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Editorial

It is your own interest
that is at stake when your
neighbours wall is ablaze!

So wrote the Roman poet 'Horace' sometime in the last century before Christ. And so we can say in our day; there once was a small country in the center of Europe. It had its foundation through the desire to be free of domineering overlords. The people of that country were willing to defend that freedom even when encircled by warring countries in the first half of the 20th Century. Most inhabitants of that country bore a great burden of sacrifice during the war years, but as is the case everywhere some few people gave in to

temptation and took advantage of other people's misfortune. There may well have been some of these people doing what they did under the impression that they could lose family, life and country if they did not comply with the threatening demands of the war-lord from the north! Let's be glad we don't have to apportion blame, not even with hindsight. Let's say "Thank God for God" he is the only judge for such a task. Let's be glad that the Government of that small country which we call our own, Switzerland, has apologized to the world for the moral shortcomings of some few people during those dark days.

Now it is time to update the history books and to boldly mention the accusations, recriminations, exami-

nations and reparations our country of origin has dealt with in the past 2 years.

Some of us patriotic Swiss-Kiwis will not be able to restore our hurt pride fully, but should we feel guilty? I don't think so. The only things most of us can remember of the Nazi-war years are honorable memories and not even the heavily biased BBC-documentary recently shown on TV should be able to make us feel guilty.

As for myself it has been a learning curve: Maybe you and I, we should have known that not knowing our history "warts and all" is understandable when we read the quotation: *History is the crystallisation of popular beliefs.* I just wish the history books would have a warning on page 1, reading: *Reader beware, that despite the noble contents of this book, some hidden and unpleasant shortcomings due to human weakness, may not be mentioned and will possibly come to light in future years.*

For the benefit of the less-well-informed reader let me recount the relevant events of the past two years, culminating in the reparation payment of 1.9 billion S/Francis by the Swiss banks for distribution to the world Jewish congress.

Excerpt from Swiss Radio
International 17.8.98

In 1996 the president of the Union Bank of Switzerland, then one of Switzerland's big 3 banks described any remaining money in dormant accounts belonging to holocaust victims as "peanuts". 2 years on the Union Bank of Switzerland is no more, it has merged with its competitor the Swiss Bank Corporation to become simply UBS. The bank president who made those remarks has since taken early retirement. But the biggest change of all has been the news that the dispute over missing assets is finally to be settled. When the controversy first began the banks insisted the issue of dormant accounts had been dealt with in the 1960's. After pressure from the United States a banking ombudsman was appointed to coordinate applications from potential claimants. This measure had only partial success. The ombudsman's survey uncovered only 39 million dollars, somewhat less than the Jewish organisations claimed existed. By this time the whole issue of Switzerland's role during the second World war was

SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

PATRON: Mr Walter Simmen, Chargé d' Affaires of Switzerland

PRESIDENT/TREASURER: Beatrice Leuenberger, 44 Montgomery Crescent,
Hamilton, Ph.(07) 843-7971 Fax (07) 843-7941

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DELEGATES TO THE SWISS ABROAD CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

DELEGATE: Heinz Leuenberger, 33 Russell Terrace,
Putaruru, Ph/Fax (07) 883-8537

DEPUTY DELEGATE: Marie-Therese Melville-Schöpfer, P.O Box 79-294,
Royal Heights, Auckland 1230, Ph. (09) 833-4029

COORDINATOR IN NZ FOR THE SWISS ABROAD YOUTH EXCHANGE SCHEME
Mrs. Nicole Helsdon, 58 A Marellen Drive, Red Beach / Orewa,
Ph. (09) 426-0927

EDITOR: Rinaldo Rust, 242 Te Pahu Rd. R.D.5.
Hamilton, Ph/Fax (07) 871-9946

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Ph. (04) 472-1593 or (04) 472-1594 Fax (04) 499-6302

HONORARY CONSUL: Peter Deutschle, P.O. Box 90-209, Auckland Mail Centre
Ph./Fax (09) 366-0403. Email: deutschle@clear.net.nz