

Bienne - 150 years in the canton of Berne and the Jura separatists

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the economic crisis of the 'thirties. The war years passed and peace came, but the world is still waiting for its Easter. Nations at war still. Racial tension and economic struggle. Crime, road deaths, divorce, all on the increase. Where are we going? The depression "Kyburg" hoped would make way for better times, did indeed disappear, and with it unemployment and undernourishment. Today, full employment, the Welfare State and general affluence — it could have been the economic Easter, but it wasn't.

Yet, if we remember the real meaning of Good Friday, that God had His son crucified for our sins because He loves mankind, we shall be able to rejoice in Christ's resurrection in spite of gloomy prospects. "No wonder we do not lose heart! Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed. Our troubles are slight and short-lived; and their outcome an eternal glory which outweighs them far. Meanwhile our eyes are fixed, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen; for what is seen passes away; what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly frame that houses us today should be demolished, we possess a building which God has provided — a house not made by human hands, eternal, and in heaven". (2 Corinthians 4/5.)

A VERY HAPPY EASTER TO YOU ALL!

BIENNE — 150 YEARS IN THE CANTON OF BERNE AND THE JURA SEPARATISTS

In the course of a varied history, Bienne could have become an independent region, i.e. later a Canton, three times. Already in the eleventh century, the town was made part of the Bishopric of Basle. Its position within this state was peculiar, for already in 1279, Bienne joined forces with the fast developing town of Berne and later also with Fribourg and Solothurn. The coats of arms of the three towns above the Bienne Council Hall remind us of this union. The relationship with the Bishop was, according to his personality, very varied. With Bishop Jean de Vienne, for instance, there were considerable difficulties, and he set fire to the town in 1367. On the other hand, Bienne wanted to keep a certain independence and did not want to rely too much on Berne either. But this duplicity had bad results for the town, for in 1798 it was not only occupied but also incorporated in the French State, together with the whole of the Basle Bishopric. We are reminded of an excellent historic survey of that period by Wilfried Haeblerli "Biel unter Frankreichs Herrschaft".

The victorious powers of the Vienna Congress looked upon Bienne as enemy territory, but that did not affect the town overmuch, except that troops were billeted in it. Generally, and not least by the Allied commander-in-chief Fürst Schwarzenberg, it was accepted that Bienne had long been a confederate of the Swiss Confederation. One of its most able citizens, Georg Friedrich Heilmann, tried in vain at the Vienna Congress to combine with parts of the former Basle Bishopric and form a separate Canton. But long before that it had already been agreed by the victorious powers that Berne should receive the largest part of the Basle Bishopric as compensation for the loss of the Vaud and the Aargau. On 20th March 1815, this was formally settled.

It is not known how this decision was arrived at, but Napoleon's flight from Elba at the beginning of the same month obviously induced the victors to hurry up. The

federation document of 23rd November 1815, which was composed in French and German, elucidated a number of individual questions.

Bienne, always eager to be independent, at first did not even become district capital, and Nidau was chosen. Only in 1830 was Bienne made an independent "Amtsbezirk".

On Thursday, 18th March last, a simple commemoration ceremony took place in Bienne. Federal Councillor Bonvin, the Bernese Government and many guests took part in the procession which moved to the "Stadtkirche am Ring", while all the bells of the town were peeling. Two history teachers, Messrs. H. R. Guggisberg and B. Kehrl, addressed the gathering on the historic facts, and the Municipal President Fritz Staehli, gave an official talk and reminded the audience that Bienne was today the ninth-largest Swiss town and very much a "town of the future." The watch industry helped the town on its economic advance, and it was also due to the same industry that Bienne was a bi-lingual town.

The celebration which included musical renderings, was followed by a dinner for authorities and guests at the Strandhotel Engelberg on the Lake of Bienne.

The separatists of the Canton of Berne, part of the population of the Jura, who want a separate Canton Jura, took the opportunity of the 150th anniversary to stage a demonstration. It was a day of mourning, and the red/white Jura flag with its crosier was at half mast. They issued a pseudo postage stamp on which the foot of the Bernese bear claws at the Jura territory. But above all, the "Rassemblement Jurassien" issued an eight-page memorandum which was sent to the signatories of the Viennese Pact of 1815 (Austria, Germany, U.S.S.R., Great Britain and France), as well as to the Swiss Government and Parliament and the Cantonal Parliaments and Governments. In it the historic events are described, and the fact that the Jura was given to Berne is called a grave error. The memorandum ends with the words "There can be neither justice nor peace as long as the history and the will of a people are disregarded in such flagrant ways. The Rassemblement Jurassien considers an act to which the Jura could not agree, as annulled both legally and politically. On this commemoration day, the Rassemblement Jurassien declares that it will dedicate itself to the cancellation of the Viennese decision in order to give back to the Jura homeland its rights within the Swiss Confederation."

There was a silent mourning procession from Courrendlin to Delémont. Slogans and Jura flags were carried, but there were no disturbances. In the courtyard of the old episcopal palace speeches were made. Some 7,000 gathered at Delémont, and Jurassiens in other parts of the country issued statements of support.

In the "Gazette de Lausanne", Pierre Béguin, who has shown some sympathy with the Jura in the past, considers the memorandum sent to foreign powers as a sad mistake which will have bad consequences. In an article in the "Tages-Anzeiger" National Councillor Prof. Marcel Beck (successor in Parliament to Mr. Arnold Meier-Ragg), gives the historic background of the Jura question and states that there are some similar problems which need a solution elsewhere in Switzerland. There is sympathy with the Jura problem, but it will fade if there are mourning marches, too much shouting about the "yoke of the Bernese", ridiculous appeals to foreign powers which partly don't even exist any more.

(Apart from sources already mentioned, news by courtesy of A.T.S.)