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An excellent way of encouraging reading

The "Schweizerisches Jugendschriftenwerk" (SJW), a Swiss organisation publishing literature for young people that was founded over 80 years ago, still focuses on ensuring affordable and attractive literature for young people in multilingual Switzerland. By Charles Linsmayer

Klaus Merz, one of Swiss literature's living greats, has kept all of the 76 SIW books he was given as a child and, when he picks up no. 552, "Mit dem Düsenflugzeug durch die Schallmauer" (An Aeroplane Goes Through the Sound Barrier), he still recalls his first middle ear infection when his mother forbade him from reading further because she feared that his ear drum would burst. His colleagues Franz Hohler, Etienne Barilier and Giovanni Orelli also go into raptures when they remember their first encounters with the books of the "Schweizerisches Jugendschriftenwerk (SJW)", which also exists in the other national languages under the labels of OSL and ESG.

were published. It took another 50 years before SJW found the courage to publish crime novels. However, with the help of teachers, it succeeded in selling large numbers of copies. The publishing house employed illustrators like Gregor Rabinovitch

Countering smut and trash

The organisation was founded in Olten on 1 July 1931 by a group led by Fritz Brunner. a schoolteacher from Zurich, whose mission was to combat "smutty and trashy literature". To counteract "trashy novels" effectively, their outward appearance was replicated as far as possible. An edition had 32 pages, cost 25 cents and had an illustrated colour cover. However, the first 12 books were unable to compete with John Kling's sensational crime novels. In 1932, in addition to stories for very small children, a biography of Edison, a report from South Africa and a case for the "sleuths' club"

and Paul Bösch from the outset who were later followed by well-known artists, such as Hans Witzig, Isa Hesse, Alois Carigiet, Meret Oppenheim and Hanny Fries. The small volumes are therefore also significant from an art history perspective. The programme included texts by Swiss authors Olga Meyer, Elisabeth Müller and Hans Zulliger - alongside works by teachers that told Swiss history from the pile dwellers to the withdrawal from the Beresina. Intellectual defence of the nation Four books were published in French for

the first time in 1935, and the first titles in Italian and Romansh appeared in 1941. At the same time, a new initiative was the publication of a book, "650 Jahre Eidgenossenschaft" (650 Years of the Swiss Confederation), in all four national languages. 614,900 copies were handed out to Swiss children free of charge. After the war, when the intellectual defence of the nation had had its day, SIW failed to recognise the sign of the times. The publications did not include any political or social topics until well into the 1970s and also practically over-





looked the everyday realities facing the young readership.

The situation improved when Heinz Wegmann, a secondary schoolteacher from Zurich, took over the management of the publishing house in 1977. There was even a title on AIDS, sparking angry public protest. The comic also became acceptable, and authors such as Franz Hohler and Niklaus Meienberg were allowed to take a critical look at Switzerland and its history. A book entitled "Drogen? Ich nicht!" (Drugs? Not Me!) came out in 1990 and one on sexuality and contraception in 1992.

Financial crisis

The company ran into difficulties in the 1990s for financial reasons and because in 1990 it had broken away from Pro Juventute,

reduce costs. This had been strongly advocated by the filmmaker Margrit Schmid - and a miraculous turnaround was achieved! With the unveiling of a series of previously successful books and four new titles - including one in German, French, Italian, Romansh and English - Margrit Schmid started a new chapter in SJW's history in 2006. This was a chapter in which the expansion of the sales network was just as important as cooperation with young authors and various outstanding artists and designers. Just a year later, with 27 new titles in all the national languages, the publishing programme had returned to the scale of the 1990s.

to 272,277 in 1999.

Give up or carry on?

In 2005, it looked as though the foundation

board would have to wind up the company

sooner or later. However, after much delib-

eration, a proposal was finally approved to

continue the publishing house with an at-

tractive new programme and to introduce

measures to modernise the sales system and

terests and target groups and - with its athousing and accounting. In 1991, to celebrate tractively presented and modern image "60 years of SIW", it published 60 new titles bore little resemblance to the and organised a lavish celebratory event unadventurous layout of the editions duthis resulted in a dramatic net loss that used ring the war and post-war period. The fiup all its financial reserves and left the publishing house in a precarious position. Pronancial situation has today been stabilised. duction was scaled back massively, and sales fell constantly from 439,158 copies in 1994

THE NEW PROGRAMME

The 2013/14 programme includes 24 new titles. A col-Walser appropriate for illustrations by Anna Sommer entitled "Der Räuber", published in German. French and Italian, is the most spectacular among them. Another classic, "Der Lebhag", based on a available in German, French and Romansh, Nadine Spengler colourfully illustrated this story about hedgehogs under threat in their natural habitat, which remains relevant to this day.

liant educational book that serves as a guide for young about a cat that ends up in amateur breeders, is writ- an eagle owl's nest. "Lilly

Margrit Schmid was awarded the Swiss Youth Book Prize in 2009 for repositioning SJW and making it a serious player in Swiss publishing for young people.

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ten by science journalist Atlant Bieri and illustrated

lection of stories by Robert by Anna Luchs, and published in German, French, young people with original Italian and Romansh. There are, of course, also new titles that appear in just one language. In German, Anita Siegfried excitingly continues the "pile story by Meinrad Inglin, is Pfahlbauer am Zugersee";

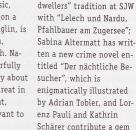
"Salzkrebschen", a bril-

ière de Julien" by the trio of writers Henriquez-Droz-Bertschy, which combines two languages in one edition, is also intended for this target readership. There is plenty more besides – Daniel Badraun's "Kinderfest auf dem Weisnew titles published in Italian. Only a brief overview is provided here. The full list of publications for 2013/14 can be found at

und der Fluss" - "La riv-

books is CHF 5 to 10. Delivery abroad is subject to advance payment of the invoice sent by the publisher upon order placement.

senstein" and four www.sjw.ch. The cost of individual



for small children - "Eine schlimme Geschichte"