

Political life in the canton of Berne

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POLITICAL LIFE IN THE CANTON OF BERNE

The Cantonal Government of Berne accepted the accounts for 1962, which showed a surplus of Fr. 1,031,384.—.

An Initiative has been launched successfully by the Liberal-Democratic Party, which requests that the law of 2nd May 1880 governing stamp and banknote duty should be abolished by the end of next year with the exception of ticket duty. Twelve thousand signatures were needed, but 29,486 active citizens of the Canton of Berne signed the Initiative.

A campaign was launched by the Bernese Cantonal Fisheries' Association for a cantonal constitutional Initiative demanding a say for the people when water concessions are given. The aim of this is to let the people decide how far proposed waterworks should interfere with the landscape and natural water reserves. This would not only be in the interests of fishing, but above all would be a question of how much should be abandoned to technical requirements and what should be preserved.

On 25th/26th May the Canton of Berne had to vote on three proposals, which were all accepted. The so-called "Melioration Bill" is the basis for a uniform order for all soil improvement, agricultural buildings, joining up of vineyards and forests, improvement of alpine pasture land, as well as special measures in mountain regions.

The second proposal concerned a subsidy of 4.8 million francs for a new nurses' training school of the Red Cross Institution at the Lindenhof. The project comprises a new hospital and a nursing college on the Neufeld on the border of the Bremgarten Forest, a costly scheme of which only the training school is entitled to a subsidy.

Thirdly, a credit of 2.5 million francs was granted by the electorate towards the erection of a cantonal administration building at Delsberg.

In its annual report the executive authority of the Canton of Berne indicated for the first time the type of offices in business or welfare undertakings its members hold apart from their government appointments. The nine "Regierungsräte" show a variety of interests varying between five and twenty-eight different offices each, naturally with an equally varying demand on the individual councillor's time. In 1962 the Council held 105 meetings and the number of business transactions went up from 756 in 1961 to 9,099 last year!

Equally busy was the Cantonal Parliament, whose affairs varied from working out new standing orders (including shortening of speakers' time) to measures intended to relieve the shortage of primary school teachers. Since February over 21m. francs have been granted towards 34 school building projects as well as large subsidies to various hospital building schemes. A million was voted for as the Canton's contribution to the EXPO 1964.

The water problem was debated which arose in some mountain regions last year when communes incurred extraordinarily high expenditure for transporting water from far away. Since 1957 the Canton had supported twenty-eight water supplies and more projects are under way.

The agricultural advice service was recommended for extension, and a "winterproof" road connection between the Oberland and Italy was asked for.

The problem of East-West cultural relations was discussed and it was found undesirable to allow cultural propaganda actions by Communist states if they interfere

with the country's interests or even safety, in which case permission to enter Switzerland will be withheld.

The desirability of a new airport in Berne was stressed in order to connect the capital with international airports.

The Cantonal Grand Council of Berne also considered and agreed to a credit of Fr. 314,000.— to equip a Cantonal Water Police (Seepolizei), which has become a necessity on account of the increasing traffic on lakes and waterways. The present police force cannot cope with additional duties on the water, nor are the available boats adequate to use in stormy weather. Various craft are necessary to navigate the different types of waters, also flood-lamps, levering instruments, ropes, ice saws and improved radio equipment.

In 1953 the Canton celebrated the 600th anniversary of joining the Confederation. To mark this jubilee the Cantonal Parliament created a fund, "Bernisches Hilfswerk", of a million francs to which were added contributions by communes and individuals. Since then the capital has shrunk and the Bernese Government now proposes to Parliament to donate another million to this fund in order adequately to help poor and worthy invalids.

Parliament also accepted 34 applications for citizenship of the Canton and considered the amendment to the pay regulations of the clergy of the Bernese State Church. The Young Bernese Party asked for the setting-up of a commission to consider aesthetic questions of new building projects. The hire of a new electronic computer for university and cantonal administration was agreed to, as was a jubilee gift to the Red Cross of a quarter of a million francs.

Water pollution and road construction were on the agenda of the spring session, which ended on 16th May, when the old President, Councillor Blaser (Socialist) from Urtenen, retired. The new "Grossratspräsident" will be Hans Will (Farmers' Party) from Ursenbach.

TOWN OF BERNE

The accounts for 1962 of the town of Berne closed with a surplus of Fr. 616,053.— with a total income of Fr. 138,184,693.—.

On 26th May the citizens of the capital had to vote on six proposals, which were all accepted. They covered the sale, purchase and exchange of land, the sanctioning of a further credit for the building of a new agricultural settlement in the Elfenu, and the extension of a new open-air gymnasium in the Marzilimoos.

A month later nine proposals were before the electorate, and again all were accepted. The new "Gemeindeordnung" are new standing regulations which replace those of 1920. The most important changes are that no municipal employee can hold a political office, that two new departments ("Direktionen") have been created (health and economic affairs), that the term of office be limited also for commissions and that the limit of financial competence be raised.

Other proposals concerned sports grounds, swimming baths and two artificial ice rinks, as well as a credit of nearly Fr. 600,000.— for the parking terrace, "Grosse Schanze", which will be above part of the new main station.

The Town Council had the usual heavy agenda to deal with. All the above-mentioned proposals had to be worked out before going to the Sovereign as the people are called. Money was granted for civil defence posts, a

jubilee gift to "Pro Juventute", Fr.200,000.— as a contribution to the cultural fund of the National Exhibition, and a subsidy to the Municipal Theatre. The business dealt with included the town's gas supply, the appointment of educational committees, the serious condition of the sanitary installations of the growing suburb of Buempfliz, parking problems and increased difficulties in recruiting men for the police force, adult education, and the issue of special passes for school-children to prevent those under age from gaining access to cinemas.

The last meeting of the present session of the Berne Municipal Parliament took place on 29th June.

Incidentally, it may be of interest to us Swiss abroad to know that a member of the Berne Commune Council is President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. He is the Municipal Director of Finance, Dr. G. Schuerch.

BIENNE

Bienne is another town whose accounts for the last year showed a surplus — of Fr.1,612,231.—.

On 26th May the town electorate of Bienne accepted amongst other proposals one to erect a district old age settlement at Mett, to which the town will contribute Fr.1,285,000.—.

The Municipal Council dealt with the serious state of the water supply from the old Aare. The two dangers are the waste waters of the sugar refinery at Aarberg and the new motor road Biel-Lyss where the accident of a tanker lorry with subsequent seeping of petrol into the water supplies could be catastrophic for the whole "Lake-land District", and a new drinking water source, possibly from the lake, has to be studied.

The town's contribution to the EXPO is a *per capita* sum of Fr.1.10 — a total of Fr.70,000.—. The new central fire brigade depot and police garage at the Mattenstrasse was officially opened on 1st July. The basement houses an air-raid shelter for 240 people and repair workshops.

The Commune Council asks for a quarter of a million francs to buy a building in the Jurastrasse which will enable the authorities to do away with the bottle-neck to trolley buses. The Civil Defence in Bienne at the moment only has 700 members — but 14,000 are needed. A widespread campaign was organised to get prospective members.

Due to the extreme cold at the beginning of the year, between 20,000 and 200,000 rats left their lakeside haunts for the sewage tunnels of the town. In order to exterminate the vermin an extensive operation has been started and vast quantities of poison have been put down.

OTHER COMMUNES

From many Bernese communes the accounts for 1962 have come in — all of them with a favourable balance.

The electorate of Burgdorf decided that the office of the Municipal President should become full-time.

At Hindelbank citizens decided to accept the more expensive of two projects for a secondary school. According to electors' decision Jegenstorf, Lyss and Roggwil are to have a Commune Hall. The Langenthal electorate accepted a credit to erect a transformer station. Proposals have also been put forward for a Youth Parliament.

At Langnau in the Emmental the citizens voted the required credit to build a water-purifying plant and a bridge over the Ilfis. Langnau is one of the Swiss communes whose citizens even have to pass the annual accounts.

The extraordinary commune assembly of Spiez rejected an Initiative for the protection of the "Schachenmatte" from being built over, but accepted a new plan

which provides for a free strip of 15 metres along the lakeside. The Spiez electorate accepted an expensive project for a new shooting range.

Thun's electors said "yes" to several proposals on two polling days in May and June. They included road corrections and the renewal of debenture loans of over five million francs, a partial revision of the service and salary regulations, as well as the extension of the Neufeld school area.

JURA BERNOIS

The Jura Bernois is the mainly French-speaking region in the north-west of the Canton, roughly beyond the line created by the Lake of Biemme and the southern part of the Canton of Solothurn which protrudes deeply into that of Berne. It consists of seven administrative districts, Porrentruy in the far north-eastern corner, Franches Montagnes with its chief town of Saignelégier bordering on to the Canton of Neuchâtel in the south, Courtelary which includes the St. Imier Valley, the district of La Neuveville on the Lake of Biemme, further north the two towns of Moutier and Delémont and lastly the German-speaking town of Laufen close to the Cantons of Solothurn and Baselland. It is in this part of the Canton of Berne that a movement has been active with the aim of establishing a separate Canton. This movement must not be confused with the "Association Romande" in Berne, whose members are largely federal civil servants. This group made intensive studies last autumn regarding the position of the French-speaking civil servant in the service of the Confederation. There are certain difficulties, especially as the Romand is more reluctant to leave his part of the country and generally does not learn the Swiss dialects. So naturally in the federal service and various parliamentary commissions which are mainly stationed in Berne and other German-speaking parts, the French-speaking element is sometimes a little neglected. Berne now has a French school which should encourage French-speaking civil servants to transfer to the capital.

The separatist movement in the Canton of Berne has quite different aims and objects, though even it objected to the resolution which the Congress of Dijon on French ethnical questions ("Ethnie Française") took in June and which asked that the integrity of the French-speaking peoples like the Walloons, the French-speaking citizens of Brussels, the inhabitants of the Jura and the Aosta Valley be not interfered with. Let there be no mistake, the Jurassiens are good Swiss and there is no doubt some justification in their contention that their culture, spiritual inheritance, church and economics, literature and art are different from those of the rest of the Canton of Berne. There are some institutions which are purely cultural, such as the "Institut Jurassien des Sciences, Lettres et des Arts". There is the "A.D.I.J." (Association for the defence of Jurassien interests) which concerns itself with Jura problems. For instance, it has recently asked for a north-south rail connection through the Jura, joining Muttentz with Domodossola, which would relieve the heavy St. Gotthard traffic. This organisation most strongly condemns the militant actions of the "Front de Libération Jurassien" which fights with fair and unfortunately also foul means against the "domineering rulers in Berne". The other separatist movement, the "Rassemblement Jurassien", also seeks autonomy but by democratic and legal means. It organises meetings and festivals and fights for what it believes to be the Jurassien rights. For instance, it strongly protested against the deposition of a military officer

(Colonel Berberat) who had taken an active part in a separatist demonstration whilst on leave and in "civvies". But this organisation, too, deplors the actions of the "Front de Libération Jurassien".

Another organisation, called "Pro Jura", also condemns the ways and means the "Libération" uses, and its new president has recently made an appeal for a general "armistice" including government, political parties, Cantonal Parliament, Church and Press.

And finally, there is a union of Jura patriots, "L'Union des Patriotes Jurassiens", which is an anti-separatist movement, and the communiqué which it issued at its annual meeting last October puts the whole problem in a nutshell. It refers to the two polls on 5th July 1959 and 27th May last year in which the Jura people decisively opposed the practices of the separatist movements by defeating four Initiatives with a two-thirds majority. This showed, the resolution stated, that the Jura did not want a separation; on the contrary, it wished that all agitation should be stopped.

(Based on reports received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

EXPO 1964

The Geneva firm, Infranor, was awarded first prize, together with the jury's congratulations, for its entry in the competition for ideas for the presentation of "Light" in the Energy Section of the Electricity Group at the Swiss National Exhibition 1964. The prize-winning project consists of an illuminated construction some 33 feet high depicting a tungsten atom out of which sinusoids in the six colours of the spectrum, violet, blue, green, yellow, orange and red, spiral vertically upwards; above the spirals are rectangular elements in the same colours, the whole topped by a triangle of white light. Through the transparent walls, this illuminated device will be visible from both sides of the building. A striking feature of this original decorative element will be the dynamism of its lines, especially the upward movement of the coloured lights. It promises to be one of the attractions at the 1964 National Exhibition in Lausanne.

[O.S.E.C.]

NEW SWISS MAPS

The Federal Office of Topography in Berne has been able to continue the issue of the new Swiss map on a scale 1:50,000. It will take a few more years for the series to be completed. New sections of the map of the alpine regions (1:25,000) have been published, and the new sections of the 1:100,000 map have been improved by special road markings, which should interest motorists. Other new publications are "Icao Aerial Map of Switzerland" (1:500,000), afforestation maps and section two of the Aletschglacier map.

[A.T.S.]

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