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EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

3, Chesterford Gardens,
N.W.3.

22.10.50.

To the Editor,

"Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I would have preferred to leave it confidently to your readers to form their judgment of the respective parts played by myself and Mr. Renou at Lausanne, as revealed by my report on the Journée des Suisses à l'étranger and Mr. Renou's letter. But the latter contains a number of misleading statements and insinuations which must not remain uncorrected.

Of course Prof. Inebnit was justified in feeling "that Dr. Egli had no right to speak on behalf of all the Swiss in Great Britain." Nor did I in any way claim this right, as Mr. Renou's wording insinuates. On every occasion I spoke I endeavoured to make it clear whose views I was presenting — now those of the Presidents' Assembly, now those of the London Group of the N.S.H., now and then even my very own.

The Assembly of Presidents of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain, to which Mr. Renou refers so contemptuously as "the 'instituted' Council of Presidents", whatever he may think the word 'instituted' to mean, was formed two years ago with the Minister's warm approval for the express purpose of co-ordinating the activities in the Colony and generally furthering its interests. Clearly the proposed revision of the law governing Swiss citizenship touches directly the interests of every one of us and the Colony at large. The Presidents' Assembly had therefore not only the right but the duty to examine the draft of the revision with a view to arrive at a comprehensive judgment on it for submission to the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger and the Journée as requested.

The President's Assembly is the only institute in our Colony — whether Mr. Renou thinks it can be recognised as such or not — capable of formulating fairly representative views of the Colony as a whole, simply because the presidents of the various societies and the three pastors forming it are presumably best qualified to reflect the attitude of the organisations and members they represent. Yet it has never claimed to speak on behalf of all the Swiss in this country of whom all too many still remain outside the organisations of our Colony. Nor have its delegates, as Mr. Renou insinuates. In fact it had no delegate of its own at Lausanne. However, I was enabled to represent its composite views on the bill for the revision of the law of Swiss Citizenship based on the decisions reached at the last meeting of the Presidents' Assembly, which had also been communicated by letter to the Secrétariat at Berne.

I fully agree with Mr. Renou that an hour is scarcely enough time to discuss such weighty questions adequately. But some at least of the presidents, if not Mr. Renou, had previously taken the trouble to discuss the draft bill with their own societies. It was open to anyone to express his views fully at the presidents' meeting and, if necessary, demand more time or another meeting for discussion. Our compatriots in France, who have also formed "an 'instituted' Council of Presidents", met for three days at Bordeaux. But contrary to Mr. Renou's assertion,

they devoted most of the time to other questions. If Mr. Renou regards their example so highly, perhaps he may feel inclined to follow it in future by co-operating more wholeheartedly in the work of our own Presidents' Assembly!

If Mr. Renou has gained "the impression here that the N.S.H. are the obvious representatives of the Colony" at the Journées, it is for no other reason than that the N.S.H. has concerned itself with the questions of the Swiss abroad and attended those meetings in Switzerland more constantly and conscientiously than most other societies in our Colony. But the N.S.H. has never sought to give that impression or claimed any superior status. On the contrary. Mr. Renou knows as well as anyone that we have urged other societies year after year to take an active interest in the "Auslandschweizerwerk" and its Journées, and to send as many representatives of their own as they could. Why does Mr. Renou try to create a contrary impression in the name of "all fairness"? It is a matter of the greatest regret to us that the participation from our Colony remains so limited.

I am delighted to gather from Mr. Renou's letter that he is sufficiently aware of the bad impression created by his belittling of our old joint advocacy of some token voting right for the Swiss abroad when on visit in the homeland — to attempt to explain at least, though not to apologise for, this strange vagary of his unsteady mind, which might justly be classed, in Mr. Bevin's famous words, as "a stab in the back." The



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explanations he offers are of the flimsiest. He sought the advice "of several members of the Swiss Parliament" — and propounds the conclusion that "our parliamentarians are not very much in favour" of the idea. Why does he further dampen their interest? Why does he deliberately try to alienate their sympathies for our proposal which they have clearly demonstrated by the request of both chambers to the Federal Council to study the question and, if found suitable, to prepare recommendations to Parliament?!

Mr. Renou also "thought it better to consider the feeling of the majority of the delegates at Lausanne . . . rather than to impose one's own and sometimes isolated opinion." Such self-effacing modesty is most unusual for Mr. Renou and completely inappropriate for a delegate nominated by two societies in England to represent their views — the City Swiss Club as well as his Confrérie Vaudoise.

But the richest plum in this array of exculpating phrases comes at the very end of Mr. Renou's letter, where he expresses his conviction that "better co-operation . . . would lead to great results" — if only "an outstanding personality" could be found in our Colony "to act as a leader!" Since when is the lack of a leader a reason or an excuse for non-co-operation among us Swiss? Does not Mr. Renou share our traditional abhorrence of the "Führerprinzip"? Do we no longer all of us prefer to be guided by our conscience and sense of loyalty?

Yours sincerely,

H. W. EGLI,
President, N.S.H. London Group.

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53, Priory Road,
Hampstead, London, N.W.6.
21st October, 1950.

To the Editor,

"Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I do not wish to join in the debate of problems discussed by the "Journée des Suisses à l'Etranger" recently held at Lausanne, but may I state a few facts about what your correspondent, Mr. Alfred Renou, calls "the 'instituted' Council of Presidents."

The Assembly of Presidents of the Swiss Societies (to give it its correct name) was formed just about two years ago by general consent and a very simple set of rules was unanimously adopted. Its purpose is "to co-ordinate, further and safeguard the interests of the Swiss Colony." Although the presidents (or their deputies) of the Swiss Societies in the Provinces or in Scotland have, for practical reasons, only found it possible to attend the meetings of the Presidents' Assembly on exceptional occasions there can be little doubt that here is an honest attempt — and as far as I am aware the only one in existence to-day — to discuss problems of general interest to the Swiss in the British Isles. Those presidents of Swiss Societies who take their task seriously do discuss such problems with their members before and after the meetings of the Presidents' Assembly. Surely, therefore, the Presidents' Assembly affords the best opportunity available to-day of obtaining a general consensus of opinion. If this does not correspond with some individual views, there are no grounds to challenge the functioning of the Presidents Assembly.

I fully agree that it would be highly desirable to study and discuss such important subjects as were before the "Journée" at greater length than is possible at any of the meetings of the Presidents' Assembly, but really practicable alternatives have so far been lacking.

Finally, it seems rather odd that Mr. Renou should endeavour to convince your readers of the comparative unimportance of the N.S.H., when the greatest single organisation looking after the interests of the Swiss abroad is the "Auslandschweizerwerk der N.H.G." in Berne and its monthly journal "ECHO" is the outstanding link between compatriots in all parts of the Globe and their country of origin.

Yours faithfully,

W. MEIER,
President, Swiss Mercantile Society.

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