

SWITZERLAND AND THE 1%

„To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize“

Voltaire

„(...) citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self - defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control“-

Noam Chomsky

An important study recently published about the financial core of the transnational corporations helps to understand certain issues in Switzerland. Its authors made the following introduction to it:

„In this study, we decided to identify in detail the people on the boards of directors of the top ten asset management firms and the top ten most centralized corporations in the world. Because of overlaps, there is a total of thirteen firms, which collectively have 161 directors on their boards. We think that this group of 161 individuals represents the financial core of the world’s transnational capitalist class. They collectively manage \$23.91 trillion in funds and operate in nearly every country in the world. They are the center of the financial capital that powers the global economic system. Western governments and international policy bodies work in the interests of this financial core to protect the free flow of capital investment anywhere in the world.“(1)

These „clusters of elites“ which „form strategic transnational alliances through mergers and acquisitions with the goal of increased concentration of wealth and capital“, are the „policy-building elites of the world, people at the absolute peak of the global power pyramid.“ They „share a common goal of maximum return on investments“ and they are „laying the foundation for the privatization of the world“. In fact, still according to the authors, „If public, democratic institutions—including schools, post offices, universities, the military, and even churches—become privately owned entities, then corporate interests will truly dominate.“

In short, these individuals are the main representatives of what became known since the Occupy movement in 2011 as the 1% against the 99%. „Almost all of the 161 individuals serve in some advisory capacity for various regulatory organizations, finance ministries, universities, and national or international policy-planning bodies.“ The majority of them come from the US and Europe – 45% from the US alone - and 11 of them from Switzerland but we must add to that some of the 161 coming from other countries who are also involved in the Swiss based corporations mentioned in the study. In relation to its size and population, Switzerland is therefore an important country in the policy making of the 1%. Among the 161 individuals identified in the study is Mr. Peter Brabeck, the most public well known representative in Switzerland of the 1% and one of the most engaged in defending and promoting its policies. It is from the perspective of the 1% that we can really understand the many sided activities of Mr. Brabeck – Credit-Suisse, CB-Chairman-Nestlé SA L’Oréal SA, Paris, Exxon Mobil Corporation, Delta Topco (Formula 1), PC-World Economic Forum 2013, European Round Table of Industrialists, E-University of World Trade – as mentioned in the study –

and as well Chairman of the Water Resources Group (WRG) which includes such other members of the 1% as the CEO's of Coca-Cola and PepsiCo.

WRG is a revealing example of how the 1% policy works. Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians wrote in her recently published book „Blue Future“: „At the 2010 World Economic Forum, the WRG launched a series of pilot projects with a clear goal: “to build a demand driven public-private platform to support governments that want to engage in water sector reforms“. Given that most developing countries will have no choice if they want World Bank funding, it is disingenuous to imply that the WRG is doing those countries a favour by setting up these projects. Any country that needs funding for water services is letting not just the World Bank into the inner circle of government but also Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, SUEZ, Veolia and, of course, Nestlé. Sadly, this initiative is aided by public funds through the development agencies of Switzerland and Germany. The model is clear: government and their citizens put up the money, the private water sector delivers the water services for profit and friendly NGOs provide charity to the poor – the exact opposite of a model of water justice and democracy“.

The „friendly NGOs“ of course do not make any criticism.

The 161 individuals at the core of the transnational corporation class represent real power and as such are untouchable. A very good illustration of this fact is the recent law court case opened in Switzerland against Nestlé – and Peter Brabeck himself – by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) regarding the assassination of the Colombian trade-unionist Luciano Romero. In this initiative, ECCHR was supported by the German development agency linked to the Catholic Church MISEREOR (2) as shown in the websites of both ECCHR and MISEREOR. The Swiss Catholic Development Agencies CARITAS and FASTENOPFER – and its Protestant counterparts BROT FUER ALLE and HEKS – do not mention the case in their websites. A German Catholic development agency considers this issue about Nestlé important enough to support it and the Swiss institutions that should be even more engaged in it remain silent. The Tages Anzeiger published an article (3) about the lack of support of Swiss NGOs for the ECCHR initiative. Moreover, the Swiss Justice refused to take the case (4) arousing again practically no reaction from the Swiss NGOs, confirming the power of the 1% in silencing criticisms in Switzerland.

Maybe the main example of how Peter Brabeck and the 1% work in influencing Swiss Government and other Swiss institutions came to public attention thanks to the Berne Declaration and Greenpeace. Both organisations brought media attention in January 2010 to the „secret meeting“ called by Nestlé at Rive Reine attended by the main Swiss Government authorities, politicians, businessmen and representatives from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. Such meetings have been organised by Nestlé since many years but only in 2010 it got attention from the press. (5) In such meeting the Swiss 1% and Peter Brabeck as their host and main spokesman can clearly and in all tranquillity convey their „message“ to Swiss authorities and politicians, set their agenda, indicate the policies to follow and even count on spiritual advice since among the selected invited group of people in 2010 were Pastor Thomas Wipf, then President of the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches, and Abt Martin Werlen from the Swiss Bishops Conference. (6) Berne Declaration and Greenpeace unfortunately didn't follow the consequences of this first exposition and have not engaged much with Nestlé policies in Switzerland since then.

Today the 1% and the policies they promote are the main threat to world peace, to the environment, to democracy and to the fabric of society. Their goal is clear, even if not openly stated: the „progressive“ group inside the 1% - they do not agree in all positions and there are inner divisions – is willing to bring the world back to the time before the French Revolution, much before such „anti business“ social conquests like trade unions, human rights, environmental protection, labour laws, welfare state, etc. came into existence. On the other hand, the real market fundamentalists, the „radical wing“ of the 1%, is willing to bring us all back to a kind of theocratic medieval state with Money in the place of God. Those are their policy options and they are already implementing it. Warren Buffett, another well-known member of the 1%, said that it is the „rich class that’s making war and we’re winning“. Still, as social movements in Latin America and other places have shown, the 1% can be challenged and defeated. The first step is always to break the silence. And remember our own power as the poet Shelley wrote in the beginning of the 19th century:

“Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number-
Shake your chains to earth like
dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you
Ye are many-they are few.”

Franklin Frederick

NOTES

(1) <http://www.projectcensored.org/financial-core-of-the-transnational-corporate-class/>

(2) <http://www.misereor.de/presse/pressemeldungen/pressemeldungen-detais/article/misereor-unterstuetzt-strafanzeige.html>

(3) http://www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/120315_TA_nestle_hilfswerke_halfherzig.pdf

(4) <http://www.ecchr.de/index.php/nestle-518.html>

(5) <http://www.evb.ch/p25017036.html>

(6) <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/RiveReine-Die-geheimste-Konferenz-der-Schweiz/story/11541353>