

A city against its countryside

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In the summer of 1833, armed men from the city of Basel marched into the countryside to suppress a rebellion of the rural population. On 3 August, at the Hülftenschanze near Pratteln, they met the rural militia and were defeated with heavy losses. Within weeks, the diet of the Confederation decided that the canton of Basel should be divided into two half-cantons: Basel-Stadt, comprising the city and a few villages on the right bank of the Rhine, and Basel-Landschaft, comprising the rest of the rural territory, with its capital at Liestal.¹ The division, which was meant to be provisional, has lasted to this day.

The roots of the conflict reached back for centuries. Part A described how the city acquired its rural territory by purchase and pledge. Part C then showed how the ribbon merchants of the city organised the work of thousands of rural weavers under the putting-out system. Although the Helvetic Revolution of 1798 had granted political equality to the rural population, the restoration of 1814 gave the city a dominant position again. Under the constitution of the restoration, the city, with a minority of the population, held a majority of the seats in the cantonal parliament. The economic dependence of the weavers on the city merchants added to the political grievance.

When the July Revolution of 1830 in Paris set off a wave of liberal movements across Europe, the rural population of Basel demanded equal representation. The city refused, negotiations failed and the conflict escalated into armed clashes in 1831 and 1832. The diet of the Confederation tried to mediate, without success. The defeat of the city troops in August 1833 finally forced a decision. Once federal troops had occupied the canton, the diet imposed the separation.

1 Notes

1. On the conflict between the city of Basel and its countryside (Basler Wirren, 1830–1833), the battle at the Hülftenschanze on 3 August 1833 and the decision of the diet on the separation of the canton (August 1833), see HLS, articles "Basler Wirren" and "Basel-Landschaft". Dates to be verified. ↩

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