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# The Swiss Observer

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## A DAY IN THE IN THE JURA

The Jura situation has occasionally been compared to the worsening plight of Northern Ireland. A day spent in the Jura last summer has convinced me that this estimation is unjustified. A day, one will say, is hardly enough to understand the intricacies of a socio-political situation emerging from 150 years of history. But then, the traveller requires only a few encounters with the native population, especially when it is as extrovert as the Jurassian race, to sense an atmosphere of community tension. I have sensed no such atmosphere whatever. To pick up an example: any person happening to find himself suddenly in an eastern European country will learn soon enough that he is in a totalitarian state. It's a question of atmosphere.

If these simplifying assumptions are accepted, then my conclusions are that the gravity of the Jura problem has often been over-emphasised and that this also applies to those communities where Pro- and Anti-Separatists live side by side.

### A history of our own

There are of course many people living in the Jura who predict serious trouble sooner or later. One such man, whom we have to name as "X", because he would not divulge his name (having apparently been convicted of political acts of violence), sees strife as inevitable.

He was waiting to hitch a ride on the outskirts of Biel. I offered to drive him to Moutier. To make him pay for it, I asked him to brief me on the situation in the Jura. Above all, I wanted to ascertain the authenticity of Separatist militants, some of whom were at that time facing trial at the Federal Court in Lausanne. Were their political motives and proclamations sincere? Were the "Béliers" not just dissenting and immature youths, out to raise hell and vent their instincts? Was it not all a big lark? I asked provocatively.

With a look of immense pity at so much ignorance of the truths of the Jura situation, he impressed on me

that his motherland, the six French-speaking districts of the Jura, were subjugated by Bernese domination.

"We have a history of our own. Our language is different. Our temperament stands out. We think and feel differently from the Bernese. They are Germans, heavy, serious and military. We're a Latin people and belong to a French-speaking culture. By controlling us, they are colonising a different people and have no right to do so."

I asked him to describe the extent of Bernese domination.

"This has always been our land", he said, pointing to the surrounding scenery. "It is the richest in Switzerland. We have modern factories and plenty of industry. Yet we could be more prosperous if Berne didn't tax us as they do and use our money to finance projects in their part of the Canton."

"In what way do they use your money for their own benefit?"

"In several ways. Their roads are much better than ours. They have motorways and modern by-passes. Our roads are lousy. Take the one we're driving on, for example. And I'll ask you one thing: Why do you think Berne would be so keen to remain in the Jura if it didn't derive very concrete advantages?"

However, apart from Berne's "superior" roads and the handsome profit the Canton was supposed to have made by reselling some 300 hectares of military land in the Franches-Montagnes to the Confederation, it did not seem to me that Berne skimmed all that much profit from its Jurassian province. On several occasions "X" described the scenic road upon which we were driving, which follows the Birse valley and passed through an impressive gorge, as "lousy".

"Are there any other non-economic ways in which Berne has tried to dominate your people?" I asked again.

"Yes. They control education. That's one thing. Then they have tried to break up our unity and national identity by favouring the settlement of thousands of German-speaking people

who do not have their roots here. Without them there would be no Jurassian problem because the true Jurassians want to be free from Berne."

### French attraction

This did away with the fact that the majority of the people living in French-speaking Jura are in fact opposed to Separation from Berne. The voice of the "majority" didn't carry much weight to people like "X", who underline that the majority of the population in the seven districts is not truly Jurassian, and who contest the validity of the figures which resulted from elections in the late fifties, when the Separation issue was first submitted to the electorate, and defeated. The majority of the people of the Jura were, deep down and left to express their true feeling, in favour of Separation.

I asked him whether he foresaw any possible deterioration of the situation.

"The situation is, on the surface, no worse than it was in 1961, when a few farms were burnt down in the Moutier area. However, the continued refusal of Berne to face up to the real issues of the Jura's independent personality and its habit of escaping them with the help of a morass of legal and constitutional mumbo-jumbo will eventually wear out the patience of its people. All this has been going on for too long. We started our independence movement twenty-two years ago and Berne is still haggling. In the long run, I cannot say exactly when, Jurassians will lose patience and trouble will flare up. I can tell you that for sure."

Remembering that many Separatists would rather belong to neighbouring France than be part of Switzerland, if that involved remaining under Berne, I asked him his feeling on the matter.

He was one of the Francophiles, and said he was more attached to France, which he hardly knew at all, than to his official country. He was convinced that the people living across the border had a more enviable lot than colonised Jurassians. He was ob-

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viously overlooking some elementary facts, such as: A much longer period of military service, far higher taxes, less democracy and a lower standard of living.

## Guy Fawkes in Berne

"X" wouldn't be explicit on the means the militant and activist elements in Separatist movement intended to use to speed up the independence of the Jura. However, he said these portentous words, which I report with utter honesty: "I shouldn't be telling you this" (he hesitated for a moment, but the fact that I didn't know his name probably helped him to overcome his inhibition) but there is a plan to blow up the Federal Palace".

Not wishing to discourage him from revealing more details of this sensational plot by showing any signs of disbelief, I avoided making any flip-pant comment and asked him who were the people with such sinister designs.

"I can obviously not tell you. But don't be surprised if the Federal Palace is rocked by an explosion some time in the future. Some circles are considering this very seriously."

This all seemed very conspiratorial. My friend "X" spoke with utter seriousness and clearly believed in his assertions. To me, the odds were that he had picked up rumours from certain Separatist sources and taken them to be true. However anti-Bernese (and sometimes anti-Federal) the extremists of the movement have proved to be, the suggestion that they should go as far as to blow up the Federal Palace must be taken with a large grain of salt. At worst, someone might plant a

powerful banger in the corridors of the Federal Chancery, or daub official monuments with red paint. Yet it deserves to be put on record here and now that there are people in the Jura who appear to be informed of a planned bomb attack on the Federal Palace. No dates are given for the event and no explanation either.

At the long village of Tavannes, we halted for a drink. We went to look for one of "X's" friends and ordered large bottles of "Cardinal" beer in a deserted cafe. The friend, who was a lorry driver from the area, told me in answer to a question that he was basically anti-Separatist. This surprised "X" who was peeved to learn that one of his mates should have such a political stand. It surprised me too. If Jurassians should feel so strongly about the Separation issue, then one would expect that two acquaintances should be aware of their mutual political stance. In this case, two young people coming from the same town and obviously acquainted with each other for a long time were unaware of each other's political creed. The lorry driver discounted the Separatist demonstrations that had been going on during the summer as "nonsense". The other fellow reacted rather sharply. Later that day, when we had moved on to Moutiers and drunk our fifteenth beer, the effect thereof had loosened his already limited self-restraint, and he became rather aggressive.

## What the women say

Yet he and his mate the lorry driver will continue to remain friends in the future and will not be estranged by their conflicting positions on the Jura.

During the evening, I carried out an opinion poll among samples of Moutier's female population. The girls of Moutiers, I can testify, are in the main indifferent and unconcerned about the Jura problem. Nearly all of them seemed to have neither opinion nor interest. One girl called herself a member of the "Third Force", another unconvincingly said that Berne should leave the Jura, and a third opined that there would be no trouble in the Jura if people minded their own business.

The Separation issue certainly didn't appear to perturb the social life of the youth of Moutier. A party of young people having fun in a rather trendy cafe probably represented all political tendencies. German-speaking Jurassians were playing Jass in a *Brasserie* next to their "Latin" compatriots and none the worse for it.

Having spent my cheapest night in Switzerland (15 francs for bed-and-breakfast at the Post Hotel or Station Hotel, I'm not sure which) I set off for Delémont, the Separatist stronghold.

A curtain of rain veiled the charm of this ancient town with stone buildings. This is a town where the Separatists form the establishment. One is very far from Berne. At a news stall standing on a wet cobbled street, I bought the weekly organ of the *Rassemblement Jurassien*: *Le Jura Libre*.

With all its reputation, this weekly leaf, which has now been published for 23 years, has only four pages. There is surprisingly little to read in it. One full page has small adverts and the list of subscribers for various Jurassian good causes. The remainder consists of editorial material of a highly polemical nature. The *Jura Libre* is more of a regularly published political manifesto than of a newspaper.

In its 7th July, 1971 issue, the *Jura Libre* printed a ravishing elegy on the Jura people by Roger Schaffter, polemist, writer and Secretary of the *Rassemblement Jurassien*. Any translation would water down the lofty inspiration of his prose, where the reader is told, among many other lovely things, that in the Jura "*l'énergie a pris place à la résignation, la fierté affronte ouvertement l'injustice et le mépris* . . ."

Let us hope that the opposing constituencies of the Jura will continue to limit their weaponry to words like these.

(PMB)

# COMMENT

## A WAGES AND INCOMES POLICY?

Switzerland is fortunately not yet at the top of the inflation league. With inflation rates running at a little under seven per cent, it is a long way behind the leaders, particularly Great Britain, and the Swiss Franc is still a strong currency. Yet its value suffered severe erosion and people are now thinking in terms of a wages and incomes policy. A man earning 2,000 francs a month in 1940 needed to earn 5,000 francs thirty years later to enjoy the same standard of living. A 3,000 franc a month salary was equivalent to 5,000 francs a month in 1970.

Shortly before the last elections to the National Council, the Vorort, an association of employers, suggested a prices and incomes policy with an increase of working hours. Swiss farmers were in favour of the scheme but the Trade Unions, for reasons best known to themselves, announced their firm opposition. Mr. Ernst Brugger, Head of the Department of Economy, initially