whispered that in your ear? The “NZZ” is THE mouthpiece of the FDP and the FDP is part of the coup of 12 December 2007 (Ed. the de-selection of Federal Councilor Christoph Blocher) which has unfortunately been overlooked thus far. The “NZZ” does not publish differentiated analyses but instead viewpoints which are unequivocally centre-left (with a sprinkling of liberal economics). This suits the financial and business elite! In a quagmire of incompetence and ideological drivel, it is possible to manoeuvre under the radar and create facts, namely Switzerland’s position as an economic zone of the EU.

MARKUS IMMER, PHILIPPINES

### Remarkable

I have been reading “Swiss Review” for many years and am very appreciative of the interesting articles and well considered coverage provided about Switzerland. I found the article by Georg Kohler about Parliament, polarisation, the political class and the voice of the people in the latest issue quite remarkable. It illustrates in a matter-of-fact and comprehensible way how important the consensus-oriented approach of the political parties is to the proper functioning of direct democracy and to what a great extent polarising initiatives and polemicising against a political class threaten precisely this form of democracy. I would like to see such an article distributed to all households in Switzerland, especially during election year 2015.

HANS RUDOLF LEU, MUNICH

### Outstanding analysis

Georg Kohler’s analysis of the development of our political system is outstanding. When, in relation to election year, he talks about our minor planet, which as an autonomous rock often vehemently conflicts with its global orientation, this debate should be further intensified after the unpegging of the Swiss franc against the euro. Having lived in Germany for three years and followed the unspeakable debates about PEGIDA, LEGIDA and similar protest movements, I believe that the political parties should focus on the most important issues concerning the future of the nation at the forthcoming election. Prudent re-orientation cannot result from mutual provocation. Each party, especially the SVP, must recognise that we have more to lose than gain as a society in a mood of rancour.

WILHELM TSCHOL, GERMANY

## A story of true love



The film will be shown in many European countries and the USA over the next few months. The DVD will go on sale from 10 March 2015 in the original language, dubbed in High German or with English/French/Italian subtitles.

“Der Kreis” was a magazine, “Der Kreis” was a gay organisation and “Der Kreis” is now a film. A film that depicts the love affair between two men in Zurich and the gay subculture which established itself in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. The way in which minorities and marginalised groups were treated has been a recurring theme in Swiss film over recent decades. The tackling of this issue began with “The Boat Is Full” by Markus Imhof in 1980, a film about refugee policy during the Second World War. “Kinder der Landstrasse” by Urs Egger (1992) about the disgraceful treatment of travellers by the authorities also made a lasting impression.

The film “Der Kreis” was a good 15 years in the making. It was initially intended as a documentary and was then to become a feature-length movie. Nothing came of either project. Director Stefan Haupt has now opted for the genre of docu-fiction. It has to be said from the outset that he has brilliantly avoided the pitfalls of this genre – sentimentality and melodrama. His film recounts the love affair between the French teacher Ernst Ostertag and the drag artist Röbi Rapp which has now lasted almost 60 years. In the film the couple are portrayed by the young actors Matthias Hungerbühler and Sven Schelker. They turn in extremely convincing performances, but it is the documentary sections, the accounts by Ostertag and Rapp, which give the film its depth.

The two elderly gentlemen relate what it meant to be gay at that time, only able to express their love in secret and living in perpetual fear for their own middle-class existence. Their experiences of repression and bigotry mean that they still fight in support of gay issues today.

During the 1960s, the gay scene was underground and fighting for recognition. It did so in a society that responded with fear, hostility and often aggression. The film reveals that resentment and discord also existed within the gay sub-culture.

Stefan Haupt succeeds in conveying all these elements without overdramatising or lecturing. The film obviously addresses historical contexts and socio-political developments. However, it is essentially a film about a couple, the story of two people, who continue to love one another into old age against all the odds. Stefan Haupt proves on several occasions that he is a master at dealing with powerful feelings – he manages to portray highly emotional scenes without a hint of awkwardness.

BARBARA ENGEL