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HOME NEWS

JURA

The Rassemblement Jurassien called on Bern to organise without delay a plebiscite in the Jura allowing its population to choose between complete separation from Canton Berne and a new status of semi-independence. The call was made at the Rassemblement's Popular Assembly during the 16th Fete du Peuple Jurassien at Delémont. The plebiscite is planned under an amendment of the Cantonal Constitution supported by the people in March 1970, but Bern is holding back on the vote until plans for transforming the Jura into new regions are finalised. The Rassemblement's call, and its reminder that a choice will soon have to be made, was partly aimed at the people of the southern areas of the Jura, bordering on Biel, who have opted for a continued attachment to Bern.

Bern was awarded domination over the Jura at the Treaty of Vienna in 1815 as a compensation for the loss of Vaud, conquered by the armies of the French Revolution in 1798. The Jura problem stemmed from the historic treaty which recarved the map of Europe with a thought for the Confederates who had, after all, been deeply involved in the Napoleonic wars. The Rassemblement's statement was rejected by the other two parties in the Jura, the Union des Patriotes Jurassiens (pro-Bernese) and the Mouvement pour l'Unité du Jura (a middle of the road movement accepting an intermediate solution known as "status of autonomy" for the Jura). The first of these two organisations accepts a plebiscite but not under the terms of the Separatists, who claim that all the Jurassians living outside the Jura area should vote. The Third Force considers that a plebiscite would be premature.

The Separatists are centred in the three northern French-speaking districts of the Jura (Delémont, Porrentruy and Franches Montagnes) whereas the Union des Patriotes Jurassiens take root in the Southern districts of Saint Imier, Moutier and Courtey. These districts have a strong German-speaking immigrant population. They are also the most industrialised of the Jura and would make life difficult for the three Separatist districts if they decided to let them form a new Canton, this being a possible eventuality.

The Union des Patriotes Jurassiens have made a surprise move by appealing to the World Council of Churches in a letter to its General Secretary, Mr Philip Potter. In a somewhat turgid style, they bring the world non-Catholic body aware of the existence in the Jura of "linguistic and racialist sectarianism".

U.N. MEMBERSHIP TO BE DEBATED BY SPECIAL COMMITTEE:

A committee has been set up to examine the consequences of Switzerland's possible membership to the United Nations. The fifty members of this consultative body have been named by the Federal Council. Eighteen are French Speaking, three Ticinese and the remainder German-speaking. They have been selected from wide sectors of the community. Many are known for their support to U.N. membership, others for their staunch opposition. The committee, which was due to hold its first session towards the end of September, is chaired by a former ambassador, lawyer and parliamentarian, Mr Edouard Zellweger, who has also been a leading U.N. official in Laos. The decision to set up this committee was taken by Parliament and will in effect delay

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concrete steps towards U.N. membership, an issue which has been in the air for many years. The idea of naming a committee on whose recommendations the Government will act is typical of Berne's caution on any decision relating to permanent neutrality. The reason why Switzerland has abstained from joining the U.N. is that she might be compelled to take sides in either condemning a fellow-country in a resolution or taking part in sanctions. This would not be a neutral attitude. Most recent statements by Swiss leaders claim that the time is not ripe for U.N.-membership and that the idea has to mature. At all matter via a referendum. There has been a strong vindication of neutrality of late. Mr Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department, has repeatedly said that neutrality constitutes a capital for peace and positive influence in the world which should not be tampered with.

MIDDLE-EAST CRISIS HIGHLIGHTS DEPENDENCE ON OIL:

The Middle East crisis has not triggered off a new Swiss diplomatic initiative. The Federal Council held a special meeting but went no further than to confirm its support to the International Red Cross and its humanitarian role in the conflict. But the past troubled weeks have highlighted Switzerland's vulnerability to any turning-off of the oil taps. It is commonly believed that Switzerland, with its many hydraulic dams, can rely on ample supplies of electrical energy. However, electricity accounts for only 16 per cent of the country's energy requirements. 78 per cent comes from petrol and oil and only 6 per cent from coal. Due to the absence of coal, Switzerland is one of the only countries of Western Europe depending on petrol for over 50 per cent of its energy requirements. Any interruption of Arab oil exports would therefore have dramatic consequences for Switzerland.

Stabilisation of Employment in Switzerland

The official statistics for overall employment show a comparative standstill in the number of employees in the Swiss economy in 1973. At the time when employment reached its seasonal maximum, an increase of only 0.1% was recorded over the same period of the previous year. Employees in industry also decreased by 0.8% after a drop of 1.8% in 1972. On the other hand, growth continued in the services sector, where the number of employees progressed by 2.1% from one year to the next. Banks no longer come first with regard to the increase in numbers, the rate of which fell from 9.8% in 1971 and 8.0% in 1972 to 5.1% last year. It is in the health sector as well as in the co-operative societies in the retail trade that the number of employees has increased the most (+ 6.2% in each of these sectors). On the other hand, employment fell off by 2.1% in the building trade. The public sector, comprising the civil service, the Swiss Federal Railways, the electricity, gas and water services, as well as the Swiss Post Office, recorded increases in personnel ranging from 0.4 to 1.6%. — (SODT).

Swiss Time for Madrid:

A timekeeping system, offered by the Swiss Watch Federation and controlled by a Patek-Philippe master clock (Geneva, Switzerland) was recently installed in the Town Hall of the Spanish capital.