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EDITORIAL

In most countries, the National Day is a day of unity, of celebrations, a day when, for a short while, you can forget differences and arguments and join in to commemorate the birth of your homeland.

Sadly, in New Zealand, Waitangi Day, which is supposed to act as New Zealand's National Day, has increasingly become a day of discord, disunity and of physical clashes between two ethnic groups that once had pledged to live together in harmony and in mutual respect.

There is no denying it that in bygone days, the Maori population had been treated harshly and unfairly, but this happened several generations ago and since then the Maoris have, in general, received far more assistance and financial support from the Government than any of us migrants could ever dream about.

Contrary to most Maoris' belief, that their problem is purely an ethnic one, public grievances against present and past governments exist in any country, including countries inhabited by only one single race and, in this respect, Switzerland is no exception.

I am sure that anyone of you who would explore your own family tree would find somewhere one or more ancestors who have been done in by some past government. You only have to dig down to the Napoleonic wars when Napoleon's rules had been imposed for a time on the Swiss and to the

Sonderbund war. During those times, many of our ancestors had seen their land confiscated without any compensation. Since then, over generations, thousands and thousands of hectares of land have been taken over by successive governments to build railway line, roads and motorways, hydroelectric storage lakes, military installations and housing and industrial complexes.

There is no doubt that amongst your ancestors, you would find a few who have been forced or strongly persuaded to part with some or all of their land under some government pressure. Most of us could raise serious grievances against some past governments on the grounds that had some of our ancestors not been forced to sell their land for what we would consider today as peanuts, we would now be sitting on a family fortune.

Put all these past grievances together and you could easily have a type of "Waitangi Tribunal" in Switzerland that would be kept busy for generations to come trying to sort all these claims out.

So why has no "Waitangi Tribunal" ever been set up in Switzerland and why is it unlikely to ever happen? There are several good reasons for that:

1) The ethnic stigma does not exist.

The "victims" and the "oppressors" are from the same race and this alone would take all the wind out of the sales of the "victims" grievances.

2) The sense of fair play of the Swiss.

When you demand compensation from a government, the government can only pay you with money it has collected through taxes, in other words, from funds it has received from you and your fellow tax-payers. It is simply a situation of robbing Peter to pay Paul. So why should the present generation of people who, after all, had nothing to do with events that happened some 100-200 years ago and who never in their lifetime had derived any benefits whatsoever from the plight that might have descended upon one of your ancestors, pay you now some hefty compensation so that you can live a life of luxury or at least a life of leisure whilst they have to keep on toiling day after day?

3) The inborn Swiss drive towards achievement.

Most of us have been educated to look after ourselves, to do something with our lives, to be achievers. There is little time left for looking back, to mull and mope over what happened in the past and what our life could have been had injustice not been done to some of our ancestors. You cannot spend a whole lifetime walking around with a chip on your shoulder and crying foul play. Life is far too short and too precious for that. There comes a time when you have to forget the past and start doing something with your own life or else it is totally wasted.

We are convinced that there was and still is just as much injustice in Switzerland as in many other countries, including New Zealand, but it is the ability of the Swiss to overcome and forget these adversities and to strive for achievement that has put Switzerland at the forefront of the civilised world.

NOTE TO SECRETARIES

Next issue of the Helvetia magazine: NOVEMBER 1996. All contributions must be in by 15 October. Many thanks for your kind cooperation.

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