

BRETON NEWS



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BRITTANY QUARTERED *****

"La Bretagne Ecartelée, by Yann Fouéré, has just been published by Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1 rue Palatine, Paris 6. Price 9NF. Available from STUDI HA LENN, 5 rue A. Bartholdi, Paris 15.

This book of 192p. (140 x 225 mm) is the first to give in French an inside account of the activities of the Breton political movement (from 1938 to 1944) and of the repression in the following years. "A synthesis, written without vindictiveness.... displays the whole spectrum of the movement, from the most conciliating regionalists to the most uncompromising separatists ... tells the vicissitudes of the war years and of the following repression : to what extent did the Germans help or oppose the Breton movement? To what extent did the latter collaborate? What exactly was Bezen Perrot? Which were the real motives of the post-war repression? The answers crop up, supported by facts, figures and documents."

These remarks are taken from a review in L'Avenir, 1-3-62. We give a more detailed account of the book in view of the important issues it deals with.

THE AUTHOR and his part in Brittany's revival.

Yann Fouéré, a doctor-at-law, with a diploma from the School of Political Science, was the mainspring in the action which secured, in the 2 or 3 years preceding the war, a vote by the majority of the municipalities of the Breton-speaking area in favour of the teaching of this language. From 1941 to 1944, he was the political editor of 2 dailies by means of which he contributed towards lifting the veil of ignorance thrown by the French agencies over the Breton problem. He soon became the general-secretary of the "Comité Consultatif de Bretagne", an assembly without counterpart in the rest of the French state, created by the Prefect of Brittany in mid-1942 to advise him on the region's cultural and administrative problems. The concessions which he obtained from the Vichy regime, one hour a week of Breton in schools, admission of the language into exams, training of and financial allowance to the teachers of Breton, priority to Breton-speaking officials in appointments to Lower Brittany, etc. were for him only a beginning. His aim was the progressive creation of a particular Breton administration. The anti-Breton reaction was going to throw all that down in the summer of 1944.

BRITTANY AND GERMAN POLICY. Yann Fouéré and his followers demanded only inter nal autonomy for Brittany within the French state. He thus distinguishes himself from the nationalists who claim full national rights for Brittany, i.e. in a world where few nations are really independent, as large a measure of control as possible over its own affairs, without regard for French sovereignty claims, by means of a Breton government.

In his account of those crucial years, he gives his own testimony of the stand taken by the nationalist leaders, Debauvais, Mordrel, Lainé, Delaporte. According to him, a francophile tendency prevailed upon Hitler in the Summer of 1940 to seek collaboration with France and withdraw support from the Breton nationalists who, as a result were not only not allowed to set up a Breton state, but also were handicapped in their action by the Germans under pressure from Vichy. The policy of collaboration is thus linked with the departure of Debauvais and Mordrel from the head of the party in the autumn of 1940. Under R. Delaporte's direction a neutralist line was adopted towards the Franco-German quarrel, and a more conciliatory attitude towards France developed.

BEZEN PERROT. Lainé refused to deal with any French party as they would always be fundamentally opposed to the Breton nationalist aims, and trusted the necessity which would ultimately compel the Germans to crack up the structure of the French state, when, at the end of the war, the French, collaborators or not, would be made aware that their Germanic Eastern and Northern provinces were to be permanently lost.

The allegations of German opposition to the Breton movement are contested by other observers. It will be recognised that from 1940 to 1944 all open Breton activities could have been banned, had the Germans not repeatedly intervened to foil the many attempts from the Vichy government to arrest Breton leaders and suppress their propaganda and organisations.

In this book the nationalist character of Bezen Perrot, the military unit created by C. Lainé, is well recognised and attested by quotations: see for instance p. 114 the speech in Tübingen. Unfortunately these excellent passages are marred at times by a somewhat tendentious presentation, as in the account of the bestowal of military honours at the funeral of J.M. Perrot, (Ref. Breiz Atao, Spring 1944).

REPRESSION.

Yann Fouéré compares the 1944-46 repression of the whole Breton movement with the 1793-96 Terror applied in Brittany by the French centralists against Chouans and Federalists alike. The French authorities used the pretext of collaboration to nip off the Breton resurgence and claimed that nobody was being prosecuted for his Breton ideas. Y. Fouéré proves on the contrary that the real crime was to have attempted to break up or prevent the unity of France. It was high treason to have advocated setting up a Breton state, whether by conciliatory methods or by force, but it was also treasonable to have worked during the German occupation - as well as prior to it - for internal autonomy (Fouéré's case, p. 128-31), and even to have continued to defend the Breton language (R. Hemon's case, p. 132-36.)

The book gives an interesting account of the investigation carried out in 1947 by a delegation of the Welsh National Eisteddfod at the invitation of the French government into the accusation of anti-Breton repression. The conclusion contained in the report was that, to have had a Breton activity of whatever order, was for the French government a sufficient motive for persecution.

Y. Fouéré ends with a plea that the French state reform its structure, recognising the existence of the real national entities which persist within its borders. This would be a convincing step in the direction of European integration.

FEDERAL REGIONS IN CASE OF A PUTSCH ?

In view of the political deterioration and the increasing anarchy in France, political organisations of the Nord département have decided, in the event of a violent overthrow of the French government which for the fourth time in 25 years would change the political regime of the country without prior consultation of the population, to apply the 1872 Treveneuc law and transform the département into a Federal Region.

The leaders of the Movement for the Organisation of Brittany, assembled in a National Council at St-Brieg on February 18th, decided to follow the example and asked the General Councils of the 5 Breton départements to meet immediately in such an event, proclaim Brittany a federal region, take charge of its administration and insure the protection of its inhabitants' interests, until the return of legality and the vote of a new constitution. Ref. L'Avenir. 1-3-62.

THE LAND FOR THE FARMERS

800 farmers met on the 8th of February at Fouenant and an equal number on the 9th in Karaez (Western Brittany) to demonstrate against the acquisition of farms by non-professionals.

The farmers have been asking for a professional card for the past 10 years as a protection against exploitation by absentee-landlords. "I am afraid we shall have to get it by force, not by means of resolutions", said A. Gourveneg in Karaez. He expressed his wish to see the multiplication of similar meetings, but in a "less peaceful way", and he warned solicitors against certain practices. "We shall boycott the sale of farms as at Fouenant, occupy solicitors' offices as well as the land bought by non-farmers. We don't want people who are not farmers to get hold of the land". And he added that drastic reforms would have to be made, which will not please everybody. Ref. L'Avenir. 1-3-'62.

READY WITH THE BILL.

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The General Assembly of C.E.L.I.R. is due to meet at Lorient from 9.30 to 13 hrs on the 16th of April. The agenda includes:

1) the adoption of the bill for a law-programme for Brittany (2nd Breton Plan), the various sections of which have now been completed by different working groups and are being integrated into a general report by Mr. Philiponmeau, chairman of the CELIB Commission for Economic Expansion.

2) Regional Action: role, structure and organisation of CELIB (Committee for the Study and Coordination of Breton Interests.) 971 municipal Councils have to date voted in favour of a special law for Brittany. Ref. Vie Bretonne March 1962.

The bill mentioned above will include a Breton Cultural Plan, detailed of which are given in the same publication.

Several farmers from the Loudeac area (Central Brittany) will be tried in Paris for having barred railways with their tractors last June. The Supreme Court has ordered that the case be taken from the St-Brieg Court, for reasons of public security. The same procedure is being applied to the case of a number of farmers from the Pont'n Abad area (S.W.) Ref. L'Avenir 1-3-62, and Telegramme. 10-1-62.