

Ziegler's Follies

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On March 26, 2008, to cheers and acclaim, Jean Ziegler was elected by the newly formed United Nations Human Rights Council to serve as one of its expert advisers. It was hardly an unexpected development. Switzerland had announced his nomination in December 2007, beginning an unprecedented lobbying campaign by the Swiss government on behalf of its nominee, featuring, among other things, a glossy booklet sent to capitals around the world documenting his “unwavering commitment to,” “excellent knowledge of,” and “unstinting support for” human rights. Not for the first time, Ziegler, a former sociology professor, a member of the Swiss parliament, and currently the UN Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, stood at the center of a perfect storm of adoration and acclaim. It was one more triumph in a remarkable career.

Granted tenure in 1977 by the University of Geneva, Ziegler founded and directed its Social Laboratory of Third World Civilizations. He has taught at numerous European universities, including the Sorbonne, where he served in 1984 as an associate professor of sociology and economics. In March 2004, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Belgium’s University of Mons-Hainaut, where he was hailed as “the modern-day Condorcet”—the great Enlightenment philosopher of human rights.

Ziegler is also the author of more than twenty books for popular audiences, most of which are dedicated to asserting that hunger and other human miseries are the inevitable products of Western capitalism and globalization. His works *The New Rulers of the World* and *The Empire of Shame*, for example, have become European best-sellers, distributed by leading French publishing houses and discussed by Ziegler in such forums as TV5, the international French-language channel.¹ His literary success was officially recognized by the French Republic in 1994, when the Ministry of Culture named him a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters. This prestigious honorific is awarded for contributions to the “radiance” of arts and letters in both France and the world as a whole. Not surprisingly, Ziegler lists the accolade prominently in his curriculum vitae.

Ziegler has found his greatest success, however, in the European media, which considers him a highly credible and well-respected authority on human rights. Leading newspapers such as France’s *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, and *La Croix* as well as Geneva’s *Le Temps* quote him regularly. Profiles of Ziegler have also appeared in premier European magazines, such as the German weekly *Der Spiegel*.² In Switzerland, the Foreign Press Association granted him its “Most Popular” award.³ “You are a little miracle,” declared journalist Daniel Mermet when he interviewed Ziegler in April 2007 for *Là-bas si j’y suis*, a popular program on the public radio station France Inter. “[You have] an amazing... taste and feeling for denunciation and revolt.”⁴ In sum, Jean Ziegler is a darling of Europe’s academic, literary, and media elite.

To be sure, none of this would be problematic if Jean Ziegler were simply an innocuous idealist. But he is not. Besides being one of Europe’s most successful celebrity activists, Ziegler is also one of the continent’s most industrious anti-American and anti-Israel ideologues as well as a prominent apologist for a rogues’ gallery of Third World dictators, including Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi, Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe, and Cuba’s Fidel Castro. During Ziegler’s tenure as Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the cause of world hunger consistently took a backseat to the promotion of his

anti-Western ideology. At a time when the UN is heralding the reform of its human rights apparatus, replacing the discredited Commission on Human Rights with a new council which it has described as the “dawn of a new era,” the case of Jean Ziegler casts grave doubt on the possible success of this reform and reveals the precipitous and accelerating decline of the UN human rights system and the international human rights movement as a whole.

Jean Ziegler was born Hans Ziegler in 1934 in the town of Thun, located in the German-speaking area of Switzerland. Ziegler’s political conversion, like that of many young radicals, began in his teens, when he left the confines of his traditional Calvinist home for the allure of Paris. There he discovered Marxism and the political philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, changed his name to Jean, and joined a militant circle that supported the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in its war against France. Ziegler’s passion for the FLN and its violent campaign for Algerian independence proved so extreme that the French Communist party eventually expelled him. He later returned to Switzerland and earned a law degree, only to switch fields and obtain a doctorate in sociology. Finally, in the early 1960s, he spent two years in the Congo as an assistant to a UN special envoy. The misery he witnessed there made him resolve “never to be on the side of the executioners.”⁵

Eventually, Ziegler’s advocacy of Algerian independence and his experiences in the war-torn Congo deepened into an all-encompassing embrace of revolutionary politics in general. He began to admire such iconic figures as the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro and the guerilla leader Che Guevara. When the latter visited Geneva in 1964 as part of a Cuban trade delegation, Ziegler served as his chauffeur. He reportedly asked Guevara if he could return with him to Cuba and join the revolution. “Here is the brain of the monster,” said the rebel leader. Pointing to the affluent city in the heart of Europe, Guevara continued: “Your fight is here.”⁶ Ziegler stayed.

By 1967, Ziegler had won a seat in the Swiss parliament as a Social Democrat, a position he held—with a brief interruption of four years—until 1999. During his long tenure, he served as president of the Swiss Third World parliamentary party and as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and he sat on the Executive Council of the Socialist International. In addition, he published a slew of books that leveled sensational charges against various prominent businessmen. This led to numerous successful lawsuits against him, in which he was eventually found liable for defamation. To this day, according to Ziegler, part of his earnings are used to pay for the judgments against him.⁷

Yet despite Ziegler's legal troubles—or perhaps because of them—his many admirers depict him as a fearless iconoclast fighting the good fight for the wretched of the earth. As a result, today Ziegler is one of Europe's most popular exponents of revolutionary "Third-Worldism," a vaguely Manichaeic ideology that sees the industrial West as an imperialist power that ruthlessly exploits the Third World, keeping it mired in poverty and suffering. Accordingly, Third-Worldists passionately support revolutionary movements and leaders opposed to Western capitalism.

Of course, Ziegler's fervent stance has acquired critics as well as admirers. Indeed, even some of his most prominent defenders have acknowledged that his work is not always trustworthy. His mentor Roger Girod, head of the University of Geneva's sociology department, conceded while arguing for Ziegler's tenure that "the pamphleteer is never wholly absent" in his scholarship and that "the most penetrating analyses are marked by polemical partisanship." Moreover, Girod continued, "since he writes rapidly, Jean Ziegler does not eliminate his factual errors."⁸ Girod's support notwithstanding, the 1977 decision to grant Ziegler tenure provoked outrage from several scholars and public figures in Switzerland, one of whom, the historian Herbert Lithy, carried through on a threat to return his honorary doctorate in protest.⁹

Indeed, Ziegler himself has admitted that in the struggle to convey his overarching message, facts are not always his first concern.¹⁰ He claims that

as a child in Switzerland in the 1940s he witnessed a train accident in which a crashed vehicle was revealed to be carrying Nazi weapons, demolishing his youthful illusions about his country's alleged neutrality. Ziegler presents this incident as a primal, formative experience, essential to the shaping of his adult character. *Der Spiegel* has reported, however, that there is no record of such a crash, and Ziegler's own sister thinks he invented the story.¹¹ Indeed, Ziegler's strained relationship with the truth has led one Swiss reporter to conclude a lengthy profile of the UN Special Rapporteur by describing him as a "*menteur et affabulateur*"—a liar and a teller of tales.¹²

Yet by dint of Ziegler's charisma, rhetorical skills, and knack for generating publicity—an easy recipe for media success in the otherwise stolid Alpine redoubt—as well as the vital support he receives from political and media figures sympathetic to his cause, his career has maintained a steady upward trajectory. To be sure, Ziegler's polemics have occasionally done some good: In the 1990s, for example, he played a key role in exposing the complicity of Swiss banks in laundering Nazi gold. In general, however, this has been the exception that proves the rule. For the most part, Ziegler's advocacy has been undertaken on behalf of dubious and troubling causes.

Ziegler's fascination with political violence would seem to have begun at an early age. In a 1993 profile in *l'Illustré*, a Swiss version of America's *Life* magazine, a photograph of an eleven-year-old Ziegler appears. He is dressed in a military cadet uniform, holding what appears to be a training gun. On the opposite page are pictures of him as an adult, this time posing with real weapons. In a 1976 photograph, he is shown brandishing a Kalashnikov while on a solidarity visit with the Eritrean Liberation Front. In an image from 1979, he is in Ho Chi Minh's Hanoi, standing atop a captured American tank. A 1981 picture shows him at a podium in Managua, addressing Sandinista soldiers (Ziegler has a medal from the Sandinista National Liberation Front).¹³ Finally, there is a photograph of him in a tent with armed militants from the Polisario Front, fighting for the independence of

the Western Sahara—this time his 12-year-old son is holding the Kalashnikov.

This affinity for the radical and violent side of politics is more than aesthetic. Ziegler has actively supplied political and diplomatic aid to some of the most brutal regimes in recent memory. Ethiopian dictator colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, accused of widespread human rights violations and of bringing his country to starvation, handpicked Ziegler in 1986 to be one of five experts who prepared a constitution calling for one-party rule—Ziegler was the only one from outside the Soviet bloc.¹⁴ Ziegler has also paid visits to Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Kim Il Sung in North Korea,¹⁵ and in 2002 he fawned over Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe—then in the midst of engineering mass famine through violent land seizures—saying, “Mugabe has history and morality with him.”¹⁶ Regarding Hezbollah, Ziegler has stated that “I refuse to describe Hezbollah as a terrorist group. It is a national movement of resistance.”¹⁷

Ziegler has also helped to promote and protect the careers of several European intellectuals with questionable if not disturbing reputations. In April 1996, for instance, he came to the defense of Roger Garaudy, a former French Stalinist and convert to Islam whose book *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel* denies the Holocaust.¹⁸ In response to the public controversy provoked by the book, Ziegler wrote a letter of support to Garaudy, which the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH)—a group dedicated to the promotion of Holocaust denial—published in full on its website:

I am outraged at the legal case they are making against you.... All your work as a writer and philosopher attests to the rigor of your analysis and the unwavering honesty of your intentions. It makes you one of the leading thinkers of our time.... It is for all these reasons that I express here my solidarity and my admiring friendship.¹⁹

Ziegler has also come to the aid of Tariq Ramadan, the controversial Islamic author who has written in praise of his maternal grandfather Hasan

al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, and Sheikh al-Qaradawi, the contemporary theologian of the human bomb.²⁰ Ramadan, also reared in Geneva and now a leading European intellectual, is a close friend of Ziegler and his family: He stuffed envelopes, made phone calls, and put up posters for Ziegler's parliamentary election campaigns.²¹ This affection apparently is reciprocated. In 1993, Ramadan wrote an open letter protesting the staging of *Mahomet*—a play written in 1736 by the French philosopher Voltaire—in Geneva, on the grounds that it would offend the Muslim community. Ziegler's wife, Erika Deuber Ziegler—a member of the communist-affiliated Swiss Party of Labor and then director of the cultural affairs department for the city of Geneva—promptly blocked the performance by withholding a 310,000 franc subsidy.²² Five years later, when his dissertation to the University of Geneva was rejected, Ramadan turned once again to Ziegler and his wife for assistance. Ramadan's thesis recast the Muslim Brotherhood as a progressive social and religious movement and excised its teachings of jihad and misogyny, not to mention its support for Nazi Germany—a position that struck Ramadan's two French supervisors as so untenable that they refused to award him a commendation.²³ After Ziegler and his wife threatened a public scandal, however, a new jury of supervisors was formed—an exceedingly rare occurrence. With the removal of a few passages, Ramadan's work was approved, giving him the academic credentials that have allowed his career to flourish.²⁴

Most striking, however, is Ziegler's role in co-founding, co-managing, and eventually winning the Muammar al-Qaddafi International Prize for Human Rights.²⁵ In April 1989, just a few months after Pan Am flight 103 was blown up by Libyan intelligence agents, killing all 259 people on board, Ziegler announced the prize's creation. It was widely believed to be a transparent attempt to change Libya's damaged international image as a terrorist state. The British newspaper *The Independent*, for instance, wrote:

Until now, the main international peace prize has been funded by a company which manufactures explosives for weapons. If we can believe

reports from Geneva, the next big award in this field will be sponsored by a regime which specializes in giving them away. According to Jean Ziegler, the Socialist MP who is Switzerland's answer to the late Abbie Hoffman, the \$250,000 prize will bear the name of Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, who has provided a \$10 million fund for it.... Mr. Ziegler said the award was designed to be the "Anti-Nobel Prize of the Third World." The Swiss gadfly is the perfect person to represent such a foundation, as he has long been a professional Third Worlder.²⁶

Switzerland's *L'Hebdo* magazine also dedicated a feature-length story to the prize under the heading "The Nobel of Qaddafi: Libyan authorities create a new human rights prize—Jean Ziegler gets involved." The article, which included a picture of Ziegler, reported that:

According to Jean Ziegler, "The Nobel Prize is a permanent humiliation for the Third World." The timing couldn't be better—just as Libya is trying to restore its image. With the interest from ten million dollars—placed in a Swiss bank—it plans to create an international institute for human rights (planned in Geneva) and two "counter-Nobel Prizes." In mid-April, Jean Ziegler and ten "intellectuals and progressive fighters" thus found themselves in Tripoli to set the project on track.²⁷

Judging by these articles, Ziegler was not only a member of the prize's founding jury, but essentially its unofficial spokesman.²⁸

The propagandist uses of the prize are frequent and diverse. First, Libya cites the very existence of the Qaddafi Prize as evidence of its commitment to human rights.²⁹ Second, during the period when the West was attempting to contain the Qaddafi regime, the Libyan government used the prize money to fund supportive European organizations: For example, *Centre Europe Tiers Monde* (CETIM), an anti-Western non-governmental organization that opposes economic sanctions on Libya, was awarded the Qaddafi Prize—and its hefty remuneration—in 2000. Coincidentally or not, CETIM is based in Ziegler's hometown of Geneva and has published his work and praised him for heroically standing up to the United States

during his tenure as a Special Rapporteur.³⁰ Third, and most ignominiously, Libya has used the prize to galvanize and unite prominent opponents of the United States. Among others, the award has been granted to Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and “the children of Iraq and victims of hegemony and embargoes.” Finally, the prize has celebrated prominent racists and antisemites. For example, Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader known for his black supremacist ideology and his frequent antisemitic statements, was awarded the Qaddafi Prize in 1996. Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Bin Muhammad—who told an October 2003 meeting of Islamic nations that Jews were responsible for all the world’s ills—was granted the prize in 2005. Other winners have included “the stone-throwing children of Occupied Palestine.”³¹

In 2002, thirteen “intellectual and literary personalities” were given the prize for their “thought and creativity.”³² One of those chosen by the prize committee was Garaudy, the French Holocaust denier.³³ Another was Ziegler himself. By this time, the Qaddafi prize was worth \$750,000, and the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* reported that Ziegler’s share of the purse would approach 100,000 Swiss francs.³⁴

Even the media in Ziegler’s native Switzerland—usually so reverential toward its most famous activist—raised its eyebrows. Under the pressure of public opinion, Ziegler announced—from Tripoli, where he claimed to be on an unspecified UN mission—that he had turned down the prize “because of [his] responsibilities at the United Nations.”³⁵ The next day, he added, “I have never accepted prizes and won’t start to do so now.”³⁶

Despite these claims, Ziegler continues to be listed by the prize’s own website—as well as by the Libyan state press service—as one of its 2002 laureates.³⁷ According to a December 2005 article in the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Ziegler did in fact accept the award, although he did so as a representative of his research center at the University of Geneva.³⁸ The center was founded in 1989—the same year in which Ziegler announced the Libyan leader’s \$10 million grant for the prize.

When Ziegler was nominated for an additional UN post in 2006, an international coalition of human rights organizations—including Cuban and Libyan victims of human rights violations—sent a letter of protest to the Swiss government.³⁹ The appeal cited Ziegler’s leadership role in founding the Qaddafi Prize as one among many examples of his support for oppressive regimes. Ziegler’s response was notable: “The Qaddafi Prize?” he said, “How could I have created it? It’s absurd!”⁴⁰

In the year 2000, Ziegler achieved a position of global influence well beyond that of a Geneva parliamentarian. Upon the initiative of Cuba, the UN Commission on Human Rights created the position of “Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food” and appointed Jean Ziegler to the post for a three-year term. The office of Mary Robinson, then high commissioner for human rights, put his name forward, and the appointment was assured by vigorous lobbying on the part of the Swiss government and certain Arab states. For Ziegler, it was nothing less than a dream come true:

My job as Special Rapporteur was like a celestial phenomenon, an enlightenment, salvation—a gift. Finally, everything comes together. Everything I have done in my life makes sense now: My criticism of capitalism, my preoccupation with the Third World, my cries, my tears.⁴¹

In an attempt, perhaps, to rise to the occasion, Ziegler announced that he was turning over a new leaf: “My life will change dramatically,” he insisted. “The period of attacks is over; now I will have to seek consensus.”⁴² Unfortunately, this change of heart appears to have been largely rhetorical in nature. Over the last seven years—he has remained in office past his six-year term limit due to a technicality—Ziegler has only intensified his outspoken activism.

This is especially apparent in Ziegler’s relationship to the United States. On numerous occasions, he has used his UN office as a bully pulpit to express his anti-American views, usually by placing issues in a false context. For

example, less than two weeks after al-Qaida's September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, Ziegler announced his opposition to any potential American military response to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, saying it would have "apocalyptic" consequences and spell "the end for the Afghan nation."⁴³ Within weeks, however, Ziegler's political opposition to the war had transformed into an objection related to food supply: He claimed, for instance, that food drops by the Allied forces violated "the key principles of humanitarian organizations and international law." In an even stranger twist, Ziegler would later oppose the drops on the grounds that they might inadvertently end up feeding the Taliban.⁴⁴

A similar sleight of hand occurred with respect to the Iraq war: In February 2003, Ziegler stated that war in Iraq should be avoided at all costs and even proposed that his native Switzerland offer sanctuary to Saddam Hussein.⁴⁵ Two months later, however, he was accusing coalition forces of violating the Iraqis' basic rights to food and water.⁴⁶

Ziegler's treatment of Cuba is particularly prominent in this regard. In nearly every report he has made to the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly, Ziegler has criticized America and its embargo of Cuba as a "flagrant" violation of international law in general and the right to food in particular. Ironically, during Ziegler's mandate Cuba has never appeared on the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) emergency list.⁴⁷ In October 2007, Ziegler undertook an official mission to the communist-ruled island, hailing the Castro regime as a government "in the vanguard of the struggle for the right to food."⁴⁸

The vitriol of Ziegler's anti-Americanism is particularly striking when compared to his criticism of other countries.⁴⁹ He has referred to President Bush, for example, as "the Pinochet who sits in the White House,"⁵⁰ asserted that the American government is an imperialist dictatorship that uses "predators" and "mercenaries" to implement world domination,⁵¹ and claimed that the United States is committing "genocide" in Cuba.⁵² By contrast, Ziegler has referred to the genocide in Darfur as a mere cause for "concern", and has characterized Khartoum's role in the atrocities as "alleged."⁵³

Ziegler's attitude toward Israel is equally intense. As far back as 1982, during the First Lebanon War, he unsuccessfully lobbied for the expulsion of Shimon Peres, then head of Israel's Labor party, from the Socialist International.⁵⁴ Less than a year into his term at the UN, Ziegler delivered a report accusing Israel of policies that "created hunger and threaten starvation of the most destitute."⁵⁵ In January 2003, he told *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya*, an Egyptian quarterly, that the policies of "colonial repression" practiced by Ariel Sharon and other Israeli officials are "criminal and classifiable as crimes against humanity." He declared that "an international force is urgently required to ensure that no further demolition of houses and destruction of livelihood of the Palestinian people take place."⁵⁶ Later that year, after testifying before the UN Third Committee on Human Rights, Ziegler informed journalists that Israel was responsible for inflicting "some form of brain damage" upon Palestinian children.⁵⁷

The peak of Ziegler's anti-Israel rhetoric came in 2004, however, with his presentation of a report to the Commission on Human Rights describing his visit to the West Bank and Gaza—significantly, the only foreign locale he had visited that year.⁵⁸ His twenty-five-page report accused Israel of numerous violations of human rights while simultaneously exculpating Palestinian terrorist groups from any responsibility for the conflict.⁵⁹ Ziegler then swiftly issued a UN press release that "urgently" condemned Israel for destroying tunnels used by Palestinians for smuggling weapons and called for an "outpouring of condemnation" against the Jewish state.⁶⁰ The Israeli army was accused of torturing and killing civilians, and then-prime minister Ariel Sharon of committing "state terror."⁶¹

In May of that year, Ziegler also authored a letter to Caterpillar Inc., on official UN stationery, urging the maker of bulldozers and other heavy equipment to boycott Israel, a demand soon adopted by the Arab League's Central Boycott Office in Damascus.⁶² A few months later, Ziegler fired off another official UN letter, this time to the European Commission, urging it to cancel its trade agreement with Israel because of the latter's alleged violations of the Palestinians' right to food. This final missive

was particularly bizarre because by the UN's own standards, the food, situation in the Palestinian territories has never come remotely close to the "catastrophe" Ziegler described, nor has it ever been ranked as one of the world's food emergencies.⁶³ In fact, when the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition compared nutritional risk in selected refugee populations in November 2003, the West Bank and Gaza ranked lowest.

Ziegler had by this time become so identified with the Palestinian cause that when reporters in Brussels asked the Commission on Human Rights for a response to the report, they identified him as the "Special Rapporteur on Palestine"—a position Ziegler has never held.⁶⁴ Perhaps chastened by a 2004 UN Watch legal brief detailing his abuse of his mandate, Ziegler did moderate his behavior for a time.⁶⁵ This respite ended in the summer of 2005, however, when, at a pro-Palestinian rally in Geneva, he called Gaza "an immense concentration camp," and Israeli soldiers "concentration camp guards."⁶⁶ The following year, the Second Lebanon War galvanized Ziegler's renewed involvement in the region. During the war, the Human Rights Council sent a mission to the war zone to document Israeli "war crimes." In addition, four of the council's human rights experts conducted their own fact-finding mission. Yet Ziegler decided to visit Lebanon in order to conduct his own inquiry into alleged Israeli violations of the Lebanese people's right to food. While in Lebanon, he referred to Hezbollah as a legitimate political organization.⁶⁷ At the conclusion of the mission, he held a UN press conference in which he called for Israeli officers to be prosecuted for war crimes.⁶⁸

Logically, an activist against world hunger would be expected to focus his resources on the world's most acute food shortages. There is little argument over what and where these crises are. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization constantly updates its list of "food emergencies." From the thirty-five countries on the May 2004 list, a UN Watch study selected a sample of seventeen countries, each of which suffered from a food emergency that the FAO attributed to some human action (e.g., war) rather than a natural disaster. Consequently, criticism of one or another party was entirely conceivable. The study found that in the first four years of

his mandate, Ziegler used his UN position to publicly criticize the United States on thirty-four occasions. In contrast, he never criticized any party involved in fifteen of the seventeen food emergencies examined, nor did he speak out on behalf of the people suffering under these famines.⁶⁹ Regarding food emergencies in such nations as Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda, Ziegler said nothing.⁷⁰ Sadly, his personal politics appear to have trumped his interest in the documented suffering of starving populations around the world—populations who are thus deprived of the benefits of the UN mechanism created expressly to serve their needs.

Under international law, UN independent human rights experts are obliged to act with impartiality, objectivity, and non-selectivity—traits Ziegler has rarely displayed over the course of his tenure.⁷¹ One can only conclude that in the case of Jean Ziegler, as his old mentor Roger Girod once remarked, the pamphleteer is always present.

Despite Ziegler's problematic use of his Right to Food mandate, the Commission on Human Rights has consistently renewed his tenure, making him one of the longest-serving human rights officials at the UN. In 2003, for instance, the mandate was renewed—and Ziegler's term along with it—by a vote of fifty-one in favor. All of the democratic member countries—including European Union members Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, and Britain, as well as Canada and Japan—voted for the renewal, with only the United States opposed and Australia abstaining.⁷² To be sure, even if the democratic nations *had* fought Ziegler's appointment, he would have won enough votes from non-democratic regimes and their allies to remain in office. However, such a fight would, at the very least, have been an official challenge to Ziegler's conduct. The fact that no such action has been forthcoming reflects a serious and deep-rooted problem within the UN.

There are several reasons Ziegler's official conduct remains largely unchallenged: First, there is the role that major NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, play at the UN. Few people outside the institution realize just how influential NGOs have become within the UN's Byzantine human rights system. In fact, they wield immense power: They initiate the creation of new mandates, nominate the mandate-holders, and supply much of the data then cited by the newly appointed experts, who are unsalaried and understaffed. In short, the legitimacy of every UN human rights official lies in their hands. Among the major NGOs, some have openly endorsed Ziegler, while others have been complicit through silence. Many of them have refused to protest Ziegler's support for such tyrannical regimes as those of Castro and Qaddafi even after being explicitly asked to do so by dissident groups. Instead of using their enormous influence to counteract Ziegler's questionable conduct, the leading NGOs have enabled it.

Second, there is the peculiar culture of the UN itself. Among European officials, more than a few may secretly admire Ziegler's forthright anti-Americanism and his rhetorical broadsides against Israel. Moreover, in what may be a strategic move on his part, Ziegler has largely refrained from criticizing specific European governments at the UN, thereby disarming potential opposition to his anti-American statements. Most important, however, is the fact that UN diplomats prefer a certain measure of vice over bad publicity for the world body as a whole, leading them to indulge even the most problematic conduct by their peers. To be a UN diplomat is to be a member of an exclusive club that has the potential to reward loyalty with lucrative jobs and benefits from an array of interconnected foundations and organizations. This practically requires that members "go along to get along"—or face the loss of their professional future. For all these reasons, UN officials such as High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, despite repeatedly being asked to speak out against Ziegler's politicization of his mandate, have—with one exception in 2005—chosen to remain silent. Whatever Jean Ziegler may say or do, he is still one of their own. It is this same climate of impunity that has led to such serious abuses of UN power

as the Oil for Food scandal and the cycle of sexual abuse perpetrated by UN peacekeepers in Africa and Haiti.

It is therefore highly unlikely that the newly formed UN Human Rights Council will change the direction set by its predecessor. Libya, for example, has recently been elected to chair the council's anti-racism program, which is scheduled to culminate in a 2009 "Durban Review Conference," likely to be a repeat of the notorious anti-Western and antisemitic colloquium held in 2001. Condemnation of Israel remains the council's first and, it often seems, only priority.

So long as officials such as Ziegler are permitted to politicize their mandates with impunity, the Human Rights Council will remain incapable of being the objective and even-handed body it purports to be. Taking all of this into consideration, one can only conclude that the Swiss government's decision to nominate Jean Ziegler to the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee may well be right: Perhaps the newly elected Jean Ziegler is, ironically enough, the perfect man for the job; for Ziegler is not a bureaucratic anomaly or a tolerated annoyance—he is the product and embodiment of a distinct political culture. His career has exemplified that culture's debased values even as it has rewarded his adherence to them. In many ways, Jean Zeigler *is* the UN Human Rights Council. He and his career are what the UN's highest human rights body has become in microcosm. And just like Jean Ziegler, if the UN as a whole continues on its current path, not only its image and institutional legitimacy will suffer, but so will all the great good which it once set out to do.

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Notes

1. Jean Ziegler, *The New Rulers of the World and Those Who Resist Them* (Paris: Fayard, 2002) [French]; Ziegler, *The Empire of Shame* (Paris: Fayard, 2005) [French]. These two books, in hardcover alone, sold about seventy thousand copies each in France, where twenty thousand copies qualifies a book as a best seller. They were best sellers in Germany as well. See www.amazon.de/Imperium-Schande-Unterdr%C3%BCckung-Pantheon-Paperbacks/dp/3570550192. Ziegler's interview on TV5's *l'Invité* show can be seen at www.dailymotion.com/video/x14d8m_lempire-de-la-honte-jean-ziegler_events.

2. Erwin Koch, "Drummer of Outrage," *Der Spiegel*, January 21, 2002 [German].

3. Koch, "Drummer."

4. The audio recording is available at www.la-bas.org/article.php3?id_article=1161 [French].

5. Koch, "Drummer."

6. Burton Bollag, "For One Swiss Professor, Vexing His Fellow Citizens Is a Duty and a Delight," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 23, 1998.

7. Koch, "Drummer."

8. Bernard Ducret, Jeanne Hersch, Herbert Lithy, and Paul Trappe, "Criteria of Academic Appointment: I. Switzerland: The University of Geneva—A Controversy About M. Jean Ziegler," *Minerva* 14:4 (December 1976), p. 561.

9. Ducret, Hersch, Lithy, and Trappe, "Criteria of Academic Appointment" (Lithy makes his threat on p. 538 and carries it out on p. 565).

10. Jean-Marc Béguin, "Jean Ziegler, Retreat Under Fire," *Le Temps*, November 1, 1999 [French].

11. Koch, "Drummer."

12. Béguin, "Retreat Under Fire."

13. Koch, "Drummer."

14. "A Future Ethiopian Constitution: Jean Ziegler, Expert," *24 Heures*, July 11, 1986 [French].

15. Jean-Claude Buhner, "Jean Ziegler Before the Bar," *Le Monde*, July 26, 1993 [French]. The article also describes Ziegler's quiet campaign of defamation against a Social Democratic party competitor, Christianne Brunner, including his leaks to journalists about compromising photos and his persistent questioning of her morals.

16. "Mugabe Has History and Morality with Him," *L'Hebdo*, August 22, 2002 [French].

17. Jean Ziegler, interview with *AlAkhbar*, September 18, 2006, quoted in “Second Statement Before the Human Rights Council by Israeli Permanent Representative Yitzhak Levanon,” October 4, 2006.

18. Roger Garaudy, *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel* (Newport Beach, Calif.: Institute for Historical Review, 2000). The Institute for Historical Review is the world’s largest publisher of Holocaust denial materials. See also Patricia Briel, “Jewish Invitees to the Tent of Dialogue Removed from Guest List,” *Le Temps*, July 1, 2004: “In fact, like Jean Ziegler and Father Pierre, Michel Lelong defended Roger Garaudy in 1996, when the latter had been attacked about the publication of his revisionist book” [French]. “Revisionisme” is the standard French term for Holocaust denial.

19. “Developments in the Kingdom of Frenzy,” Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust website, www.codoh.info/inter/intchron1.html [French].

20. Paul Berman, “Who’s Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?” *The New Republic*, May 29, 2007.

21. Martin Beglinger, “Under Suspicion,” *Das Magazin*, January 7, 2006, www.signandsight.com/features/586.html [German].

22. Beglinger, “Under Suspicion.”

23. Beglinger, “Under Suspicion”; see also “Tariq Ramadan, Genesis of a Muslim Star,” *Le Temps*, January 28, 2004 [French].

24. Beglinger, “Under Suspicion”; see also Berman, “Who’s Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?”

25. See *Switzerland’s Nominee to the UN Human Rights Council and the Muammar Qaddafi Human Rights Prize*, UN Watch Report, June 20, 2006, www.unwatch.org/atf/cf/%7B6DEB65DA-BE5B-4CAE-8056-8BF0BEDF4D17%7D/Jean%20Ziegler%20and%20theKhaddafi%20Human%20Rights%20Prize.pdf. Many of the articles cited below can be read in their entirety in the attachments to the report, available at www.unwatch.org/ziegler.

26. Bruce Palling, “Qaddafi Funds Peace Prize,” *The Independent*, April 25, 1989.

27. Pierre Huguenin, “The Nobel of Qaddafi: Libyan Authorities Create a New Human Rights Prize—Jean Ziegler Gets Involved,” UN Watch, www.unwatch.org/atf/cf/%7B6DEB65DA-BE5B-4CAE-8056-8BF0BEDF4D17%7D/SOURCES%20FOR%20ZIEGLER-KHADDAFI%20PRIZE%20REPORT.PDF, p. 6, originally published in *L’Hebdo*, April 27, 1989 [French].

28. In addition, Ziegler has played a significant role in North-South 21, the Geneva group set up by the Libyans to manage the Qaddafi Prize. Tellingly, this group has been accredited by the UN as a “non-governmental” organization. See *Switzerland’s Nominee*, p. 6.

29. See “Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination Considers Report of Libya,” UN press document, March 3, 2004, www2.unog.ch/news2/documents/newsen/crd04009e.htm: “The Libyan delegation... hoped that the committee was aware of all the activities that the Libyan Government had undertaken to uphold human rights. The Qaddafi Human Rights Award was created in 1989 and was bestowed [on] those who had exemplified the values of human rights.” Additionally, in a cynical attempt at credibility, the first award was granted to a genuine human rights activist, Nelson Mandela.

30. Malik Ozden, “The Iraq War Makes the Ice Creak at the UN,” *Le Courrier*, April 11, 2003 [French].

31. *Switzerland’s Nominee*.

32. See “Qaddafi Human Rights Prize Awarded to President Chavez,” *Jamahiriya News Agency (Jana)*, November 24, 2004 [French]. The article lists past recipients of the prize, including Ziegler.

33. “Swiss Human Rights Campaigner Turns Down Qaddafi Award,” *Agence France Presse—English*, October 1, 2002; “Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights’ Stipend Refused by Jean Ziegler,” *Schweizerische Depeschagentur AG (SDA)—Service de base français*, October 1, 2002 [French].

34. “Jean Ziegler Refuses the Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights,” *Le Temps*, October 2, 2002 [French].

35. “Swiss Human Rights Campaigner”; “Jean Ziegler Refuses the Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights.”

36. “Jean Ziegler Refuses the Qaddafi Prize.” In fact, Ziegler has accepted awards, such as the 2004 “Swiss Award” for politics. See www.swissinfo.org/eng/swissinfo.html?siteSect=43&sid=5455611.

37. See www.gaddafiprize.org/HomePageAr.htm [Arabic]; “The Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights,” *Jamahiriya News Agency (Jana)*, November 30, 2005, www.jananews.com/Page.aspx?PageID=16211 [French]. See also www.libyenews.de/November2004-teil2.htm, which lists Ziegler as a 2002 Qaddafi Prize recipient in November 2004.

38. “The Leader State with a New Coat of Paint,” *NZZ Am Sonntag*, December 25, 2005 [German].

39. NGO statement opposing Jean Ziegler’s nomination to new UN post, available at www.unwatch.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=bdKKISNqEmG&b=1330815&ct=2165591. The signatories include Libya Watch for Human Rights, Libya Human Rights Solidarity, Mothers and Women Against Repression for Cuba, Plantados: Until Freedom and Democracy in Cuba, Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, Hope for Africa International, UN Watch, International League

Against Racism and Antisemitism (LICRA), Concerned Women for America, and the Cuban Democratic Directorate.

40. Michel Jeanneret, "United Nations: Jean Ziegler at the Heart of a New Polemic," *Le Matin*, April 24, 2006 [French].

41. Koch, "Drummer."

42. "Jean Ziegler: The Return," *Le Temps*, September 4, 2000 [French].

43. "U.N. Swiss Envoy Warns of Apocalyptic Consequences of U.S. Strikes on Afghanistan," Swiss Radio International's *Swissinfo* website, September 22, 2001, cited by *BBC Morning Europe*, September 23, 2001.

44. "Special Rapporteurs Tell Third Committee That Events of 11 September Severely Affected Efforts to Promote, Protect Rights to Food, Religious Freedom," UN press release ga/shc/3660, November 9, 2001.

45. See "Swiss Rights Campaigner Urges Swiss Exile for Saddam," *Agence France Presse English*, February 5, 2003.

46. See "UN Rights Expert Demands Aid Agencies Get Access to Feed Iraqis," *Agence France Presse English*, April 3, 2003.

47. See FAO lists of countries facing food emergencies from September/October 2000 to June 2005 at www.fao.org/giews/english/fs/index.htm.

48. Jean-Guy Allard, "UN Special Rapporteur Describes U.S. Blockade of Cuba as 'Unilateral Arrogance,'" *Granma International*, November 12, 2007, www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/noviembre/lun12/zeiler.html. For more on this visit, see also letter from Hillel Neuer, UN Watch executive director, to UN High Commissioner Louise Arbour, February 14, 2008, www.unwatch.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=bdKKISNqEmG&b=1330815&ct=5031193.

49. For an extensive list of Ziegler's anti-American statements, see *Jean Ziegler's Campaign Against America: A Study of the Anti-American Bias of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*, UN Watch, October 2005, p. 9, www.unwatch.org/atf/cf/{6DEB65DA-BE5B-4CAE-8056-8BF0BEDF4D17}/Jean_Zieglers_Campaign_Against_America.pdf.

50. "Jean Ziegler is Attacked in the U.S., at the IMM, and at the UN," *Schweizerische Depeschagentur AG (SDA)–Service de base français*, January 27, 2003 [French].

51. Bernard Bridel, "Political Books: The Maelstrom of Globalization," *Le Temps*, October 28, 2002 [French].

52. "Blockade of Cuba is Genocide, UN Rapporteur Asserts," *Prensa Latina*, March 20, 2005 [Spanish].

53. "Eight Human Rights Experts Gravely Concerned About Reported Widespread Abuses in Darfur, Sudan," U.N. Press Release AFR/873, HR/CN/1065, March 29, 2004. See also Jonathan Fowler, "Nearly Twice as Many Iraqi Children Going Hungry Since Saddam's Ouster, U.N. Expert Says," Associated Press, March 30, 2005.

54. "According to the National Representative Jean Ziegler, 'Shimon Peres Should Be Excluded from the Socialist International,'" Associated Press Service Français, August 9, 1982 [French].

55. Jean Ziegler, *The Right to Food: Preliminary Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Right to Food*, UN Commission on Human Rights, 56th sess., July 23, 2001, www.fao.org/righttofood/kc/downloads/vl/docs/AH320_en.pdf.

56. "United Nations Rights Experts Appeal to Israel on House Demolitions," May 28, 2004, UN press release HR/4768, <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adb322aff38525617b006d88d7/bf1b3535067bed9f85256ea200695b3b!OpenDocument&Highlight=2,ziegler>.

57. "UN: Policies Cause Palestinian Hunger," *United Press International*, November 12, 2003.

58. Jean Ziegler, *The Right to Food: Report Submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*, UN Commission on Human Rights, 60th sess. February 9, 2004, [www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/34441bf9efe3a9e3c1256e6300510e24/\\$FILE/G0410777.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/34441bf9efe3a9e3c1256e6300510e24/$FILE/G0410777.pdf).

59. Jean Zeigler, *Mission to the Occupied Territories: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*, UN Commission on Human Rights, 60th sess. October 31, 2003.

60. "United Nations Rights Experts Appeal to Israel on House Demolitions," UN Information Service, May 28, 2004, www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/hr4768.doc.htm.

61. "Jean Ziegler Compares Gaza Strip to Concentration Camp," (*Swiss SDA—Schweizerische Depeschagentur AG*, May 21, 2004 (citing *Swiss Blick*). Ziegler said, "the Gaza Strip resembles a huge concentration camp," and called on the European Union to suspend its free trade agreements with Israel to "impress Sharon."

62. "Arab Boycott Office Warns Caterpillar It Will Be Blacklisted for Selling Equipment to Israeli Military," *Associated Press Worldstream*, June 24, 2004.

63. At a briefing given by Ziegler in 2004 during the 60th session of the commission, I asked him to elaborate on his criteria for determining which countries

merit a special mission and report. He responded that his decision was the product of lengthy consultation with civilian groups “such as the Red Cross.” However, according to the Red Cross representative attending the event, Ziegler never engaged in any such consultation.

64. World Radio Geneva made the same mistake in an April 2007 broadcast. It should be noted that the Human Rights Council does have a Special Rapporteur on Palestine—Professor John Dugard—whose distaste for Israel rivals Ziegler’s.

65. See Hillel Neuer, *The Struggle Against Anti-Israel Bias at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Post-Holocaust and Antisemitism publication no. 40 (January 1, 2006), www.unwatch.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=bdKKISNqEmG&b=1314451&ct=1766305.

66. Only after UN Watch protested did the UN leadership comment. Ziegler then became the only UN human rights expert in history to be publicly rebuked by the organization’s highest officials—UN secretary general Kofi Annan and UN high commissioner Louise Arbour. See “Annan Slams UN Official,” JTA, July 8, 2005; “Gaza Comments by Rights Expert Irresponsible—UN,” Reuters, July 7, 2005.

67. Ziegler, interview with *AlAkhhbar*.

68. UN press conference, October 26, 2006, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=ehUPTdNLPpLA>.

69. *Jean Ziegler’s Campaign*, p. 8, “Table A: Comparison of Jean Ziegler’s Treatment of the United States and Food Emergency Countries.”

70. *Jean Ziegler’s Campaign*, p. 8.

71. General Assembly resolution 48/141, December 20, 1993.

72. See Commission on Human Rights resolution 2003/25, April 22, 2003, http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/CHR/resolutions/E-CN_4-RES-2003-25.doc.