

Summer in Absurdistan

Gooseberry season? Well, at least the gooseberries get a little publicity, too, for a change. And there is actually something in it:

François Hollande is suffering a hairdresser-gate: apparently he hired a court Figaro who serves him exclusively, and earns over ten thousand Euros for doing so. After the issue was raised, the Elisée Palace communicated that you have to give credit to the fact that the poor man has to get up very early every day and grab his comb and scissors. Yes, maybe, and let him earn that money, but honestly, for that salary one would wish to see something at least mildly spectacular on the noble head, wouldn't one? Go wild, François!

UBS boss Sergio Ermotti launches quite a bold assessment of the situation in a Sunday newspaper on July 10: „The current situation has a different dimension than the financial crisis, a systemic dimension.“ It must give cause for major concern if one of the top banking managers implies that the issues in his industry do not have a systemic dimension – bad news for those who hoped that something or even a lot would change there in the near future.

Smart-writer Peter Schneider takes the opportunity on July 15 to devalue his readers publicly, at least those who dare criticise him: „Learn to read properly, before you fabricate boiler plates of indignation...“ – now is this philosophic disdainfulness, or psychoanalytic? (I admit he can be funny, too, but eventually this doesn't help anymore).

Martin Scholl, CEO of ZKB, fights a close race with his colleague, coming up with a sensational finding on July 23: „Already with the introduction of negative interest, we found that even investment professionals make totally irrational decisions.“ With all due respect, this was already found by a lot of people a lot of years ago (I remind you of the chimpanzees throwing darts...).

And then, of course: The Donald! He is running around firing at will, one can't help his jaw dropping, and it's not even sure that he will lose in the end. I simply don't have words.

Why is this relevant and not just funny? Because these are variations of a cocktail composed of a handful of ingredients, in changing combinations and intensities: disdainfulness, egocentricity, contemptuousness, ignoring basic knowledge or indifference. These are slow-acting poisons; their effects remain covered but may be close to uncontrollable when they become manifest. And observing that more and more political processes are dominated by votes of protest, it may well be that these effects are beginning to unfold right now, and if that is the case we really want to hope that it is not just the beginning.

It is just not enough anymore to be successful or to deliver good figures. It is becoming more and more important what messages you send, particularly about caring for other people and for obvious issues or not caring for them. If people in power positions don't display prudence and integrity and confirm them by factual proof, their power will be seen as less and less legitimate, and that harms the psychological contract between the powerful and the people they are supposed to lead, and many things go down the drain.

A few gooseberries are enough to make me a naysayer? I don't think so. And yet I believe that in a position of leadership – and not only there – it is wise to make sure that you have things and people around you that help you to be grounded. Recently I was asked about compassion in organisations. These are dimensions that move people, and it's this kind of dimensions that we will have to integrate in the future.