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Editorial

Literature - Language - Culture !

I think you would agree that common sense would have it that these three components can be found in the make-up of every country of the civilised world to a greater or lesser degree. - In my dictionary I found the following definition of the word literature; *"it is the collective writings of a country or period"* !

Not too bad a description I said to myself as I followed the invitation to attend an evening lecture entitled *"The Contemporary Literary Scene in Switzerland"* by Professor Romey Sabalius (German born, Head of the German Program at San Jose State

University and currently Visiting Professor at Monash University in Melbourne) at the University of Waikato in Hamilton. A most interesting discourse presented in layman's language was enjoyed by a good representation of Waikato's Swiss/Kiwis and Hamilton/Kiwis alike. Concluding his address with some condensed statements, Professor Sabalius had to admit that there is no real contemporary Swiss literature as such, due to the four language fragmentation in Swiss/German, Swiss/French, Swiss/Italian and Romanch (mainly published in German).

- So the 'moral of the story' is obvious; that literature and language go together like horse and cart. This statement in turn leads me to think

about controversial happenings in New Zealand as well as in Switzerland. While one of our Maori-Leaders here in our adoptive country is calling for compulsory studies in the Maori language, the Parents of Primary School children in Switzerland (in Canton Zürich) are demanding English-language lessons be implemented presently.

- Would you agree that there is little chance of Maori language proficiency ever bearing any 'commercial advantage' to the general population? If so, it is understandable that the average New Zealander is loath to embark on Maori language studies on a compulsory level. In our country of origin, Switzerland, the commercial value of English has been recognised for some time and the authorities in the field of education are at this time under great pressure to introduce lessons in an orderly fashion. However some important questions need an answer first. For example; is it reasonable to burden a Primary School pupil with another language course right at the beginning of its schooling career? By doing so, will the study of the other language requirements - French or Italian - suffer disproportionately? Should English study lessons become integrated into the State School education system at all, or should such studies remain available on a voluntary basis paid for by the Parents, as is the case now? Are there enough Swiss Primary School teachers available qualified to teach the English language?

- According to an article I found in a Swiss newspaper sent to me by the Swiss Embassy, there is confusion in Canton Zürich (usually the forerunner of such 'innovations'). For example; The School authorities in Dielsdorf were happy so far with a voluntary offer of English lessons for its Primary School pupils, but want to make it obligatory now. In Dübendorf however they found such a great demand for voluntary lessons (at Fr. 190.- annually per pupil), that they think it would be impossible to change to a compulsory and integrated system of 'English for Primary School children'. Again some different approach is evident in Herrliberg where the introduction of English lessons has been somewhat slower and voluntary lessons are scheduled to begin next year, but only

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from School-class 3 onward. It is estimated that 80 % of all pupils will partake of this offer. In contrast to these examples, the School authorities of the municipality of Greifensee and especially their local teachers are reticent to introduce English lessons either on a voluntary or on a obligatory level, since they feel incompetent to undertake this task.

As the newspaper article mentions, there are no such worries for the private School 'Fun languages AG' since it operates some 30 English language clubs for Primary pupils of 'class 3-level' in Canton of Zürich at a cost to Parents of Fr. 18.- per hour.

Some time in future years it may be expected that English as part of the curriculum may become accepted throughout Switzerland and the more fundamental question will remain; what will the introduction of English, (the universal language as it is called) do to the relationship between the four language-regions of our 'home-country'? Will it help or hinder the understanding on a political and cultural basis? Let us hope that it will not lead to 'loss of culture' in the various regions. Maybe we should not fear, since there have been traditionally over 100 dialects spoken for quite some generations now and this is likely to continue even with English as a secondary language well into the new millennium.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'd like to begin by heartily congratulating the Swiss-Kiwi Yodel Group from Auckland on their most successful competition results at this year's Yodel Festival in Switzerland. They scored exceptionally well in all sections - Yodel, alhorn and choir singing. The members of this group put a lot of energy and many hours of their spare time into their singing and music, and are to be commended for their commitment. They all deserve the support of the Swiss Community here in New Zealand, and we can all be justifiably proud to have this group representing Swiss Abroad from New Zealand, both in Switzerland and in Malaysia.

Looking at Club events, many people around the country have recently

been enjoying delicious Fondues. But things are winding down, with mainly only Christmas functions left on the annual agenda.

For anyone who is interested, I have been sent a video (in German) from Swiss Radio International (SRI) called "Wahlen 99, Die Schweiz - integriert oder isoliert?".

I also recently received more correspondence from the Swiss Abroad Secretariat (ASO), most of it dealing with AHV and voting rights. But it also included an interesting list of the number of Swiss Citizens resident in each country around the world, of which there are over 570,000 (registered at respective embassies or consulates). Here in Oceania, we total over 24,500. The bulk of these, 19,000, live in Australia, a further 5423 are in New Zealand, with the remaining 100 or so being scattered around a variety of Pacific Islands. We also have seven citizens from the Principality of Liechtenstein registered and residing here in New Zealand. Of the 5423 in this country, 4004 have dual nationality. The female population of 2181 greatly outnumbers the men, of which there are 1696, along with 1546 children aged under 18 years. And of the adults, 3373 are aged between 18 to 65, with 504 over 65 years. All of these 3877 adults are entitled to vote in Swiss elections and referenda, but currently, only 450, or 11.61% have registered to exercise this right.

The Swiss Abroad Secretariat is currently selling Year 2000 "Pestalozzi Calendars" at a special price for Swiss Abroad for approx. \$17.50 (normal retail price is \$25), plus postage. If anyone is interested in purchasing a calendar, please contact me on ph. 07 843 7971, or fax 07 843 7941, by Mon-



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Daylight saving is here, many of us are busy in our gardens, and we are finally enjoying lovely warm summer days - making New Zealand the best place in the world to be. And as we head rapidly towards the pre-Christmas period, I wish everyone a good and happy month without too much of the stress common at this time of year. Kind regards,

Beatrice

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