

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

In one of my recently published reminiscences about wartime happenings in London I mentioned Brendan Bracken in his capacity as Minister of Information in Winston Churchill's Cabinet. He was, in my opinion, the only one amongst the several Ministers of Information who knew what his job was about and who had a clear conception of his role as counterpart to Nazi-Germany's Chief propagandist Dr. Goebbels.

When World War II broke out the first man to run the newly created Ministry of Information was a Scottish Judge, named Macmillan, who lasted about four months. He was followed by Mr. Duff Cooper who was later to become a successful Ambassador in Paris. As Minister of Information however, this conservative politician and author was a total failure: he so grossly misjudged the situation that he thought the morale of the British population needed raising under the constant German bombing.

To do this he felt it was best to read poetry over the radio, which made him the laughing stock everywhere. He did not last long either, and was succeeded by the towering John — later Lord — Reith of BBC fame.

He was a failure too and it was an open secret that Churchill used to speak of him as "that Wuthering Height". On his assuming office he gave a reception for the British and Foreign Press and when I was introduced to him as representing the Swiss News Agency he said: "Ah, yes, Switzerland — I always thought Stockholm is a lovely city!"

Finally the red-headed Brendan Bracken took over. It was known that he was part of the most intimate entourage of Churchill's and some people pretended to know that he was the Prime Minister's illegitimate child. According to another version Bracken had come to Britain from Australia in his early youth. He had, so it was said, one day appeared at the well known Public School of Sedbergh near the Scottish border. There he demanded to see the Headmaster, pulled wads of hundred pound notes from his pocket and said: "I wish to be educated here".

Bracken — he was M.P. for Paddington North — was very accessible and extremely helpful to the Press, both British and foreign. He started a system of background news conferences, in the course of which he sometimes gave us highly confidential information.

He could, of course, afford to do this, knowing full well that Admiral George Thomson's Censorship Division would successfully stop any attempt at getting such information out of the country. Thus Bracken told us months in advance that the enemy had a new weapon which might soon start des-

cending on Britain: namely the "Flying Bomb", or "Pilotless Aircraft".

These background conferences had come about at the suggestion of the Foreign Press Association. As its President I had been asked by my Committee to invite the Minister of Information to a tête-à-tête luncheon at the Dorchester Hotel and to put the idea to him. The committee had graciously decided that the two lunches and one bottle of wine were to be paid for out of FPA funds.

The wartime food regulations were so strict that one was restricted to three courses and if one wanted a roll or some bread, this counted as a course. Bracken, on arrival, immediately said that he had

a cold and a splitting headache and the best remedy for him was a good white wine. To my horror the one bottle for which the Committee had given me credit was empty before the first scrap of food appeared on the table. Of course I ordered a second one, for which I paid out of my own pocket, but without ever telling the Hon. Treasurer of the FPA about it. Bracken lasted the war out and was later sent to the House of Lords, having acquired a majority of the shares of the "Financial Times".

He was, all in all, a great character, a very helpful man and, as far as I am concerned, responsible for the fact that the Foreign Press Association in London still owes me the price of a bottle of white wine.

INDEX OF PRICES IN SWITZERLAND AT THE END OF APRIL 1978

| | Wholesale price 1963 = 100 | Difference in relation to | Retail price Sept. 1977 = 100 (Sept. 1966 = 100) | Difference in relation to |
|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| End of April 1978 | 143.8 | | 100.7 (169.8) | |
| End of March 1978 | 144.0 | -0.1% | 100.5 (169.5) | +0.2% |
| End of April 1977 | 149.4 | -3.7% | (167.4) | +1.4% |
| Evolution of the prices of | ... raw materials, semi-manufactured products and consumer goods. | | ... main consumer goods and services included in the family budgets of wage-earners. | |

THE SWISS FOREIGN TRADE IN APRIL 1978

| Period | Switzerland's Balance of Trade | | | Value of exports as a % of the value of imports |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------|---------|--|
| | Imports | Exports | Balance | |
| | (in million S.Fr.) | | | |
| 1977 April | 3,461.6 | 3,288.6 | 173.0 | 95.0 |
| 1978 March | 3,855.5 | 3,536.6 | 318.9 | 91.7 |
| 1978 April | 3,572.2 | 3,453.5 | 118.7 | 96.7 |
| 1977 Jan.-April | 13,916.9 | 13,315.8 | 601.1 | 95.7 |
| 1978 Jan.-April | 14,094.8 | 13,481.5 | 613.3 | 95.6 |

FORTHCOMING TRADE FAIRS

| | |
|---|--|
| 3 - 4 September - Zürich: International Shoe Sample Exhibition (<i>Verband Schweizer Schuhindustrieller, Postfach CH-8042 Zürich</i>) | SEMICON EUROPA 78 - Specialised Trade Fair on Semi-Conductors (<i>Züspa, Thurgauerstrasse 7, CH-8050 Zürich</i>) |
| 3 - 5 September - Basle: INTERFEREX 78 - 10th International Trade Fair for Hardware, Tools and Household Goods (<i>Sekretariat INTERFEREX, Postfach, CH-4021 Basel</i>) | 12 - 14 September - Basle: SURFACE 78 - 5th International Exhibition for Surface Treatment (<i>Sekretariat SURFACE, Postfach, CH-4021 Basel</i>) |
| 3 - 5 September - Bern: SPISO - Exhibition of Toys, Souvenirs, Exclusive and Summer Articles (<i>Genossenschaft SPISO, Monbijoustrasse 14, CH-3011 Bern</i>) | 12 - 16 September - Basle: ILMAC 78 - 7th International Exhibition of Laboratory, Chemical Engineering, Measurement and Automation Techniques in Chemistry (<i>Sekretariat ILMAC, Postfach, CH-4021 Basel</i>) |
| 9 - 24 September - Lausanne: COMPTOIR SUISSE - National Fair (<i>Comptoir suisse, Palais de Beaulieu, Case postale 2560, CH-1002 Lausanne</i>) | 25 - 30 September - Bern: SAMA INTERNATIONAL 78 - International Exhibition for Automated Production (<i>SAMA, Postfach 1052, CH-2501 Biel</i>) |
| 12 - 14 September - Zürich: | |