

Editor's post-bag

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EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

29th August, 1950.

The Editor,
Swiss Observer,
London, E.C.2.

Dear Mr. Stauffer,

On several occasions I have been on the point of writing to the S.O. but feeling that discretion was the best part of valour, my pen has remained idle. I have just read your article "100% Democracy", and this time I cannot resist.

By implication your notes seem to convey that the Swiss in England are not 100% democrats and this, no doubt, is due to the fact that this hospitable country is a Kingdom where the laws of the protocol are rather strictly adhered to. No meeting takes place without an array of speeches, and you know only too well how boring that can be. On the other hand, let us not do away with all discourses and lectures because they can be a sheer delight when the speaker is of the calibre of Mr. R. A. Butler; Prof. Rappard; the late Jan Masaryk, and many other brilliant speakers, even if in less exalted positions.

Our distinguished guest, Mr. Max Petitpierre (then Federal Councillor) a true democrat if ever there was one, must have been a little amazed at the stiffness of our reception on the occasion of his visit to London in 1948, and I am sure the red coated M.C. has impressed him tremendously!

Against this background please allow me to relate a most enjoyable day spent in Switzerland last July when I attended the "Alt Zofinger Central Fest". This takes place every five years in the charming town of Zofingen and brings together for a few hours hundreds of "Doctors, Directors, Professors ... and humble business men". The list of participants numbering about 500 was printed in strict alphabetical order without precedence or priority, and the names of the President of the Swiss Confederation, other Federal Councillors, of our General, of University Professors, etc., appeared in precisely the same type as that of a Zahnarzt, Pfarrer or Manufacturer's Agent. No M.C. here, but just a trumpeter of the Stadtmusik trying to restore order and silence for Mr. Petitpierre to say a few words. True enough we listened to our President in respectful silence. Then two other speeches followed but I could not tell you what they were all about.

A distinguished Professor from Basle and an eminent speaker from Geneva struggled along as best they could but by now the "Old Boys" had had enough of a serious meeting and laugh and banter had become the order of the day.

Before dinner was over inveterate smokers had lit their pipe, Stumpe or Brissago, although nobody had given the traditional signal: "Gentlemen, you may smoke!"

Some of the most eminent lawyers, politicians, doctors and superior officers of our country were mixing freely with the less glorified school-teacher, clergyman or Landsturm Corporals, and as the saying goes "A jolly good time was had by all".

The President of Sektion Neuenburg ordered all the Neuchâtelois "Upstanding on your chairs" and at the top of our voices we called for Mr. Petitpierre, who without ado, left the top table to sit with us for one hour and exchange reminiscences and jokes in the best spirit of camaraderie.

It was very hot and by then at this official banquet you could count the few who were not in their shirt-sleeves, but they did not discard their Red-White-Red sash and their old Student's Cap, that famous cap which years ago was an immaculate white and by now has turned a lovely amber.

Is that not 100% Democracy?

Yours sincerely,

J. HEIMERDINGER.

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