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## President's Message

What a sad irony it was that hot on the heels of the near-death of our national airline, Air New Zealand, we also received the news that Switzerland's own national carrier, Swissair, had also suddenly been grounded and was facing bankruptcy - news that was rather difficult for many of us to stomach!!

How heart breaking it was to see the images of stranded passengers and the fleet of Swissair planes grounded at Kloten Airport (*pictured on page 12*). This also caused about 38,000 passengers to be stranded for two days at airports around the world. Even my own parents were caught up in the debacle on their way home from a holiday in Switzerland, as their booked Swissair flight from Zurich to Tokyo had been cancelled. Finally, they managed to secure a flight from Amsterdam with another airline, and spent a total of 27 hours in the air to get home!!

So how on earth could this happen to two of the best airlines in the world ?? For both countries, the collapse of their respective airlines was said to be their biggest corporate losses in history!

It seems the demise of both was aided in similar ways, following foreign expansions by purchasing smaller airlines requiring large capital input - Air NZ bought Ansett to enter Australia's domestic market, whilst Swissair took over Belgium's Sabena Airline for better access into the European market. And now these two provincial airlines are no more, leaving both Air NZ and Swissair with very bad reputations.

However, while there were some comparisons which led to the financial woes of two airlines, there are less similarities in their deliverance. Here, the Government "rescued" Air New Zealand by purchasing an 80% share (but at a cost of nearly one billion dollars to taxpayers!), while in Switzerland, the "problem" may not be quite so easily solved. The Swiss Government has concerned itself about the fate of Swissair, but it was made clear (at time of writing) that a large scale amount of federal funds would not be available towards the four billion francs (approx NZ\$5.5 billion) needed to salvage the airline.

However the Government did then

say it would be prepared to invest into a re-launched national airline, but again repeated that it would not back the venture alone.

Swiss business has even offered to give up planned tax cuts worth SFr1.5 billion to help salvage Swissair, and the country's main business association (Economiesuisse) also said it was prepared to forgo tax cuts of SFr300 million pa for five years to help save the airline. Another option proposed to raise money for a new airline was to introduce a special "Swissair-tax", perhaps by increasing the current "value added tax" (VAT).

Of great concern is also the huge loss of jobs, both airline and airport staff, and also for the myriad of as-

sociated businesses affected.

We only hope now that some sort of a long term solution can be found, and we will have a Swiss national airline, in whatever form it may take, back in the air again soon. Then we Swiss-Kiwis will once again be able to be proud of both of "our airlines" again, as they win back the excellent image and reputations they both had until just a short while ago.

On a lighter note, I would like to thank the Society members who responded to last month's reminder notice for unpaid subs, and I hope to receive the remaining few shortly.

Regards to everyone, Beatrice

## Swiss Embassy - INVITATION

Ambassador Walter Thurnheer, Head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad of our Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Bern, will visit the Swiss Communities in New Zealand and give a talk on

### Switzerland Today / Situation of the Swiss Abroad

and will also answer questions in relating to topics concerning Swiss Abroad.

Walter Thurnheer was born in 1963 in Muri, Canton Aargau, Switzerland. He read theoretical physics at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, graduating in 1985. He entered the Swiss Diplomatic Service in 1989 and completed internships in Bern and Moscow.

From 1991 to 1995 he was employed in the Secretariat for Foreign Policy Planning in Bern. In 1993 he was assistant to the Special Envoy for Georgia to the United Nations Secretary-General, and later went on to represent Switzerland at the negotiations concerning the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh within the framework of the Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE. From 1995 to spring 1997, still within the framework of the Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE, he returned to Moscow as Minister to the Swiss Ambassador.

In March 1997, he was appointed personal assistant to the Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and in May 1999 took up the position of deputy head of Political Affairs Division VI with the rank of Minister. In May 2000 he was appointed Ambassador and Head of Political Affairs Division VI (Swiss Abroad).

The meetings will take place at the following destinations:

### CHRISTCHURCH Saturday 1st December, 7.00pm

at the Historical Boatshed Café, 2 Cambridge Terrace, Chch.

### WELLINGTON Sunday 2nd December, 5.00pm

at the Swiss Club House, 21 Moores Valley Road, Wainuiomata.

### TARANAKI Monday 3rd December, 8.00pm

at the Swiss Club House, Kaponga

### HAMILTON Tuesday 4th December, 7.30pm

at the Quality Hotel. Te Rapa, Hamilton

### AUCKLAND Wednesday 5th December, 7.30pm

at the Newmarket Club, 13 Teed Street, Newmarket, Auckland.

For further information, please contact either Mrs Bernadette Hunkeler Brown at the Embassy of Switzerland in Wellington (Ph. 04 472 1593), or your local Swiss Club.