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Editorial

Switzerland and it's recent past! This was and is the theme of many a discussion among politicians and people in our Country of origin.

The ordinary Swiss citizen is posing the question why, after 50 years, do we have to face all these accusations in connection with immoral banking and trading practices during World War two. Why only now after such a long time and why is Switzerland singled out, a country that took no active part in the holocaust?

- Swiss people in general (including some of us dual-Nationals) feel a sense of loss-of-pride and a sense of anger that a 'shadow' over the image of Swiss history has been uncovered, without our knowledge that such a 'shadow' had ever existed.

-In accord with the official reaction from today's Swiss Government we are forced to acknowledge the moral and ethical shortcomings of Swiss bankers, Politicians and Industrialists during those most difficult years of World War two.

- A quotation in my dictionary reads; "Even God cannot change the past" and so our Country of origin can but try to make amends as best it can.

- A process of restitution with apology and compensation is well under way. Recently (May 98) some Swiss Politicians, led by the Foreign affairs Commissioner of the House of Representatives, met with the Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), Mr. Israel Singer, in Bern. - It appears that a consensus was reached and Mr. Rolf Bloch, the holocaust fund's president announced that a further pay out of 60 million Francs will go to approx. 30 to 40,000 people (survivors and their heirs) in the USA. - A further 15 million Francs will go to survivors in Eastern Europe. It was also agreed that funds should for the first time be made available to wartime political prisoners.

- With all of these news in mind it is easy to allow a sense of guilt to take hold of the ordinary person in Switzerland.

However by doing so the Swiss of today (including us Swiss Kiwis) have cause to balance such guilt feelings with proud memories of the heroic efforts by the Swiss Army and the general population of the 1940's. Willing to resist, at all cost and with great personal sacrifice of the individual the ideology of the "Third Reich" was rejected in order to defend freedom and democracy.

- Having been shielded from the consequences of direct involvement in the war itself, we owe a sense of gratitude to our forbears and it is timely to be reminded of some heroic action by two of many Swiss citizens of those days.

Maybe the names of Paul Grüninger and Maurice Bavaud do not mean anything to you, but please allow me to express my admiration for these "victims of compassion and civil courage".

- **Paul Grüninger,** the Police Commandant of St.Gall lost his job in disgrace when it was discovered that in 1938/39 he allowed many hundreds of Jewish refugees to enter Switzerland illegally during the time of the Nazi regime in Germany. A year after loosing his job in 1940 Grüninger was condemned for disobeying orders and falsifying official documents. He died a disgraced man in the early 1970's.

In recent times and for some years now family and friends of Grüninger have tried to have him post humously rehabilitated. (Rehabilitation according to my dictionary means "to re-establish in the esteem of others)

Not only did they succeed by having Grüninger officially rehabilitated in 1995, but now the Cantonal Parliament of St.Gall has granted a credit of 1.3 million Francs to establish a "Grüninger Foundation" with the aim to rewarding people acting selflessly in the interest of others. This foundation has a further mandate to counteract racism and anti-Semitism.

Maurice Bavaud, a young student

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of Theology from the Canton of Neuchâtel was unsuccessful in his attempt on Hitler's life in 1939. Arrested by the Nazi's in 1940 he was condemned to die and was executed. Announcing the rehabilitation of Bavaud, the prominent Swiss newspaper "Der Tagesanzeiger" states the following:

On behalf of the Swiss Government of 1939 and the Legation in Berlin the present Swiss Government has apologised for the lack of intervention in the case of Maurice Bavaud.

- It appears that the Swiss diplomatic service in Germany at that time avoided any involvement and the young Swiss 'criminal' had to face his predicament without any help or compassion from his country, Switzerland. The 'authorities of the day' went out of their way not to offend the Germans. Against any expectation there was no attempt made to exchange Bavaud with some German spies held by Switzerland at that time.

-With hindsight, so the Federal Council said recently, Bavaud deserves our admiration and a place of honour in the annals of Swiss history and an apology was extended to the heirs of Maurice Bavaud. In order to underline this apology, the town of Neuchâtel has with an official ceremony mounted a commemorative plaque on the house where Maurice Bavaud was born. A fitting tribute to a brave, maybe somewhat foolish young Swiss individual. Don't you think?

Paul Grüninger in old age.

Maurice Bavaud, never to grow old.

Presidents's Message

A few weeks ago, in preparation for the AGM in Taranaki, I spent some time browsing through the "latest" Society minutes' book. With the first entry dating back to 1967 (not that much younger than me!), this book made very interesting reading. I still recognised quite a few names and sadly, a number of these people have since passed away. However, there are also many who are today still very active in their own Clubs, as well as the Society. But one name in particular did stand out - the Society Treasurer of over 30 years ago, Mrs Ruth Messmer, who is still working very hard for the Wellington Club to this day. Congratulations on your commitment, Ruth - I still have many years of catching up to do!

In reading the minutes from year to year, there was one topic which was always regularly, and, it seems, vigorously discussed - money! The major cost was producing the *Helvetia*, and in 1976 this caused much debate regarding the increase of subscriptions by 50% - from $2 to $3! In 1979 it increased again to $5, and then to $7 in 1981. Nine years later, in 1990, it climbed to $10, followed by a !00% increase to $20 only three years later in 1993, and finally to the current $25 in 1995. So over the years, not much has changed.

One of my own main goals as President is to ensure that the Society's finances remain healthy and intact; to conclude each year with a reasonable profit. It is important to remember that foremost, we are a benevolent organisation, so we must always be prepared to fulfil our obligation of providing financial assistance to any member should the need ever arise. To ensure this, sufficient funds must always be at hand. Along with the minutes' book, I also had a look through the Society Rules, where Rule 2.i caught my attention. Coincidentally, this was also mentioned in the President's Report from the 1989 AGM, so I, too, shall be bluntly bold in quoting this rule. It says that one objective of the Society is to "accept any trust or legacies for all or any of the purposes of the Society". Therefore, the Society may be made a benefactor if anyone so wishes. Further on, Rule 4a also includes that donations will be very much appreciated!

On a lighter note, I must remind a certain past President of a statement made in his 1990 annual report. He felt it would be a good idea to form a "Swiss Party" should proportional representation ever become a reality in New Zealand. Well, André (Schleicher), may your words come back to haunt you!!

My warmest greetings to everyone,

Beatrice

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