

Extract from the "Neue Bernerzeitung"

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Extract from the " NEUE BERNERZEITUNG "
 supplied by Heinz Leuenberger

"SWISS JEWS", is the theme of an exhibition in the 'Kornhaus' in Berne. Who are the Jews? How do they live and think? There are only one Federal Councillor (Mrs. Dreyfuss), one Party President (?), 17 in Agriculture, 498 in Industry and Commerce, 5685 in Service Industries and 257 unemployed. These are the statistics of the employment structure of the Jewish minority. The figures for the Service Industry are slightly above average. As for the rest - they are much the same as for any other social grouping.

- In today's multiplicity, the Jews are no more a homogenous group as any other minority. The 2500 practicing Jews continue to follow their religious teachings to the letter. The rest visit the Synagogue merely on festive occasions, disregard the rules and teachings or at best followed them only liberally.

- Their history in Switzerland, as well as much of Europe, including of course the City of Berne, is one of prejudice, racism and extremism. Hebrew inscriptions in Berne dating back to 1259 say that 'Hebrews' are not permitted to own property - pursue a trade - or engage in business. Yet, in order to make a living, they were allowed to trade as money lenders. Ironically, Christians were forbidden to act as money traders. However, they were hit by very high taxes. In the event of their insolvency, they were simply 'disposed of' in one way or another, preference being given to 'for ever'.

In 1427 by edict, the Jews were expelled from the City. Over the next 400 years, only a very few medical people and Livestock Traders, (Vieh-Händler) were tolerated and then only under a regime of heavy taxes or so-called 'protection money'. It was left to the French Revolution that allowed Jews back into the City as well as much of the rest of the country. This was in spite of the fact that the new Federal Constitution of 1848 allowed freedom of domicile only to Christians. In 1850, the Berne City Council was of the opinion that an increasing Jewish population and their increased trading was not 'desirable'. By the late 1860's - again through pressure exerted by the French - the Jews were finally accorded the freedoms everyone else had always taken for granted. - Yet, prejudices remained until after World War 2.

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