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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

BY GOTTFRIED KELLER

After months of speculation as to whether Federal Councillor Rudolf Gnaegi will retire at the end of the year, it is now definite that he will.

Mr. Gnaegi has been in office as a member of the Federal Executive during nearly 14 years. During the first two years he headed the Department for Traffic, Energy and the PTT and thereafter he served as Chief of the Military Department. In this latter capacity he has been — and will be up to the end of the year — the political head of the Swiss Army and it has twice been his lot to preside over the Confederation. Official tributes will be paid to him in December, but already now the mass media has reviewed his 12 years as "Minister of Defence".

Mr. Gnaegi, a sturdy Bernese from peasant stock, with a rasping deep voice, has had successes and failures in his magisterial career and if one believes what one can read in the papers, his relations with the highest army commanders have not

always been the happiest. With his impending retirement — after lately having been shot at from many sides — the question of who might possibly succeed him has already arisen and speculation is already rife. It goes without saying that the political party to which Gnaegi belongs, the Schweizerische Volkspartei, (Swiss People's Party) wishes to remain a member party of the governmental coalition and it is most likely that the other member parties of the coalition will not dispute this claim. Thus the names of three prominent politicians of this party are, at present, bandied about. The top favourite amongst them is the former "Price Watcher", Councillor of States Leon Schlumpf, who hails from — and represents in the Council of States — the Grisons. But this very fact that he hails from a Canton other than Berne might yet, in spite of his undoubted personal popularity, prove to be a snag. Because tradition wants it that one Federal Councillor should come

from Zurich, one from Berne and one from the Canton de Vaud, these three being the largest cantons (or states) inside the Confederation. But tradition is not law and if present-day indications mean anything, it is most likely that "Ex-Mr. Price", as he is often called, may finally make the running.

Nothing is officially known about other possible intended resignations at the end of the year, but there are rumours afloat that one or two other members of the seven-man Federal Executive are not in the best of health. However, officially, there will only be one vacancy in the Federal Council to be filled when the two chambers of the Federal Parliament meet in combined session on 5th December.

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