

Editor's post-bag

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EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

3, Chesterford Gardens, N.W.3.
6 November 1952.

To the Editor,
Swiss Observer,
London.

Dear Mr. Editor,

You cannot complain if I am unwilling to accept your "homily" in connection with the recital of the "Berner Singbuben" as either deserved or constructive criticism.

The discouraging circumstances in which the N.S.H. undertook in the last minute to organise a recital in London for the "Berner Singbuben" on their way back from their stay in Birmingham were well known to you. Although the likelihood of this visit was known several months ago the necessary details reached me only at the end of September. The lack of interest shown by those who knew of it made it appear most unlikely that a sufficiently large audience would turn up to justify the risk of taking a large hall especially as no one had offered to share in the expense with the N.S.H. The fact that not even a hundred seats could be filled in the end confirmed this expectation.

The Great Drawing Room was secured by courtesy of the Arts Council of Great Britain at a nominal charge too late for announcement in the "Swiss Observer" of September 26th. Owing to the confusing habit of the S. O. being published occasionally only at a three weeks' interval there was no other issue until after the recital on October 16th. Nevertheless the circular, obligingly sent out by the Anglo-Swiss Society, the City Swiss Club and the Swiss Mercantile Society as well as the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, reached well over one thousand of the most likely to be interested in such a recital. Less than five per cent applied for tickets. The limit of 100 seats was strictly stipulated by our hosts and raised only on the day of the recital to 130. But they remained empty. If any blame must be apportioned it should be to the indifference of the Colony.

There was no one either, apart from our hon. secretary Miss Alice Gretener and Mr. Böschenstein, erstwhile president of the N.S.H. Berne, who volunteered to help shepherding the 35 young boys through London on their three day's stay. Nor did any society, apart from the N.S.H., spend anything on hospitality for the boys, while there was also fortunately a considerable surplus from the recital towards the expenses of their stay in London.

Somebody warned us not to organise the recital at the short time still available, as we would only get disappointment and rudeness through it. That it should come to us, of all people, from the Bernese editor of the S. O., who ought to have known or found out the facts before sermonizing in public, I find particularly ungracious.

Your other complaints appear to me even less called for, wildly exaggerated and in any case dating back several years, to the period of my inexperience in these things after rescuing the N.S.H., our only society seriously devoted to matters of Swiss culture, from the indifference of most and the animosity of a

few members of our Colony. Year after year the S. O. publishes very laudably the long list of lectures, entertainments and other efforts provided by the N.S.H., all richly varied and inspired by the high aim of cultivating patriotic knowledge and attachment in our Colony, which aim we are proud to share in particular degree with the S.O., efforts which you profess to admire. Yet you hark back to the distant past to recall one or two mishaps in our selfless endeavours to throw at our heads when we have just taken much trouble to enable at least some of our Colony, including yourself, despite much discouragement, to hear the angelic singing of our young Bernese compatriots.

On one occasion the lecturer, Mr. Welte, turned up late to read from his works, owing to the late arrival of his train from Birmingham in a fog. On the occasion of Col. Erb's lecture on the Swiss army the film he had dispatched well in advance failed to reach us in time. Once or twice we had trouble with slides of mixed size to fit the projector causing delay in starting their showing. Not all of these mishaps could have been avoided, and we have had to learn how to do it. Those of us, who devote so much time and effort to our activities take your strictures on the few imperfections very ill indeed. The success we can claim for most of our numerous endeavours, despite the cultural indifference of a large section of our Colony, requires not "a little organizing" as you call it, but quite a lot of it as you must know from your own meritorious share in the Colony's activities over so many years. We treasure the goodwill and co-operation you and the S.O. have always extended to our work. The more painful it is to me to have to defend ourselves against the unfair slur suddenly cast on our work. There remains too much to do in our tacit partnership of truly patriotic endeavour, for the S.O. and the N.S.H. as well as other organisations, to indulge ourselves in spleenful lapses from mutual consideration and helpfulness.

Hoping that you will help me redress the wrong you have done our work and reputation by publishing this rejoinder, I remain, in the best of old friendships,

Yours sincerely,

H. W. Egli,

President of the London Group of the N.S.H.



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London, November 12th, 1952.

H. W. Egli, Esq.
President,
Nouvelle Société Helvétique.
London.

Dear Mr. President,

In a covering letter you have asked me to publish your communication of the 5th inst., and I have acceded to your request.

A number of complaints, which I had received from our readers concerning the arrangements made in connection with the "Bernser Singbuben" recital, prompted me to mention a few facts, which I thought might be useful.

Instead of accepting my remarks in the spirit they were meant, you find it necessary to reply in a most unfriendly and aggressive manner, accusing me of "gross exaggeration" and "unfair slurs" on your Society.

You can, therefore, not complain, Mr. President, if I take the liberty of replying to your ill-tempered letter, and I will endeavour to do so with more restraint than you have shown.

"BERNER SINGBUBEN" RECITAL.

According to your statement you were apparently only informed of the arrival of the choir at the end of September, although, according to information which has reached me from authoritative quarters, the organisers *f.i.* of the Birmingham recital were advised much earlier of the exact date the recital would take place in that town. This seems to me quite feasible, considering the journey had to be fixed so as to fit in with the boys school holidays. However, I will not quibble about this, and accept your statement as being "according to facts."

You seem to agree with me, that the intended visit of this choir was known to you "for several months" in fact you had mentioned it on various occasions at the Presidents Assembly meetings. Experience should have told you, that such arrangements need careful preparation and time, but you did not apparently feel it necessary to press the organisers in Berne for an early fixture date. Had I been in your shoes, I would have sent an ultimatum to Berne to the effect "either you inform me by return of the date of your arrival in London, or I wash my hands of the arrangements, and will have nothing to do with the affair."

Instead of doing so, you patiently waited for information until the last moment, when it became almost impossible to take adequate steps to make this recital a success.

On Thursday, October 2nd, you informed the Presidents Meeting, that the choir wished to give a recital in London on

Thursday, 16th of October. You were asked by members of the Assembly whether you had made any tentative arrangements with regard hiring a Hall (several possible halls being mentioned), which produced a negative answer from you; wherefore the Assembly very rightly told you, that under the circumstances and in view of the shortness of time (barely a fortnight) it would be advisable to drop the matter. You ignored the opinion of the Assembly, and decided to go on with it; being put before a *fait accompli* the Presidents of some of the Societies very courteously agreed to circularise their members, this circular reached the respective members 4 to 5 days before the actual date of the recital. You now say, that over 1,000 members of the Colony were thus informed, and less than 5 per cent. turned up, blaming the Colony for "indifference". Surely you should have known, and you were told so, that a few days notice is quite insufficient time to give people a chance to attend.

You seem to be surprised, that the "Bernese editor of the S.O., of all people" took the opportunity of "sermonizing in public" your arrangements. I fail to follow your trend of mind, may I be allowed to point out to you, that *not one line* ever reached me from you, as to your intentions in connection with this choir. Do you not think that the "Swiss Observer" would have been obviously the most useful medium of bringing this visit to the knowledge of the Colony? I would have gladly and willingly helped you to make this recital a full success if only from sentimental reasons, as the boys came from my home town. I venture to remind you, Mr. President, at this stage, that in the past I have given your Society more space than any other Society in the Colony, and I have often gone out of my way, as you will perhaps admit, to be helpful to you, when communications reached me after the paper was partly on the printing press. I find your remarks, therefore, "particularly ungracious". I am unrepentant, and still maintain that the arrangements were insufficient, and hasty, and it is unfair to foster the blame on anybody else for the unsatisfactory attendance.

As to the "confusing habit of the S.O. being published occasionally only at three weeks interval", may I remind you, that it so happens that some of the month's in the calendar have five Fridays, and by leaving one out, it gives the editor a welcome opportunity of getting a little respite thus enabling him to spend an evening or two at his own fire-side. The date of each publication is always given a fortnight previous to its appearance. Perhaps it would not be unfair to mention here, that the Publishers of this paper had the "confusing habit" of publishing this paper regularly during the war, even when the Printing works were severely damaged owing to the "Blitz".

You call my other complaints "uncalled for", "widely exaggerated" and "in any case dating back several years", which is quite incorrect, all those mentioned have taken place within the last 1, 2 or 3 years.

You, Mr. President, accuse the Colony (or a large part of it) of "cultural indifference"; I consider this a very "uncalled for" attack on the members of the Colony. I highly value the cultural efforts of your Society, and I have on many occasions given you full credit for it, but in all humbleness I must remind you, that other Societies of the Colony have also catered for the "cultural education" of their members. For instance members of the City Swiss Club were given the opportunity to listen to lectures by such personalities (to mention only a few) as: Professor W. Rappard, Harold Nicholson, Vernon Bartlett, "Candidus" Dr. G. Kullmann, Sir Arnold Lunn, Sir A. Morgan, Lord Jowitt, Sir Harry Brittain, etc etc., surely you will agree, that all of them come up to the standard of your Society's excellent lecturers.

Furthermore both the Swiss Mercantile Society and the Swiss Economic Council have, on many occasions arranged lectures by eminent speakers.

I must, most strongly reject your unjust allegations therefore, that the Colony suffers from "cultural indifference", members of the Colony should be allowed to obtain their "culture" wherever they choose (even outside the Colony), and I think it is presumptuous that any one Society should claim the sole privilege of administering such culture.

In your closing lines you are gracious enough to refer to our old friendship, as well as to the services rendered by the *Swiss Observer* to your Society, services which were gladly given and will continue to be given also in the future.

Some very unkind things have been said, which would have better remained unsaid, it may have cleared the air or it may not, but whatever the result of our disagreement may be, I shall endeavour to work with you, as we have done so in the past, for the benefit of the Colony, each in his own way and own sphere.

I remain in friendship,

Yours,
A. STAUFFER, Editor "Swiss Observer".



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To The Editor,
Swiss Observer,
London.

Dear Mr. Stauffer,

In your report on the concert given by the " Berner Singbuben " you assert that the Nouvelle Société Helvétique have not only been unlucky with some of their arrangements, but that mishaps could have been avoided by better organisation. You also state that members would benefit from more careful preparation. As a member I cannot support this statement. Ever since I joined the N.S.H. several years ago I have attended every one of their Open Meetings and other functions except two. I was present at the meetings when " things went wrong ", but the mishaps you refer to were of such minor character that not once did they interfere with the success of the evening. Unlike other Swiss societies the N.S.H. have lecturers mostly over from Switzerland and it is therefore considerably more difficult to arrange fixtures and prepare the details of the programmes.

As regards the performance by the " Berner Singbuben " I think we can be but grateful to the N.S.H. for organising the concert at all. It is not their fault if the Colony — as is unhappily often the case — did not respond better.

With due respects to the several other societies of which I am a member I should like to say that there is no other Swiss Society in London which offers its members such a variety of cultural programmes as the N.S.H. Not only is the membership of 10/- extremely modest indeed, but with very few exceptions all their meetings are free to both members and friends. I feel

we have every justification in being grateful to their untiring President and Council and in particular to their hard-working and conscientious Secretary, Miss A. Gretener.

Yours sincerely, MARIANN.

(Mrs. W. Meier).

Mariann's gallant defense of the N.S.H. is very praiseworthy, but I am afraid it is not very helpful; in any case, she does not answer any of my questions. If she has been satisfied with the manner in which the functions have been conducted in the past all the better for her peace of mind; there are others who do not share her viewpoint.

I fully agree with her, that the work done by the N.S.H. deserves being acknowledged, and I have done so on many occasions, but I still maintain, that the arrangements made for the " Berner Singbuben " recital were inadequate and hasty. I have personally received many complaints, and it is, therefore not fair to blame the Colony for the small attendance.

May I assure Mariann, that I also belong to " several Societies ", and that I can humbly claim to have some experience of the Colony's affairs, a Colony in which I have been active over 35 years. I have always tried to make fair comment, and if I made use at times of the privilege of the Press, to criticize (not only the N.S.H.) I have done so in order to be helpful, and for no other reason.

Rather than give praise left and right, in order to gain cheap popularity, and to make this paper the organ of a " Mutual Admiration Society ", I would lay down my pen.

ST.

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