

# Letters from Switzerland

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## Guns for the asking?

On 7th April this year the Federal German Attorney-General was shot dead by terrorists in Karlsruhe and on 5th September four Security Guards were shot dead in Köln when Hans Martin Schleyer was kidnapped and subsequently murdered. In both cases it has been established beyond doubt that the weapons used to perpetrate these crimes had been bought — over the counter and without certificates, formalities or difficulties — in *Switzerland*.

It is a known fact that quite a number of submachine guns and rounds of ammunition have disappeared from arsenals of the Swiss army — if the German Newsmagazine *Spiegel* is correctly informed, the number of "lost" submachine guns runs into 500 or more. No wonder that Police — and Justice Minister Furgler has exclaimed "This self-service shop for weapons called Switzerland has to be shut, and quickly."

As a first step the Military Department has decided that all the Army's weapons and munitions deposits will have to be much better guarded and that some of the Confederation's stores (estimated value, Sw.Fr. 3,300,000,000!) are to be moved to different hiding places. This may help to a certain extent — but as long as it is possible to walk into a shop — as was the case recently in

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BY GOTTFRIED KELLER

Zürich — and to buy guns, rifles and submachine guns plus ammunition over the counter, potential terrorists can still get what they need for their dreadful deeds, without let or hindrance in Switzerland.

And a Federal Weapons-law seems to be a long way away, because no provision for such a measure exists in the Federal Constitution. This is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs.

## Ripples as Ministers retire

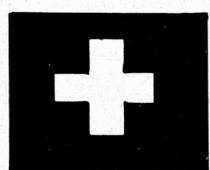
On Thursday, 29th September, two members of the Swiss Government confirmed rumours that they will be retiring at the end of the year. They are Messrs. Pierre *Graber*, 69, Foreign Affairs Minister and Ernst *Brugger*, 64, Head of the Department of Public Economy. The elections of their successors will be held on 7th December, the two chambers of the Federal Parliament — meeting in combined session — being the electoral body.

The announcement of the impending retirement of the two

magistrates has been made early in order to give the Social Democratic Party (Graber) and the Liberal Democrats (Brugger) the opportunity to clarify the position concerning candidates in good time. For it can naturally be taken for granted that both these political parties will want to be represented by the same number of men as hitherto in the re-constituted Federal Council of 1978. The elections will be held according to the traditional formula of 2:2:2:1, which stands for two Social Democrats, two Liberal Democrats, two members of the Christian Peoples Party plus one representing the Swiss Peoples Party.

Both retiring Federal Councillors will have been in office during eight years. Both have rendered great services to the Confederation. The reasons for their retirement are in both cases non-political and as far as Mr. Brugger is concerned it is an open secret that his doctors have insisted on a quieter and less strenuous life. As regards Mr. Graber, he will be remembered by his efforts to strengthen Switzerland's contacts abroad, his endeavours in favour of developing countries, his initiation of a very active travelling diplomacy and not least his contributions to the Helsinki and Belgrade Conferences for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Three cantons — Zürich, Berne and



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Vaud — have by tradition the right to send a representative into the Federal Council. As Mr. Brugger is a Zürichoï and a Liberal Democrat his successor will almost certainly be yet another liberal-democratic Zürichoï. Mr. Graber, on the other hand, has been representing the Romandie — he is a citizen of La Chaux-de-Fonds — and his successor will consequently be hailing either from the Romandie again or from the Ticino. Even though some 50 names of possible new members of the Federal Council are at present bandied about — amongst them at least one lady — both the 2:2:2:1 formula and the regional traditions narrow the choice down very considerably.

Once the new Federal Council is constituted early in 1978, the seven wise men meet in order to distribute the Departments (Ministries) amongst themselves. It is already expected that a so-called Rochade will take place. It is well known for example that Mr. Furgler's ambition has long been to be in charge of foreign affairs and to play an international part. Mr. Chevallaz in turn has not been very successful as Minister of Finances and might well be replaced by the very popular Mr. Ritschard. Mr. Brugger's impending departure is, generally speaking, much deplored, even if the compelling reasons for it are understood. And one of the biggest Zürich dailies, the *Tages Anzeiger* quite openly expresses regret that Mr. Gnägi, the Head of the Military Department, has not taken this opportunity to announce his resignation at the same time.

The media reaction to the news about the impending resignation of two Federal Councillors has, on the whole, been one of very high praise in the case of Mr. Brugger and of somewhat more modified commendation of Mr. Graber. The latter's oratorical brilliance, but also a certain intellectual arrogance, which in the early stages of his governmental career made him a treat some young parliamentarians cruelly, harshly, have been recalled in most newspapers.

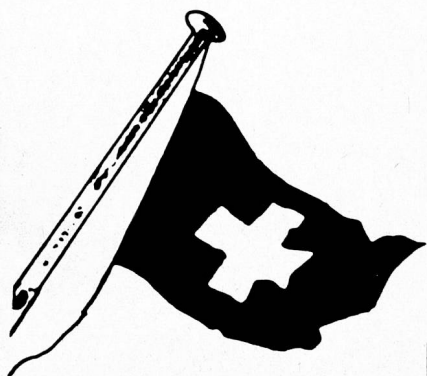
While Ernst Brugger's departure from Berne has been commented on with great and genuine regret, the announcement of Pierre Graber's retirement has been accepted in a far more matter-of-fact spirit. It had, it is an open secret, been widely hoped and expected, particularly in the Grisons and in the Romandie, that Mr. Gnaegi, who has now been in office during 12 years, would take this opportunity and make way for the Grisonais Councillor of States and Federal Price Watcher Schlumpf to take his place. Some very heavy hints have been dropped in more than a dozen newspapers to the effect that "12 years is a long time" and "this would be a good moment to retire gracefully." But all this pressure has been to no avail. With enormous steadfast Gnaegi has let it be known that he has been elected for a term ending with the year 1979 and that he intends to sit it out. And since under the Swiss Constitution nobody can ask for a Government member's resignation — as a British Prime Minister can — there is nothing that can be done about it. Mr. Gnaegi stays put.

## "Orange Blossom Punch" at the Portman

Mr. Michel Favre, General Manager of the Portman Inter-Continental, was host to well over 300 guests at the re-opening of the Portman Ballroom. Those who know the Portman's *Rôtisserie Romande* and the *Captain's Galley* expected only the finest food. But I think even they had to admit that food and drink were superb. The atmosphere was friendly, and Mr. and Mrs. Favre's welcome was warm and personal. The ballroom with its new *décor* in beige and brown provided a perfect venue for the reception. Delicious food, traditional and of *la cuisine nouvelle*, both hot and cold, was served on two specially erected canopy-crowned buffets, and excellent wines, champagne and a newly created "orange blossom punch" were available.

Mr. Favre gave a short speech and introduced some of his collaborators, notably his Swiss chef, Mr. Felix Muntwyler, who is carrying on one of the finest traditions of Swiss catering in the centre of London.

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