

The Jura problem [continued and end]

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **33 (1970)**

Heft [3]

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942206>

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THE JURA PROBLEM

[CONTINUED]

NO COMMON UNDERSTANDING

The great majority of the Swiss frown on the Separatists' demand, and find their intransigent attitude regarding the Federal Commission's proposals specially distasteful. They believe that their behaviour has been, in the main, contrary to the spirit of tolerance that has guided the Confederation since its creation. Their action not only disrupts the country's political harmony, but mars its reputation in the eyes of the world.

The Separatists say the four wise men are partial judges of their predicament. This is not unfounded and the Commission's critical attitude towards the Rassemblement and its methods transpires in its report, a fact which can be excused a long way because both the Rassemblement's representatives and those of the "Group Belier" (a militant organisation) have refused to help the Commission in any way in its fact-finding efforts. But even if the Separatists get a "confederal" commission to study their case, they will find no more objectivity. The majority of the Swiss plainly look askance at their struggle.

The Rassemblement has a few excellent polemicists, among whom Roger Schaffter, its vice-president, whose pamphlet called "20 years of struggle" is written with ardent Jurassian fervour, forcing the reader to realise that, to some people at least, the Jura's present situation is resented deeply and that the occasional Jurassian outbursts have deeper motivations than a transient grudge against Berne. The problem of finding out how deeply pro-"free Jura" sentiments are really rooted, of sizing the degree of sincerity in the Separatists' brashness and weighing the heckling element can only be solved by one who has lived in the Jura for a very long time. According to a member of our "Club des Jeunes", Jurassian autonomy is a deeply felt issue. He comes from Moutier and tells me that in 1961, after three large farms had been burnt down in the vicinity, the atmosphere reigning in his town (populated by both Separatists and anti-Separatists) was unbearably tense. People were living in constant fear of seeing the next-to-one building, which belonged either to a well known Separatist or Jurassian Patriot, blown up. Nobody dared speak out over the Jurassian issue in any way, and squadrons of "Groupe Belier" and "Jeunesses Civiques" youths, headed by armed lieutenants from the army, were patrolling the countryside. The situation was for a while a good foretaste of what has been happening in every township of Ulster during recent months.

THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS

The Commission, viewing the Rassemblement's behaviour objectively and not attempting to penetrate the **feelings** of its members in any way says the following in its report:

"The leaders and spokesmen of the Rassemblement compare the Jurassian people to the oppressed people who have fought, or are fighting, for their independence. Thus Algeria, a former colony that has had to win its independence through a long war, and Czechoslovakia, whose wishes of independence have been repressed by the occupation of her soil by a foreign army, are cited as comparisons. In a letter addressed to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on September 25th, 1968, by the Women's Association for the Defence of the Jura, mention is even made of Biafra. As though there were any common measure between these countries and the Jura, whose political freedom today solely depends on the will of Jurassians.

As regards the methods employed by the Rassemblement, the aim is:

1. In the Jura, to create an atmosphere of tension and exaltation or even occasionally of civil war by provocations, pressures on the inhabitants and recourse to an appropriate terminology that dramatises the situation in warping reality. Inlying troop pickets are qualified as military occupations. Those Jurassians who do not share the Rassemblement's views are considered as traitors and the lackeys of the oppressor. The Bernese, he is an enemy with whom no negotiation is possible, etc. Youth has been organised and conditioned through the creation of the "Groupe Belier" which puts its "receptive credulity" to use in political action. Young people are encouraged to commit offences or inconsiderate actions in the name of their most generous qualities: the love of the motherland, disinterest, the desire to devote oneself to a cause and even to sacrifice everything to it. The excesses that they are thus brought to commit are hailed as patriotic exploits and acts of courage. There reigns today in the Jura, according to evidence given to the Commission by Jurassians of all tendencies, an atmosphere of insecurity and fear. In some regions, people no longer feel free to be frank. The term of terror has even been used;

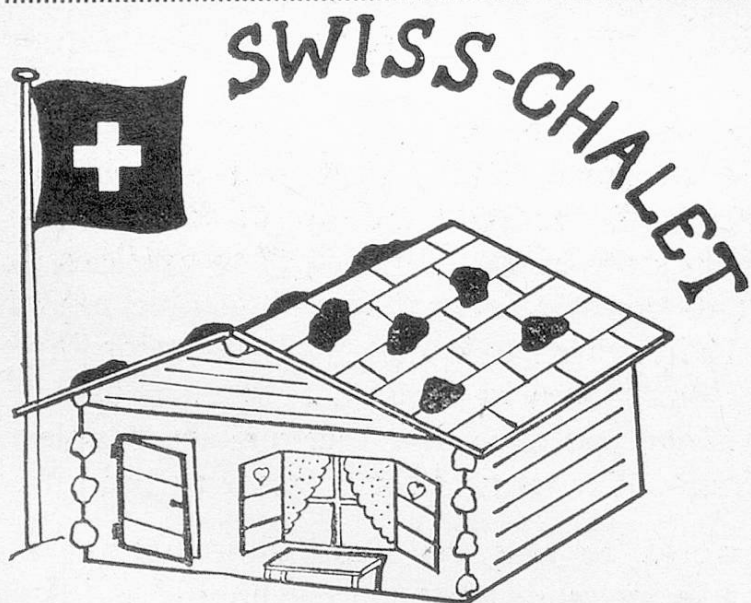
2. In the outside world, to give the impression that there is within Switzerland an oppressed people to whom freedom is refused. Berne is not alone to be blamed, but Switzerland and her institutions fall under denigration. The language used is the following: ". . . the Fatherland, that which constitutes our carnal and native land, is the Jura and nothing else. As for our spiritual fatherland . . . it is France and her civilisation. Switzerland is not a fatherland . . . it's a federation, a co-operative society . . .

It is therefore quite in vain for you to appeal to our patriotism".
(Le Jura libre, 8th January 1969).

Attempts are made at arousing French-speaking Switzerland against the German part, in an effort to extend to the federal level the antagonism reigning between a part of the Jura and Berne. Worse, the Rassemblement has not shrunk from discrediting Switzerland abroad and has sought to internationalise the Jurassian question in attracting foreign attention on to it. This behaviour, together with the refusal of engaging in discussions with non-approved interlocutors is one of the major obstacles to the start of negotiations of the Jurassian question. The Commission believes that these facts could not be left unmentioned. This is not an appreciation but the plain acknowledgment of precise facts.

So much for the Rassemblement. The Commission's report also presents the Bernese point of view:

"In the old Canton, there is a tendency at underestimating the importance which the Jurassian problem has, not only for the Canton of Berne, but for the whole Confederation. The general feeling is that the Jura has benefitted from ample good will and generosity, embodied more particularly in the constitutional disposition that recognises the existence of a Jurassian people, distinct from that of the old Canton. This generosity and this comprehension have not been paid back in return. On the contrary, the feeling is that every new concession and every pacifying step are considered and exploited by the Rassemblement



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as an avowal of weakness on the part of Berne. There is a growing lassitude at being treated in an often arrogant and injurious manner, not in the least designed to inspire conciliatory dispositions . . . However, understandable as the feelings of the Bernese in the old Canton may be, they must not forget that it has its share of responsibility in the present situation, and that although the constitutional revision of 1950 has been a positive gesture towards the Jura, renewed incidents and errors more psychological than material have given the Rassemblement Jurassien motives and pretexts for continuing and hardening their anti-Bernese campaign”.

FUTURE PROCEDURE

What next? In this plainly negative climate, the Commission believes that it would be harmful to organise a plebiscite where Jurassian voters would be confronted with the bare choice of “status-quo or separation”. To present such antagonistic issues to the choice of Jurassians would only awaken old rancours. It is therefore far wiser to proceed towards autonomy in smaller steps. The Commission then proposes the following:

Before being bluntly asked whether they want to remain in Berne or get out, the Jurassians will be asked to vote on a clearly defined autonomy statute within the Canton of Bern. As other Bernese citizens are equally concerned, this will be a cantonal vote. If both the old canton and the Jura agree to this autonomy statute, it will be enacted. Only then would the question of a separation of the Jura from Berne be submitted to Jurassian voters, who would have to choose between the freshly voted autonomy statute and the formation of a new canton. If the statute of autonomy is rejected by the old Canton and accepted by the Jura or vice versa, it would then be abandoned and would place Jurassians before the status-quo and separation alternative. Should the six French-speaking districts be in disagreement in this plebiscite and the overall balance of votes incline against separation, then the right is reserved for the three separatist districts to form a separate canton. Conversely, should the majority of the Jura favour separation, then the three anti-separatist districts may vote for a continued attachment to Berne.

The Separatists want a free Jura, eventually sliced into two half-cantons. They naturally groan at the prospect of being left with the three northern-most districts of the canton, the most beautiful maybe, but the poorest. To the best of our knowledge, the Rassemblement has not yet clearly stated whether it would be prepared to accept a free Jura comprising the three districts of Franches Montagnes, Delemont and Porrentruy. It has however made known that such a canton, although deprived of the upper Birse Valley and its wealthy watch and machine-tool industries, would be economically viable.

A new element has been the creation of a third force movement, favourable to the statute of autonomy, which is presided by the mayor of Tramelan. Its efficiency as a political body has still to be tested.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

As things now stand, it is true to say that the situation has worsened, in the Jura during recent years. It is not that the Rassemblement has massively gained new adepts but rather that its position has not changed, and even hardened, although political circumstances have definitely improved since the days when the present Separatist movement was first hived off. A softening on Berne's side has not been met by a corresponding attitude in Separatist circles and this has probably induced a hardening of the Union of Jurassian Patriots, faithful to Berne. The chasm between the two tendencies is therefore inevitably widening. However, we should not overdramatise: taking the Ulster comparison, we find that this strife-torn province has to be scaled down thirteen times, both in surface and population, to attain the dimensions of the six French-speaking districts of the Jura. This shows at least that there cannot, fortunately, be any common measure between the crisis in the Jura and Northern Ireland. There has been nothing in the Jura that even foreshadowed the generalised window smashing and arson that every town in Ulster has experienced recently. It must be pointed out that in Ulster, the evil (basically, inter-denominational resentment) is very deeply ingrained, whereas enmity in the Jura is relatively recent, Cromwell having been dead a long time when the Jura was awarded to Berne. Furthermore, pure-stock Jurassians have really had less to complain about than Catholics in Northern Ireland. Still, let the situation stagnate for another hundred years, and we shall positively be having a Northern Irish situation. Nobody believes the Rassemblement wants this, although it has by no means proved it by its behaviour up to now. (P.M.B.)

News of the Colony

Auckland Swiss Club

PICNIC AT THE SWISS FARM

It was one of those hot summer days, which we all got to know so well this year, that sent us off from Auckland on Saturday afternoon. What bliss to find a nice cool breeze up on our farm. From the doors of the little tent-town, excited children's faces greeted us. Putting up camp, a nice hot cup of tea, and it was