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IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF BERNE

CANTON

The Commune President of Saignelégier, a teacher by profession, Councillor Maurice Péquignot (Liberal), was elected President of the Bernese Cantonal Parliament. He is known as a representative of the conciliatory third power in the Jura. In November, he was elected Councillor of States to represent Berne in the Second Chamber. He has thus become the successor to the retiring *Conseiller aux Etats* Charles Jeanneret, St. Imier. The second representative is *Regierungsrat* Dewet Buri (BGB.) Etzelkofen, as he has been since 1957.

The cantonal budget for 1968 estimates revenue and expenditure each at 721.8m. francs. From 1st January, all foreign workers are being taxed at source. Two plans are being studied at the moment, one a new law regarding the cantonal finances, and the other the revision of the Cantonal Constitution.

Increased cost of living is the reason for a 7-million rise in the total cost of the new Berne station and surrounding improvements which is now expected to reach over 30m. francs. The Canton has already paid 13.4m. towards the total expenditure and has now been asked to grant a further 3.5m., the town having to pay the rest according to an agreement with the Federal Railways.

Road construction in the Jura over the last three years amounted to 42% of the total expenditure in the Canton (about 100m. in all). On the Jura river correction scheme, 133 million francs will be spent by 1973, as against the budgeted 88.7m. In the whole Canton, some 200m. francs has been spent on water protection. The river Doubs, as far as its banks are on Bernese territory, has been put under State protection and declared a nature reserve.

The ever-increasing demand for electricity necessitated a further extension of the power stations in the Bernese Oberland; the main centre now is the sub-station Wilderswil of the Bernese Power Works (BKW.). A further stage in the Oberhasli works was completed in summer, the power station Hopflauenen in the Gadmen Valley. The capital of 60m. francs is shared between the BKW (50%) and the towns, of Basle, Berne and Zurich. Aarberg power works have also been operational since May, and steady progress is registered in the construction of the atomic power station Muehleberg.

On civil defence, the Canton of Berne spends millions every year; in 1967, 1575 new shelters were constructed. The problem of Berne airport has not yet been solved; 1967 was a record year for Belpmoos, by 7th December, 40,000 passengers had passed through it.

The "Vereinigung der Volkshochschulen des Kantons Bern" can look back on a decade of fruitful activities. In 1957, 1,223 courses were held with a total of 4,500 students. In 1966, 12,996 men and women took part in 3,703 extra-mural courses. The "Berner Schulblatt" is to be fused with the "Schweizerische Lehrerzeitung".

The Canton of Berne, is planning new Reformed Church Centres. A centre similar to Gwatt is to be built in the Jura, "le Centre de Sornetan", and another one is the new Reformed Students' Home in Berne.

Mrs. Yvonne Beer, daughter of the famous lawyer, the late Prof. Guhl, has become the first *Strafrichterin* in the Canton. Mr. Hans Baehler succeeds General Manager Blaser of the Cantonal Bank; the latter retires after more than 50 years.

JURA BERNOIS

The Government of the Canton of Berne decided on 17th March to put into action a programme to solve the Jura problem. The "Commission of 24" which is made up equally of Jura delegates and representatives of the "old Canton", has already made some progress, and from the 39 political, economic and cultural organisations which were asked about their attitude to the whole complex question, 26 answers, some of them several pages, have been received. Any points which need clarification are to be aired and all possible information given. By the end of March, the first mandate, that of information, should be completed. A well-documented memorandum is then to be worked out which will serve as a basis for negotiation between the Cantonal Government and the Jura separatists.

In the meantime, the extremists still cause trouble. They organised a big rally in Delémont in September to celebrate the twentieth festival of the Jura people. On the same day, the anti-separatists met at Tramelan. The two terrorists Boillat and Hennin remain in Spain and France respectively. National Councillor Jean Wilhelm asked in Parliament for a separate electoral district in the Jura. The Confederation still considers that the time for intervening in the Jura Problem is not yet ripe.

BERNE TOWN

Johannes Stumpf published his "Swiss Chronicle" for the first time in 1547. In it he drew a map of Berne with a caption which speaks of a beautiful town with serried rows of stone houses, and he mentions the special charm of the city, the arcades "where one can wander about through all the streets, dry-shod, in all kinds of inclement weather and on rainy days". This still holds good to-day. In 1957, the first President of the German Federal Republic, Prof. Th. Heuss, said of the Kramgasse: "Die macht Euch keiner nach". In 1779, Goethe had called it the "finest alleyway in Europe". But other Berne Gassen are considered the most attractive shopping streets. The municipal authorities are endeavouring to make the Spital- and Marktgassen free from all road traffic and turn them into a fine shopping centre. Other traffic improvements are planned too. A special delegation of experts came to London in November to study traffic problems in Great Britain. The onion market in November was marked by a first snowfall, but nearly 54,000 kg. of onions and lots of other vegetables were sold at more than 100 stalls. The traditional confetti fights took place.

But Berne not only has traditions and old alleyways; it is also in the process of getting the most modern hospital in Switzerland with the 20-storey Inselspital which will cost 89m. francs. 38m. are being spent per annum on running the hospital — a far cry from the modest "eternal hospital" which Anna Seiler founded 613 years ago. The most modern home for old people was opened in Berne in May. On the other hand, conditions at the Ziegler-spital are below standards, but to bring the hospital up-to-date would require 83m. francs. As this is considered too much, a temporary solution has been planned at a cost of 20m. francs.

After 12 years of building work, the new Berne railway station will be completed by 1971. Layout, tracks and platforms have been completed, and the remaining time

will be needed to furnish the buildings above. The subways Neuengasse-Hauptbahnhof were opened in October.

In the same month, the waste-water plant Neubrueck became operational. Berne also has the first-ever combination of garbage incineration, heat supply and optimum power generation, already opened in 1954 (Sulzer).

In November, the citizens of Berne had to elect seven Commune Councillors from ten candidates. For the Municipal Parliament and its 80 seats, there were 295 candidates. All the Parties registered losses, but the "Landesring der Unabhängigen" and "Junges Berne" improved their positions. The Social Democrats still have a large majority. The "Landesring" secured a seat in the executive for the first time (Dr. H. M. Sutermeister) at the expense of the Liberals (Councillor Duebi). Editor Kurt Schweizer replaces the retiring Socialist Dr. H. Bratschi. Dr. Raynold Tschaeppaet was confirmed in his office as Mayor. He was recently elected "Honorary Oregonian", i.e. honorary citizen of Oregon, U.S.A.

The capital's budget for 1968 estimates a loss of over 3m. francs; expenditure is expected to reach the 200 million mark for the first time (204.3m.).

A five-day week (44 hours) has come into operation for municipal staff. The tax authorities are to have their work eased by the introduction of two computers.

Apart from a drop of 12% in the number of nights spent in Berne hotels by British visitors, all other nationalities showed an increase in 1967, 17% for Italians alone. Berne is increasingly used as a venue for congresses; one of the most important in the near future will be the World Congress of the Young Baptists with participation of between 5-6,000 visitors in one week. For this, 2,500 private rooms must be found by July.

In September, the satellite town of Tscharnergut (5,000 inhabitants) was opened after a building period of 8 years.

The Literature Prizes of the town of Berne 1967 were awarded to Ernst Eggimann and Pfr. Kurt Marti (poetry); Dr. Helmut Schilling, Dr. Arnold H. Schwengeler, Hans Stalder and Dr. Emil Waechter (Drama). The cellar theatre "Rampe" has ceased to exist in its popular form, though its Producer B. Stirnemann is trying to keep it open for this season in the hope that the necessary financial support might be forthcoming.

The new Municipal Veterinary Surgeon is Dr. Erwin Lanz.

COMMUNES

Beatenberg celebrated its centenary as a health resort in September. During some correction work in a Biglen road, a huge Grimsel granite boulder was discovered, dating to the Ice-age.

Bienne now has nearly 68,000 inhabitants. The municipal employees have decided not to accept one of the 3% granted as cost-of-living allowance. They proposed this so as to keep the budget for 1968 balanced. The new Finance Secretary is Marcel Jean in succession to *Fuersprech* J. van Wijnkoop. The "Landesring" are campaigning for a new *gymnase* in Bienne. The Municipality has given a building in the Roemergaessli, which is to be turned into "Studentenfoyer Roemerquelle". A home for unmarried mothers is to be built, and a Foundation "Mother and Child" has been started with a gift of a quarter-of-a-million francs. The Schwab Museum and the Stadtkirche are to be renovated.

A few months ago, nearly 100 young Burgdorf boys and girls appealed to the Commune Council to change the compulsory membership of the Cadet Corps to a voluntary service. The Education Committee have decided, however, to keep the old system. A well-equipped settlement for old people was opened in the summer.

The picturesque townlet of Erlach on the shores of the Lake of Biel celebrated its 700th anniversary "Handfeste". Considerable festivities were organised in July, and the proceeds benefit the new school to be opened in spring. Dr. h.c. Elizabeth Mueller, the well-known writer, has been elected Honorary Citizen of Hilterfingen.

The Commune President of Interlaken, *Oberrichter* Heinz Junker (Socialist) retired after 12 years in office; with a voting participation of 82%, the citizens elected the Liberal *Grossrat* Kurt Borter. The electorate also granted a credit of 18m. francs for a new school centre.

Kandersteg is to have an artificial ice-rink, and the citizens of Langnau approved plans for a secondary school at the cost of 7.2m. francs.

The Meiringen-Rosenlau Mountaineering School has gained international recognition; its new offices are now in the Hotel Sauvage at Meiringen, itself recently modernised. Among V.I.P.s who have trained at the School are Sherpa Tensing, Sir John Hunt and Mr. Robert McNamara, former U.S. Secretary of Defence, and his family. Newly attached to the School is a highland pony riding school.

Muensingen's fourth primary school is to cost 6.4m. francs, including a civil defence centre. A similar project (4.2m.) was agreed to by the citizens of Oberdiessbach.

The new youth consultant of the St. Immer parish district is a Biel teacher, Miss Erica Forney. The women of the R.C. parish of Spiez, like those of Interlaken and Thun, now have the vote. A novel way was used at the opening of the new Boy Scouts Home at Tavannes, when parachutist Corti landed near the home and presented the scissors with which to cut the symbolic ribbon.

The *Burgergemeinde* Thun has bought the beautiful former guild house "Zur Metzgern" at the Rathausplatz. Utigen is to spend a large sum (2.3m. francs) for a new primary school, Vechigen granted 3.2m. and the Commune Assembly of Zweisimmen 4.2m. francs for similar projects.

(Compiled from news and information received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse and S.N.T.O.)

CURLING ON THE MARCH

This winter season has brought the opening of Continental Europe's first completely enclosed curling arena, situated not far from the centre of Zurich. Housed in a multi-storey building, it features four curling rinks, a lounge and a grandstand with 50 seats. This is one of the first facilities of its kind in the world, others being available only in Canada, the U.S.A. and Scotland. Another "first" for the new curling stadium is that it offers an opportunity for Swiss curlers to play on Canadian grain-ice and with officially weighed and approved stones.

Another attractive new curling facility has opened in Berne, where the former arena has been extended from two to four covered rinks and the clubroom has been expanded.

[S.N.T.O.]