

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

By Gottfried Keller

It is sometimes said that Switzerland remunerates its highest Magistrates, the seven Federal Councillors, poorly. This is a complete fallacy, even though it is true that in certain other professions even higher annual incomes are obtained. The annual salary of a Federal Councillor is at present fixed at Sw. Fr. 220,543 per annum or Sw. Fr. 18,378 per month, payable quarterly. On top of this all Federal Councillors enjoy considerable fringe benefits. To begin with, they are all exempted from military service and have the right, when elected, to return their military equipment to the Confederation, without, of course, having to pay military tax. The Federal Railways and all other public transport institutions — postal cars; ships, tramways, funiculaires — offer them free season tickets. The PTT does not send any accounts to Federal Councillors for either their use of the telephone or their television and radio licences. Over and above this they and their families do not have to stamp their letters, and these privileges are extended not only to their homes in Berne, but also to any secondary or holiday home they may possess anywhere else inside the country. Most newspapers and periodicals are sent to them free of charge and if they want to go to the capital's theatre or to any cinema in Berne a special box is always at their disposal. The same applies to the sports stadiums in and around Berne and if a member of the Federal Council should wish to go to a part of Switzerland which is not easily accessible otherwise, he can call on the Federal Air Traffic Office which will provide a helicopter for him. Federal Councillors who travel abroad, which they do both in their official and private capacities, are given free journeys by Swissair, and if they have to — or want — to give luncheon-dinner — or garden parties, the "Lohn" in Kehrsatz outside Berne, the Confederation's guest house, stands at their disposal. Both their official and their private cars are run on "Federal petrol" on which no tax is levied and if repairs become necessary to their private vehicles, mechanics of the Army's motor vehicle pool will carry them out. It is furthermore said that if a Federal Councillor appears in a hotel or restaurant he is such good publicity value for this enterprise that the

account has a habit of disappearing in a drawer, bearing a stamp "settled". Federal Councillors receive diplomatic passports, but are prevented from accepting pensions, decorations, titles or presents while in office. On the other hand their job is a very secure one, since neither parliament nor the people nor anybody else can depose or force them to leave office. The only possibility to "get rid" of a Federal Councillor is not to re-elect him when the time for re-election comes after a four year term. All in all, even though it is said that our Federal Councillors are terribly overworked, the job nevertheless seems to have its very attractive sides.

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