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P.O. Box 2075
North Little Rock, AR 72115
Telephone: (501) 374-1788

James Roger Brown, Director
Member, Federation of American Scientists
E-mail: thesociologist@aol.com

March 13, 2004

Congressman Joe Baca
201 North "E" Street, Suite 102
San Bernardino, CA 92401

SUBJECT: New information for child protection system investigation

Dear Congressman Baca:

I want to draw your attention to a recent development in Europe that may help you organize the information you have received and provide an example for comparison.

Documentary film producer Peter Neumann and Historian Marco Leuenberger have exposed the existence of a Swiss government sponsored child slave trade that operated from prior to 1850 to 1950, over one hundred years, under the guise of family welfare and child protection.

I suggest that you obtain a copy of Peter Neumann's documentary and Marco Leuenberger's Thesis, "Verdingkinder. Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945, 211 S., 1991." I am attaching copies of two English language articles about the *Verdingkinder* Scandal.

This historical event is relevant to your investigation because the Swiss *Verdingkinder* system has identifiable elements in common with the United States child protection system you are investigating. The social processes I have identified common to both systems are:

1. Poor families required to register with the Government. (US Public Assistance, Welfare, Medicaid, Medicare and numerous other special programs.)
2. Once registered with the Government, Parents were subjected to ongoing monitoring to determine if "the best interest of the child" was served by removing the child from the home and placing the child in the *Verdingkinder* system.
3. Children who aged out of the system were not intellectually and emotionally prepared for adult life, especially marital relationships.
4. Decisions about the "best interest of the child" were made by Government employees using subjective criteria.
5. Children auctioned off or distributed under government sanction. (US Child Protection Agencies post pictures of children held for adoption on the internet and foster parents are enticed with additional household income generated by foster children.)
6. Children physically abused, starved, and malnourished by State and foster custodians.
7. Children sexually abused by State and foster custodians.

8. Children murdered by State and foster custodians.
9. Children economically exploited. (In the Swiss system by the middlemen, farmers and businesses using the child labor; In the US system by State employees who wrongfully seize children for federal funds to meet the agency payroll, by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers filing fraudulent insurance claims and crime victim therapy service provider claims for nonexistent or fictitious child crime victims, and by attorneys, prosecutors, child abuse investigators, juvenile court judges, and civil court judges who exploit false child abuse allegation to sustain their income, power or prestige.)
10. Criminal activity was concealed with the absence of records, falsified records and incomplete records.
11. Government agencies paid fees and subsidies to State and foster custodians who physically abused, murdered, sexually abused and economically exploited children.
12. Law enforcement agencies ignored or covered up criminal acts against children by State and foster custodians.
13. When prosecutions did occur for crimes against *Verdingkinder*, the punishment was minor compared to the crime.
14. The operation intended to benefit poor families and children became an organized criminal enterprise economically, physically, and sexually exploiting children.
15. Government officials and media not directly involved in the criminal activity refused to believe that a child slave trade could have developed in a civilized nation like Switzerland.
16. The economic exploitation of children in the Swiss system did not end until a cheaper means of farm production than child slave labor was found.
17. The Swiss child slave trade also expanded and operated outside of Government control. (The private purchasing and sale of children in the US is conducted by private child brokers and child adoption attorneys.)

To possibly assist you in making sense of this information and all the evidence books you have received, I would like to point out to you what I consider the two most important relevant bits of wisdom imparted to me. One of the people I interviewed for my Masters Thesis on World War II intelligence operations provided an insight that has proven true with regard to the evolution of nefarious and evil human enterprises over time, "Things never really change, they just get more sophisticated." I think this should be kept in mind when comparing the *Verdingkinder* scandal with the criminal activity in the current United States child protection system.

The other bit of wisdom is Alexander Solzhenitsyn's insight that for men to do evil they must first believe they are doing good.

Thank you for your efforts to find the truth.

Sincerely,

James Roger Brown
Director

<http://www.swissinfo.org/sen/swissinfo.html?siteSect=105&sid=4749883>

Historian reveals tragedy of Swiss child trade

swissinfo

February 29, 2004 12:00 PM []

Marco Leuenberger was inspired by his father's childhood as a 'Verdingkind' (swissinfo)

Slave labour, beatings, sexual abuse, fear and isolation were the norm for thousands of "Verdingkinder", or "discarded children", who were given away or sold as cheap labour until the 1950s.

Historian Marco Leuenberger told swissinfo that the time has come for reappraisal of this dark episode.

Leuenberger was ten years old when his father first told him of his childhood as a discarded child. Also aged ten, his father had to endure the daily grind of getting up at 5am and working until late into the night.

Inspired by his father and thousands of children like him, Leuenberger in 1991 embarked on a huge research project to explore this dark chapter in Switzerland's history.

The discarded children were usually orphans, illegitimate or came from the poorest families and they were either given away or sold to farmers.

"Most of these children were used as cheap labour, exploited physically or even sexually abused," Leuenberger concludes in his study.

Leuenberger and other historians are calling for a nationwide research project to be carried out into the trade in "Verdingkinder", while many of these former child labourers are still alive.

swissinfo: Were children given away or sold throughout Switzerland?

Marco Leuenberger: Yes, especially in German-speaking Switzerland in the Protestant cantons, though also in Catholic areas. It also happened in [French-speaking] canton Vaud. It is also known that children from [Italian-speaking] canton Ticino were sent to work as chimney sweeps in northern Italy.

swissinfo: How many of these 'Verdingkinder' were there?

M.L.: For years, the trade involved more than 10,000 children [every year]. But it's very difficult to come up with an estimate because there is no evidence available prior to 1820. There were also lots of children who were traded without the knowledge of the local authorities.

swissinfo: How did Swiss authorities manage this child trade?

M.L.: Poor families were forced to register with their local authority every year. It was then decided whether all the family members were [adequately] provided for. Authorities in the 19th century had the right to separate the poorest families.

There were no criteria that [farmers] had to fulfil to receive a "Verdingkind". They only had to prove that they needed more cheap workers.

swissinfo: Why did the authorities turn a blind eye to the abuses committed against these children?

M.L.: There was a different perspective at the time. Today we speak about children's rights and children's right to education. But those kinds of considerations didn't figure in the 1800s. Lots of children had to work. Poverty was a huge problem at the time.

And even though there were critics of the system even back then, these were voices in the wilderness.

swissinfo: Did these children suffer physically from the work they had to do?

M.L.: That was often the case. They were often given too little to eat [which stunted their growth].

There were also emotional scars. Lots of these discarded children couldn't cope with adult life. Statistics show that many of them turned to crime.

swissinfo: And these children were also often sexually abused?

M.L.: I found dozens of cases of sexual abuse in court files, most of which never became public. problem was usually solved by moving the child to another place.

people who committed these acts were sometimes fined, but never imprisoned.

swissinfo: Did some rejected children complain or rebel?

M.L.: Some tried to, but they usually didn't find anyone willing to listen.

swissinfo: Children were auctioned off in some places as late as the 1930s. How were these auctions allowed to happen in "free" Switzerland?

M.L.: It's not possible to explain that. And an explanation wasn't required at the time.

Three 'Verdingkinder' from the Jau family during the 1920s (SF DRS)

swissinfo: Some former Verdingkinder, along with historians and politicians, are calling for a historical reappraisal of this subject. What progress has been made?

M.L.: We want to carry out a nationwide research project, which would take up to three

years. But so far we haven't found any support. We could work jointly with the universities or look for private financing.

swissinfo: What are the main obstacles?

M.L.: There are very few sources available. Local authorities and archives only show the bare figures and there are very few written accounts from the victims. That's why we launched an appeal on Swiss television for former rejected children to come forward.

swissinfo: There've also been calls for some form of compensation for these injustices.

M.L.: At the very least, local authorities should acknowledge the errors committed in the past. And they should issue an apology to all former Verdingkinder.

swissinfo: Do you think that these former Verdingkinder will live to see their suffering acknowledged?

M.L.: I hope so. I'm confident, even though there's been no definite support for our project yet. We cannot tackle this alone.

swissinfo-interview: Renat Künzi (translation: Vanessa Mock)

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[http](http://)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/03/14/wswiss14.xml&sheet=/news/2004/03/14/ixworld.html>

'No one could help me escape'

By Kim Wilsher

(Filed: 14/03/2004)

Tens of thousands of unwanted Swiss children were sold in auctions or given away as cheap labour until the 1950s, according to a shocking television documentary which has forced the country to confront a dark chapter of its recent past.

Many of the child workers, known as Verdingkinder (discarded children), ended up being beaten and sexually abused after passing under the auctioneer's hammer in Swiss provincial towns.

They were handed to farmers or factory owners, who were paid a fee by local authorities to feed and house them. Although the children were supposed to be paid a basic wage for their work, in practice many were treated as slaves.

Historians estimate that as many as 12,000 children of poor families, some of them infants and many with unmarried or divorced mothers, were given away or sold during the 1930s alone. The trade finally ended only in the decade after the Second World War, when increased farm mechanisation meant less need for youthful labour.

Peter Neumann, the documentary film-maker whose work has forced Switzerland to acknowledge its uncomfortable past, first heard of the ordeal of the Verdingkinder, from his grandfather.

"I was so moved by the stories of his gruelling childhood, and his struggle to put the past behind him, that I decided to research into the subject," he said.

He found that surviving Verdingkinder were frequently reluctant to dredge up painful memories of malnourishment, overwork, physical and sexual abuse.

"I found that many former discarded children still haven't come to terms with their experiences," he said. "For some, the memories of being physically and sexually abused run too deep. They still feel somehow ashamed about their past."

Turi Honegger, one of only a handful of Verdingkinder willing to talk of their terrible experiences, was just 14 years old when he was taken away to work on a farm.

"My life consisted of working and sleeping," he said. "There was very little food and everyone shunned me. I remember feeling invisible, like I didn't exist. I ate and slept under the stairs, well away from the family dinner table. I was shunned by everyone and no one could help me escape."

Mr Honegger, now 80 years old and a retired journalist, said that he was regularly beaten by the farmer for whom he worked. "Everyone would turn away when he hit me.

"Once he beat me so badly that his wife took pity on me, cleaned up my wounds and

put me to bed - but the farmer was so angry that he dragged me out and threw me into the stables.

"He kept me locked up for days and told me to eat the animal feed. It's very painful for me to think back to those times."

Marco Leuenberger, a historian who has researched the practice and is appealing for more Verdingkinder to come forward, said: "We estimate that between five and 10 per cent of all Swiss children may have been sold or sent away by their families to work in the countryside between 1850 and 1950."

He is campaigning for the Swiss government to establish a national register of those affected.

The trade in surplus or unwanted children started during the early 19th century. Although it was particularly widespread in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, it occurred elsewhere as well: boys known as "black brothers" were sent from the Italian-speaking region of Ticino, across the border to work as chimney sweeps in Italy.

Historians say that it is impossible to establish exactly how many youngsters were involved because no records exist before 1820, and some were traded without the knowledge of local authorities.

In the Bern region alone, an estimated 300,000 children were put into forced labour between 1850 and 1900. Public auctions for the Verdingkinder were still being held in Swiss towns and villages in the 1930s.

"It's astonishing that these slave auctions were allowed to happen in Switzerland," said Mr Leuenberger. "One explanation is that at the time it was a poor agricultural country and there was a desperate need for cheap labour. Poor families were forced to register with their local authority every year.

"They decided whether all the family members were adequately provided for, and in the 19th century they had the right to break up the poorest families.

"There were no criteria that farmers had to fulfill to receive a Verdingkind. They only had to prove that they needed more cheap workers."

He said that his research had uncovered records of "dozens of cases" of sexual abuse of the children, which were usually addressed by moving them to a different location.

Mr Honegger said that he tried to write about the painful episode in his - and Switzerland's - past in a book about his Verdingkinder experiences, 20 years ago, but was advised to "tone down" his work.

"My publisher told me to cut chapters out and to rewrite and tone down my account because he thought that no one would believe that this kind of thing had happened in Switzerland. It was taboo to talk about it in public."

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