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The 23rd Canton of Switzerland has been created

The author

Michel Margot (34), born in the Canton of Vaud, has been correspondent of the French-speaking Swiss radio in the capital. At present, he is President of the Association of Parliamentary Journalists. For the benefit of his audience at home and abroad, he has been commenting on the Jura problem for more than 10 years.

On 23rd June 1974, the electors of the Jura answered in the affirmative the question «Would you like to create a new Canton?» Thus the birth of the 23rd Canton of Switzerland was induced by a majority of approximately 2750 votes.

On 5th July 1959, a consultative plebiscite still resulted in a majority of 1191 noes.

This complete reversal in the whole of the Jura, however, must not make one disregard the fact that the gulf between the separatist North and the anti-separatist South has become even wider. Observers and responsible politicians wonder whether the unity of the Jura has disappeared for ever, all the more so as the Southern districts have already affirmed their loyalty to Berne. Corresponding Initiatives were launched immediately after the plebiscite, and the people of the three districts will, like that of the Laufental, decide finally in a second poll.

In order to study the history of the Jura problem, one has to go back at least to the year 1815: That is the time when the last Canton joined the Confederation and the boundaries of Switzerland were fixed. With it, the general military and political position prevented the formation of a Canton Jura. The vehemence of the cultural struggle in the Jura at the time indicates that the root of the separatist movement lies in the annexation of the former Episcopal Principality of Basle with Berne. This separatism exploded for the

first time in 1920 when a definitely Roman Catholic movement emerged which, however, soon faded away again. Two decades later, the autonomist current began afresh in various demands by the «Emulation» and «Pro Jura». The real catalytic agent, however, for all these separatist aspirations was the case Moeckli immediately after the second world war.

Georges Moeckli, a prominent representative of the Jura Socialism, died on the eve of the Jura plebiscite. He did not live to see the historic day which, after all, some of his adventures in the Council Hall in Berne, had helped to bring about.

The Detonator

Twice in 1947, the Bernese Great Council refused to hand over the Department of Building to the Jurassien Moeckli — it is known to facilitate getting on various boards ... —. The excuse given and openly voiced by Councillor Tschumi, was that «to give such a Department to a Councillor of French tongue would be an injustice to the inhabitants of the Old Canton».

This decision worked as a detonator. Varied and vehement protest flared up in the Jura. The Committee of Moutier was formed in order to represent the interest of the French-speaking minority with a programme of demands and campaigns. Already one heard talk of an independent Jura, and the Committee announced «studies with a view to a possible separation».