

# Spotlight

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1951)**

Heft 1172

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-695523>

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**SPOTLIGHT.**By **PIERRE BÉGUIN.****"The Problem of the Autonomy of the Jura."**

You have probably already heard about the autonomy of the Jura, and even about its secessionist tendencies. A movement was born, within the last few years, in the French-speaking part of the Canton of Berne, which aims at obtaining a division of this large Canton, so as to render independent the territory where French is spoken. Should it succeed, it would raise the number of Cantons from 22 to 23.

This movement, in fact, goes quite a long way back. A pamphlet on this subject — which has remained famous — was published some thirty years ago, and a number of citizens attempted to form a group for the purpose of achieving the realisation of this idea. Then, after a while, the discussion calmed down. They have taken on much bigger — and in fact rather alarming — dimensions, since last year.

It is not really surprising that this movement exists. After all, the French-speaking part of the Canton of Berne only became attached to it at a relatively recent date, that is to say, less than half a century ago. Formerly, this territory had belonged to the Bishopric of Basle. Then, after having been attached to France during a certain number of years, it was handed over to the Canton of Berne, in compensation for the loss of territories which the latter had possessed under the Old Régime in the countries of Vaud and of Argovie. It is, therefore, quite evident that all along a certain feeling of mortgage overshadowed this union, for there were no historical ties in common existing between these two parts of the Canton. It was only natural that, under these circumstances, the inhabitants of the Jura felt themselves to be Jurassians first, and Bernese only in the second place. When one remembers how deeply rooted are traditions in our country, it is not surprising that a conflict should have broken out, finally. This was bound to happen sooner or later.

Through an unfortunate concatenation of circumstances, the Jurassians have felt that they have not been treated fairly on various occasions. Quite naturally, they tended to attribute some of the major difficulties to the fact that they were not autonomous, but were living within a community where the German-speaking element predominated — and this to a considerable extent. Formerly, this feeling could be declared openly more or less, could be spoken of, could exist more or less consciously. Nowadays, however, it has shown itself in a much more definite manner, because we are living in an era when the State plays an increasingly important part in the lives of everyone, when its decisions affect us all and its authority makes itself felt, more and more. This is probably the chief reason for this reaction, which has been delayed so long.

In effect, the division of the Canton of Berne into two parts would in no way be scandalous, or even something new. In Switzerland, we already have three Cantons which have divided into two autonomous halves: Unterwald, which never constituted a real unit; Appenzell, which carried out its scission at the time of religious disturbances, and finally, Basle, where the city dwellers and those belonging to the

countryside decided to live their lives separately during the last century. These divisions have never really shaken the unity of the Confederation. They have even made it possible to get rid of some apples of discord.

Nevertheless, the Bernese are loathe to lend a helping hand to any such division. And among the Jurassians, also, it is only a minority that support the idea of a scission, the rest of the country preferring to reach some kind of agreement. For this reason the German-speaking Bernese have made a big effort to achieve conciliation and to appease the French-speaking members of their Canton. A proof of this will be found in a constitutional reform which has been accepted by both parts of the Canton.

In spite of all this, the movement is progressing. One cannot say that it is extending, but it is in no way going back. And heated discussion continue to go on. The whole atmosphere is not quietening down sufficiently. What is needed is patience on the part of the people of the Jura, and steady nerves and much tact on that of the Bernese belonging to the ancient Canton. Should this prove to be the case, then, in a few years' time, the scission of the Jura will become a mere memory. It is very doubtful whether these separatist ideas will prevail. There are a great many persons in the Jura who realise that their union with their German-speaking compatriotes brings them many advantages and that, were they alone and separated, they would be both weaker and less prosperous.

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