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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by **Gottfried Keller**

Do our Federal Councillors travel abroad too often? This is a question which has not only been raised in Parliament, but is also at present widely discussed in the mass media. Not so very long ago the tradition was that Federal Councillors did not go abroad while they were in office. Now the pendulum seems to have swung in the opposite direction to a nearly alarming extent. Thus Federal Councillor Gnägi was recently in Sweden his colleague Honegger in Bonn, Foreign Minister Aubert in Vienna. And in July the latter intended to go to Italy and later to Federal Germany and Hungary.

While it is an undisputed fact that officials contacts on the highest governmental level can be beneficial to the country as such, it is nevertheless true that one particular member of the Government seems to have overdone things somewhat of late. Thus the Chief of the Justice and Police Department, Furgler, went — privately, it has been stated — to the USA in April. That, of course, was his undisputed right.

But then he attended the so-called Bilderberg-Conference in Princeton — an only slightly camouflaged NATO outfit —

then went to see UNO Secretary-General Waldheim, as well as US Vice-President Walter Mondale and asked to be received by President Carter.

This latter venture, however, did not come off, as Mr. Carter was too busy. Mr. Furgler's excursion into the field of foreign affairs, which would really have been Mr. Aubert's business, if anybody's, then became the subject of a parliamentary intervention. It is a fact that Federal Councillor Furgler has a talent to rub some parliamentarians up the wrong way. People who indulge in too much self-glorification and who seek too much publicity are, as everybody knows, not very popular in Switzerland.

There are no laws in existence concerning journeys abroad of Federal Councillors. But there are some rules, nevertheless, and one of them states that any member of the Federal Government who plans an official or unofficial trip abroad should inform his colleagues beforehand. A discussion on the purpose of the journey may then take place and after the journey the "Traveller in Foreign Policy" is asked to draw up a report about the results achieved. The

new Swiss Foreign Minister, Pierre Aubert, has recently proclaimed a "Dynamisation of the policy of neutrality" to be one of his aims. What he means by this formula he has explained in an interview in the somewhat sensation-mongering German magazine "Spiegel".

This, in turn, has not been "bien vu" everywhere. Declarations of such importance should, it is felt, be made either in the Federal Parliament in Berne, or at least inside the country. Nor should it be forgotten, that the more our Federal Councillors travel, the more they devalue the costly apparatus of professional diplomacy.

FACT '79

Organised in cooperation with the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, the Battelle Institute in Geneva and the Swiss Association for Solar Energy, and backed by the Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects, Fact 79, an international congress of architecture and townplanning, will be held in Lausanne (Switzerland) from 25th to 29th January 1979.

It will be of interest not only to architects, townplanners, engineers, sociologists, managers and administrators but also to consumer groups.

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Solution will appear in our next issue.