

Letter from Switzerland

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Better the devil one knows . . .

THE Swiss Secret — or as it is officially called — Information Service has been in and out of the news ever since the Schilling Affair and since Federal Councillor Chevallaz, as head of the Military Department, had to admit that part of the Service has, until recently, been financed from “private sources”.

It has not been officially divulged who the owners of these “private sources” are, but the general guesswork pointed to certain large banking concerns.

As to the Affair Schilling, which is really an Affair Bachmann, it may be recalled that several months ago a Swiss spy (Schilling) was apprehended while clumsily observing military manoeuvres of the Austrian army. He was promptly arrested and put on trial.

During the interrogations he naively told the Austrian authorities that he had been sent to Austria by his military superior, Colonel Bachmann, and that his orders were to find out certain secrets about the Austrian army.

This ridiculous escapade was, of course, highly embarrassing for the Federal Council as a whole and brought the Swiss Information Service negatively into the news, both nationally and internationally. Colonel

Bachmann was at once given indefinite leave and a group of parliamentarians is at present investigating the whole affair.

In most countries not even the names of the chiefs of the Secret Services are publicly known. In Switzerland, however, a certain amount — for obvious reasons a limited amount — of information about this branch of the Federal Administration can be obtained from the official States Calendar.

According to this document a group, Information Service and Counter Espionage, is attached to the Swiss Army's General Staff. Its head is listed as Colonel of Division Richard Ochsner.

This group is sub-divided into two sections: The Information Service proper, headed by Brigadier Mario Petitpierre, and the Counter Espionage Section, headed by Colonel André Zumstein, who is also Commander of the Federal Police.

Additionally there exists a section Special Services — hitherto commanded by Colonel Bachmann — which prepares,

in advance, resistance in case the country should ever be occupied.

In addition to all this a certain somewhat dubious further organisation has been in existence up to the end of last year which, however, according to official information, “is now over-ripe for liquidation”.

That Switzerland needs an efficient Counter Espionage Service is partly due to her geographical position, partly to her neutrality and partly also to the fact that she plays host to innumerable international organisations, most of them with extraterritorial rights.

Between 1948 and the sad Jeanmaire Affair, Switzerland had to deal with no fewer than 188 cases of espionage. All in all 315 persons were involved in these cases — among them 112 Swiss citizens and 98 foreign “diplomats” and functionaries.

Switzerland shares with the USA the dubious distinction of being the seat of two Soviet residencies — one in Berne and one in Geneva. It is from these

two towns that the Soviet secret services steer their activities against NATO, against Federal Germany, France, Great Britain and possibly other countries. Some of these activities are also directed against Switzerland herself.

In 1970 the USSR maintained 300 diplomats and functionaries in Switzerland, a figure which today has risen to 650. Together with their wives and children, plus “servants”, the Soviet colony in Switzerland today numbers 1,450 persons. Thus within 10 years the number of Soviet citizens inside Switzerland has risen by 120 per cent!

Another 130 “diplomats” from other eastern bloc states are to be added to this fantastic total of potential spies and agents. It is known that these gentlemen call their Soviet colleagues from KGB and GRU “Uncle”.

The following Soviet enterprises also have seats in Switzerland: Sovchart in Geneva, for chartering ships; Sovoil in Zürich, importing and exporting oil; the Soviet Chamber of Commerce in Zürich; the News Agency TASS with offices in Berne and Zürich; Aeroflot with offices in Zürich and Geneva; Izvestia, the newspaper, moreover the press agency Novosti with offices in Berne and Geneva; furthermore the Wozchod Bank in Zürich, which is totally in the hands of the State, and several more.

Why, one may ask, do the Swiss authorities not simply expel all those Soviet citizens who in their eyes are known spies and agents?

Apparently one of the rules of counter espionage is that it is often more important to know and control one's adversaries. Were they expelled from the country, they would no doubt soon be replaced by fresh, unknown ones.

Gottfried Keller

Out-of-pocket expenses . . .

PHILISTINISM and narrow-mindedness are responsible for an almost unbelievable affair which Berne is apparently trying to settle quietly and “out of court”, as it were.

The Queen's visit last spring turns out to have cost 20,000 francs (£5,000 more than budgeted. Her Majesty's state visit — only one per year is programmed, for economy reasons — was originally only planned to last for two days, but the two days in the course of planning became four. (And, as far as can be judged, very successful they were).

When, however, recently the final accounts were made and the excess of 20,000 francs was established, a very embarrassed

Federal Council seems to have decided to keep this a tight secret. Unsuccessfully, of course.

They feared that there would be another public hullabaloo similar to the one in connection with what is called the Federal Council's “school journey”. Once a year the seven magistrates take a trip to the region from which the year's Federal President comes, this year Mr Chevallaz' Canton de Vaud.

There they could not resist the temptation to have a meal in one of Switzerland's smartest restaurants, which, if I am not mistaken, boasts two Michelin stars. The bill, of course, amounted to considerably more than the 60 francs per head per-

mitted by regulation.

In order not to be reproached publicly with luscious dining and wining at the taxpayers' expense, the seven Wise Men then decided to settle the difference out of their own pockets.

And this, according to the Weltwoche, to which I am indebted for this charming story, is what they will do now with the 20,000 francs excess spending on the Queen's visit.

Next year's state visitor will be Italy's President Sandro Pertini. Will there be, asks the Weltwoche sarcastically, a public collection in front of the Federal Palace to finance it?

Where, one might well ask, does barmyness start and where does it stop?