

Correspondence

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CORRESPONDENCE.

3, Walsingham Road,
Enfield,
Middlesex.
23rd August, 1947.

The Editor,
The Swiss Observer,
23, Leonard Street,
London, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

May I crave space to offer your readers one explanatory comment and one challenge in regard to your report on the Swiss National Day Celebration held at the Casino Theatre on July 27th?

First the comment. Nobody more than the committee deplored having to refuse a very large number of applications for tickets; it is a distressing fact that these unfortunately unsuccessful applications totalled nearly 550 seats, and there might have been more. Nobody, I am equally sure, wants a repetition of the bitter experience of 1943, when admission was open to all comers without tickets and very many of our compatriots, including ladies who had donned Swiss national costumes specially for the occasion, found themselves shut out of a Stoll Theatre crowded with Swiss and other nationals, a good many of the latter with no other excuse to be in the house than they happened to be idling along Kingsway and saw there was something on free. It was a hard lesson and the committee, very wisely, decided that in future admission, whilst remaining free, must be by ticket only.

No celebration was held in 1944 because of the flying bombs. But the committee's decision was put to the test in 1945 and it worked well. The 2,250 seats at the Stoll Theatre were all booked up in advance and not many late applicants were disappointed. In 1946, a good many Swiss in London took advantage of the resumed travelling facilities to enjoy a summer holiday in Switzerland. The result was that the attendance at the Swiss National Day celebration at the same Stoll Theatre that year fell to about 1,700 only.

Now, who could foresee six months or more ago, when the committee had to set about hiring a theatre or a hall, that this smaller number would be exceeded this year. The reverse seemed more likely. Who knew then that 3,000 or more young Swiss were "invading" England in the spring and early summer? How easy for the critics, after the event, to "suggest" simple remedies! Do they not realise the great amount of thought that is given months ahead to the arrangements, carefully planned as these are on past experiences?

Unexpected difficulties are apt to crop up and upset the best calculations. The Committee cannot be blamed for that, nor should its wisdom be belittled by easy suggestions. Constructive criticism, yes, the more the better.

What were the facts?

The Stoll Theatre was not available this year, but the proprietors offered another theatre holding about 2,200 instead. Films, however, could not be shown there. The question of alternative accommodation was carefully studied; quite a number of theatres and halls were considered and inspected. The Casino Theatre, with a capacity of 1,750 (not 1,500 as stated in the

report), appeared to be in every respect the most suitable alternative. Against the 1,700 attendance of 1946, it seemed to be perfectly alright.

When the Swiss Fête at the Central Hall in mid-June revealed the large influx of young people in the colony, it was too late to make other provision for the Swiss National Day Celebration.

Thus, whilst the disappointment to so many was not a surprise to the Committee in the end, it just could not be helped this time. But it goes without saying that plans for the future must and will take the altered circumstances into account.

Now only a few words more, for the challenge. It would be interesting and helpful to have the opinion of as many as possible as to the type of celebration they consider best and most appropriate. Perhaps a poll could be taken in the colony.

Should we keep to a theatre on the Sunday, or go to the Central Hall, if free, on the actual anniversary day of the 1st of August (not available on Sundays); or should it be an open air event (without the drawbacks of unpleasant Welsh Harp memories)? Should we drop our simple festival with the best our own old colony can provide and secure gymnasts, a double-quatuor (yodlers or otherwise), or a well-known male choir from one of our big cities in Switzerland, at a price?

Admittedly there must be better and more suitable films of Switzerland than have been sent to us in recent years, films that would show the splendours of our homeland, a little bit from every part of it to touch the inner chords of almost everyone present. But that is another story which will not be solved here. Incidentally, the same film on Swiss democracy (not a capital row in the "Gemeinderat," Mr. Editor) was shown to the Swiss Colony in Paris on the 1st of August.

May I quote in conclusion the following sentences from the "Zurichsee-Zeitung" of the 31st July:

"So fanden wir die Stimmung, in der die Schweizer in London am letzten Sonntag ihren Geburtstag der Heimat begingen, recht eigentlich eine herzliche. Im bis auf den letzten Platz besetzten Casino-Theater nahm die besinnliche und doch frohe Feier einen eindrucksvollen Verlauf."

"Wirklich: es war nicht zur Schau getragener Patriotismus, sondern vielmehr waren es von Herzen kommende, einfache Worte und frohe Lieder, die diese Bundesfeier in einer Millionen-Weltstadt nicht so leicht vergessen machen."

I hope that the challenge will be taken up and bring to the First of August Committee the new ideas and the new moving force which are promised us, the new blood which is so badly needed to guide our social efforts towards higher attainments and loftier ideals, away from our "drab" performances of the post-war years. I for one will most heartily welcome the new inspiration and will gladly rejoin the ranks.

Yours faithfully,

J. ZIMMERMANN,

Hon. Secretary,
First of August Committee,
Hon. Treasurer,
First of August Fund.