

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1974)

**Heft:** 1688

**Rubrik:** Comment

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**Download PDF:** 10.01.2026

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# The Swiss Observer

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Published Twice Monthly at  
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET  
LONDON E.C.2  
Tel: 01-253 2321

Telegrams: Paperwyse London  
PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES  
(POST FREE)

## UNITED KINGDOM

24 issues £2.40  
12 issues £1.25  
6 issues £0.65

## SWITZERLAND and elsewhere

11 issues Frs. 13— or £1.30  
24 issues Frs. 25— or £2.50

Swiss subscriptions may be paid into  
Postcheck Konto Basle 40—5718

## Comment

### A TWENTY-THIRD CANTON IN THE OFFING

A twenty-third canton has been virtually created. After twenty-six years of struggle, the *Rassemblement Jurassien* has nearly reached its goal of a French-speaking canton independent from Berne. This result has not been obtained without misgivings and some disappointment, because a majority of less than 3,000 of the 90 per cent of voters who went to the polls on Sunday, 23rd June, to answer the simple question "Do you want to form a new Canton?", provided a "yes" answer.

The count showed 36,802 "yes" and 34,057 "no" ballots, and 1,841 blank votes. It also showed, as expected, that the three southern districts of La Neuveville Courtelary and Moutier voted "no" while the three northern districts of Franches-Montagnes, Delémont and Porrentruy overwhelmingly voted for "independence". The seventh, and German-speaking, district of Laufen voted "no" as expected and will be free to adhere either to Basle or Solothurn.

The vote thus spelled the division of the Jura. The very small number of blank ballots pointed to the minimal impact of the "Third Force" movement which had recommended a null vote in order to preserve the Jura's unity. The division between north and south underlined basic historical and cultural differences. The three northern districts descend from the old Bishopric of Porrentruy. Their population is Catholic and Gallic, while the southern districts had established links with Protestant Berne and Biel well before the "Act of Reunion" of 1815 which annexed the Jura to Berne in application of the Treaty of Vienna.

Although French-speaking, the southern districts have a Protestant majority and a strong Germanic element.

The differences that exist in such a small area — 500 square miles and 150,000 inhabitants — are truly remarkable and are best exemplified by the radical opposition between two men, Roland Béguin, General Secretary of the *Rassemblement Jurassien* and Roland

Stähli, General Secretary of the anti-Separatist Union des Patriotes Jurassiens. These are two men living less than ten miles away from each other (Delémont and Moutier) and yet fighting for ideas that belong to two different worlds.

This fundamental difference of outlook will now be translated into political terms. Six months following the validation of the results next September, the people of the three anti-Separatist districts will be given the opportunity to confirm their vote, so that they are not integrated in a new canton against their will. It is generally believed that Courtelary and La Neuveville will confirm their desire to remain in Canton Berne. There is some doubt regarding Moutier, a traditionally anti-Separatist district in which the Separatists have nevertheless gained considerable ground since 1959, when an earlier vote on the separation issue was held. The 23rd June plebiscite yielded 42 per cent of "yes" votes against 55 per cent of "no" votes in the district. Observers believe that the Moutier district, which is the most industrial in the Jura, could see a further move towards Separatism. Whatever the outcome of the next popular consultation, the three northern districts are now determined, and they have showed it by a 70 per cent majority, to form a new Canton. This formula may not match the Separatist's original ambitions, but will all the same enable them to live and express their cultural identity in a canton of their own. This canton would be one of the smallest in Switzerland and have a population of about 70,000. It is less industrialised than the three districts of southern Jura, but its economy is more diversified. The future canton would be quite viable.

As a third stage of the creation procedure, the communes neighbouring the new canton would be given an opportunity to opt for the "status quo" or join the Canton of the Jura. In this way, the people of the area will have been consulted at regional, district and communal level. One can hardly be more democratic.

The importance given to the Jura issue in Switzerland must be astounding to anyone unconnected with the country's history, institution and particular way of thinking. One can

imagine an Englishman's surprise at all the fuss at what may appear to him as a pure local issue carried out on a minute scale. After all, the county map of Britain was recarved lately. New local authorities were created and new names appeared without hardly anyone apart from county officials noticing it. The new map will probably have its greatest impact on ratepayers.

The Jura issue is far more than administrative. It can be related to the problems of Scottish and Welsh nationalism. The fact that it is being staged on a much smaller scale doesn't alter its intensity and meaning for those involved. Two other basic considerations add to the subject's importance in the eyes of the Swiss. The first is that the Jura emerges as a "problem" in a country that is remarkably peaceful and that has managed to solve its other problems with more efficiency than most. The other is that the Jura is a difficult constitutional issue. The 23rd June vote required a previous referendum altering the cantonal constitution. It also raised legal problems pertaining to the rights of people which could not be solved within Switzerland's constitutional framework. These legal considerations mean a lot to the Swiss mind.

Whatever the following course of events, the 23rd June plebiscite in the Jura showed that Switzerland was able to tackle its internal problems in full respect of its federal ideals.

P.M.B.

## SWISS EVENTS

### SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE AGAINST RIGHT-WING PROFESSOR

The ban of right-wing speakers instituted by the National Union of Students in Britain was enacted in a smaller scale in Switzerland. Some sixty sociology students at Berne University staged a demonstration and took over the administrative block of their faculty to back their demands for the dismissal of a professor considered as too right-wing. The students placarded posters against Professor Walter von Rugg and his team. When they refused to pull these posters down and evacuate the faculty, the Dean of the University called on the police. The students left the premises after a warning that the police would come into action, and published a statement saying the "Rugg and Management can only teach under police protection".

The demonstrators were faced with a hostile "sub-group" of students, but later in the day received the backing of the psychology students of the