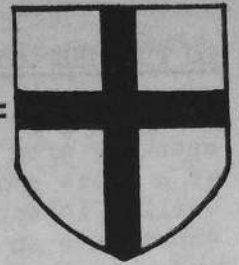


BRETON NEWS



A Bulletin issued by
The Breton Information Bureau

All correspondence to be addressed to LINTON, Fassaroe Lane, Fassaroe, BRAY, Co. Wicklow

No. 10

Dublin, Eire.

November 1960.

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO BACKWARDS. A law proposal relative to the teaching of "regional" languages was submitted last July to the Commission for Cultural matters of the French National Assembly. Its humble aims were to obtain 1) a slight improvement of the 1951 law which allowed the teaching of these languages, in "deplorable" conditions; 2) the admission of Breton as a second language to the oral part of secondary school examinations.

The proposal was provisionally rejected by the commission. Reasons: overloaded programs, equating of these languages with patois, etc... As a French proverb says: if you want to drown your dog you accuse him of rabies. Among the fiercest opponents were Parisians and a Guadeloupian.

The proposal was to be discussed again by the Commission after the reconvening of Parliament in October. If accepted, it would go to the full assembly. If successful there, it would face the Government - and the Superior Council of Education which is the Eminence Grise in such matters. If the proposal was again rejected, it would have to wait for a new Assembly. Surely there is no urgency?

In 1937 a similar proposal had succeeded in weathering the cape of the Commission for Cultural matters. But it was wrecked in Government waters, That contributed to many Bretons' determination to take up arms during the war.

The question is asked in the October issue of "Breiz": Is it for the representative of Guadeloupe to decide the fate of the Breton language or for the Bretons? Breiz is the organ of the folkloric movement whose leaders have chosen to abstain from politics. The Bretons who dare answer the question agree with the editorial of Ar Vro No. 7: We must give priority to political action, the success of which conditions all the rest.

A measure of the success which is to be expected for the new law proposal can be obtained from the following informations.

WHERE DOES BRETON COME IN? The "Bulletin de l'Education nationale" (12-9-60) and the French "Journal Officiel" (13-9-60) publish the decree relative to the languages allowed for the optional tests in the Leaving Certificate examination. They are: german, amharic, english, arabic (literary and dialectal), armenian, berber, bulgarian, cambodgian, chinese, danish, spanish, finnish, modern greek, hungarian, italian, japanese, laotian, etc. (13 other languages). No breton.

A WAR OF ATTRITION. In 1959, the one and only official incentive to the teaching of Breton in schools - a hard bone - was already taken away when new regulations concerning examinations were introduced and the optional test for "regional" languages was suppressed. Mass protests followed (see Breton News, No. 1) and the Minister for Education declared that the measure did not affect the Breton test. We now hear again that the optional tests for regional languages have been suppressed in Secondary School Examinations (Decrees of Sept. 12, 1960 and of Sept. 21st, 1960).

So the 1959 demonstrations only happened too soon! The report will confirm a remark by R. Hemon in his book "La Langue Bretonne et ses Combats," Editions de Bretagne, La Baule, 1947: "It is clear, that in Government circles, they hope to gain time, to tire the Bretons' patience." "But, he added, in this they are mistaken."

DO THE BRETONS CARE FOR THEIR LANGUAGE?

During the past 9 months a dozen of stage performances known as "beilhadegou" (evening gatherings) have met with such a success in the Breton speaking area of Tregor that it is possible without any exaggeration to speak of a craze among the population. These performances which remind of the Gaelic Oicheanta Seanchais with their songs, monologues and humorous "sketches" constitute an astonishing demonstration of the vitality of the Breton language and a test of the attachment of the common people to their language. Similar gatherings have been equally successful in Breton Cornwall, not to speak of the Nozvezhieu laouen among the Bretons of Paris, inspired by the Welsh "Noson lawen" or merry nights.

The success is due to the zeal as well as to the spirit of cooperation of people who socially and ideologically often belong to different classes. The organisers represent cultural groups with different objectives, but they are here united by their common devotion to their language.

The sympathetic and exalting welcome given to the beilhadegou proves beyond dispute that the Breton language does not occupy its legitimate place among the public activities of Brittany. These gatherings answer a deep need, and the organisers must be careful not to disappoint a public which expects and demands more performances and renewed programs. There lies an opportunity to make use of the rich store of modern plays in Breton, so far known only to the readers of Breton language periodicals and kept concealed from the overwhelming majority of the Bretons by a system of education which ignores this language and a propoganda which represents it as an uncultivated "patois". The next step should be the constitution of theatrical groups capable of presenting high standard productions.

The organisers must be congratulated for providing the Breton cultural movement with the proof that the masses are ready to support it. The importance of this testimony can be appreciated from a quotation of R. Hemon, the leader of the Breton literary movement: "It is essential for the future of the language to win the support of the people during the coming 25 years". This was written about ten years ago. R. Hemon was saying recently that the evening gatherings could go a long way to counteract the invasion of the French language and culture in this age of radio and TV.

A first record (43 rpm) by some of the best beilhadegou singers has been released by the firm Mouez Breiz (Kemper). It is presented as a "historical document". Ref. Avenir, Oct. 1960 (excellent articles in Breton on the same subject in Barr Heol, Ar Bed Keltiek, in French in Breiz).

SPILL A LAND OF HOPE.

We don't know how much Brittany has profited from decentralisation during the first nine months of 1960 - trade union protests indicate that there has been precious little. For 1959 there are recently published official figures ("Decentralisation et localisation industrielle en 1959):

Number of industrial permits to build granted and number of employments thereby created: none in Finistere ($\frac{5}{4}$ of a million inhabitants).

Operations of industrial decentralisation carried out or decided upon: none in Loire-Atlantique and Morbihan: one in Finistere: two in Cotes-du-Nord.

Employments thereby created: none in the first 2 departements, less than 100 in the 3rd, less than 200 in the 4th.

Factory buildings available: 5 in Morbihan, 10 in C-d-N, about 15 in L-A, and F., about 20 in Ille-et-Vilaine. Ref. l'Avenir October, 1960.

HAS A REGION ANY RIGHTS?

In our No. 9 issue we mentioned the Rueff-Armand Committee appointed officially to investigate the ways to remove the obstacles to France's economic expansion. We considered only one aspect of their report. In "l'Avenir", Oct. 1960, we read that Prime Minister Debré presided the Committee and signed the report. The statement that "the organisation and administrative division of France have given satisfaction for 150 years" could well be his. It certainly does not admit any correlation between the strong centralisation of government and the return to waste of 1/10 of the French territory in that period. Debre himself, speaking on the 18th September in a small town of Central France in a department which looses its population at the yearly rate of one in 50, urged his listeners to rejoice at developments in other areas, even if theirs remained undeveloped. "All that is in France belongs to France... There is no Brittany, Lorraine, or Languedoc when it comes to national achievements."

The Rueff-Armand report also insists on the necessity to favour only such regional schemes and projects as will be useful at national and international levels.

At the beginning of the year, Debré had urged his associates to "populate the Centre of France and take people away from Brittany". This statement caused an outcry and was promptly denied officially.

"The displacement of populations", writes l'Avenir, "though not openly mentioned, is certainly implied in the search for a record productivity. We have reasons to believe ... that the authors of the report had Brittany in mind when they stated that the actual distribution of enterprises and of population among the regions of France does not in many important cases correspond to the conditions for the maximum national expansion."

They admit that it might be useful to help regional economies to regain their balance as strictly free competition would lead to the concentration of Europe's essential activities between the Seine and the Weser. That was for the Government to decide however.

In l'Avenir's view a centralised State was justified only if it enabled each of its regions to attain to a higher prosperity than they would if left to their own devices. The State should be an arbitrator between the regions. But a strong government coupled with overall centralisation results in tyranny. Brittany's only chance lay in a regional administration for her regional interests.

A different view was taken by Y. Olier writing in Breton in "Ar Vro", March 1960. "If Brittany is considered only as a region, as a part of France, she has no definite rights: a part has no claim on the whole, but has to serve the whole. France may consider it in her interest - as in fact she does - to break up the Breton people and to eradicate their language. As Frenchmen, the Bretons have to bow to this superior interest."

As a nation however, Brittany has the same rights as the other European nations: if not independence from them, at least equality with them; in any case the right to self-government."

THE METHODS OF PHENOMENOLOGY are applied by Abenna in Ar Vro No. 7 to show how the French have managed to bring to national self-denial large sections of the Breton population. We shall quote some interesting passages in a later issue. The conclusion is that a regionalist movement which concerns itself excessively with the folkloric vestiges of a shattered Breton order while protesting of its respect and loyalty to the very power that destroyed it, is a historical absurdity.

PERSONALITY CULT. It was announced recently in the press (The Télégramme de Brest devoted even a front page picture to the thing!) that a child had been "christened" DE GAULLE in Paris, with official agreement. But historic Breton names, such as the name of Guryan, the Breton leader who fought the Danish invaders, are still refused. (from a correspondent, 3-10-60).

RECOGNISE THE BRETON PERSONALITY. In the "Open letter to General De Gaulle" tens of thousand copies of which were distributed when he travelled to Brittany, we note this passage:
"This summer our Breton national flag was present everywhere, acclaimed, adopted, and recognised. You could now recognise the Breton personality as you have done for Algeria, Martinique and so many other counties which are already or will soon be independent. We proclaim that, apart from the question of skin, we are as "different" as our coloured brothers; we are, if not quite as intelligent certainly just as "evolved" as they are and our national character is even more marked than theirs."

WHEN TO DISOBEY. In the editorial of LABOUR, August-September, 1960, G. Toublanc raises the question of obedience to French laws in Brittany. In international law, the Bretons can refuse this obedience. "The treaty of 1532 defining Brittany's autonomy having been unilaterally denounced by France, the Parliament of Brittany in October 1789 declared all French laws void in Brittany unless constitutionally validated by the Breton National Assembly (States-General). This assembly however had been disbanded by French Troops at the beginning of 1789 and did not meet again. Brittany's rights proceed from the rights of Nationalities and these rights are internationally accepted - even by France - as imprescriptible.

"However the facts do not correspond to these principles and the Breton attitude to French laws is whether to submit to force or not.

"For centuries, political thinkers like Gandhi have universally proclaimed the citizens' right and duty to disobey infamous laws imposed by brutal force."

"The French government's action separating the Nantes area "administratively" from the 4 other Breton départements, in spite of mass protests, is in line with the old project of partition of our country in the same way as happened in Ireland and Wales with the "6 Counties" and Monmouth.

"Heads of family who wanted to give Breton and Celtic names to their children have often been refused this right by the French officials and having themselves refused to give any other names, are now deprived of their family allowances (the children are left unregistered).

"Herve Bougeant refused to fight the Algerian people. The State bowed, (after keeping him a few months in jail), but sent him as a teacher to Algeria. Other young Bretons refused to wear the French uniform and went into hiding or into exile, breaking with their families and profession, risking if caught jail sentences and torture.

"We have in our columns refused to follow the general instruction not to talk about the French concentration camps and suffer daily the worst insults as a result.

Last Spring, the young recruits in Kemperle tore a French flag and replaced it by a "Gwenn-ha-Du", since then it was noted, during the summer festivals in particular, that wherever tricolor flags were hoisted, as many policemen would be present. On the contrary, the Breton flags float and rise in the sky with the cheers of the crowds.

"That also is disobedience. The way of disobedience is open again in Brittany."

COMMON RESISTANCE OF FACTORY AND FIELD WORKERS: For the second time in 6 months in the Loire-Atlantique, the representatives of the large workers Trade Unions and of the Fédération of Farmers' Unions published in September a joint declaration. They state that the Government's economic policy is in reality that of the big financial groups. Rejecting De Gaulle's gratuitous promises of things to come "within 20 years", they asked for concrete achievements. For the 1st time in Finistere, factory workers and teachers Unions joined with the Farmers Unions to sign a declaration in which stress was laid on the widespread discontent and hardship resulting from the fall in the purchasing power of salaried people and farmers alike, the extension of unemployment, the collapse of prices at production level without any reduction at consumption level, the prospect of unemployment for the young people in the near future, the rural exodus.

They claimed for:

- a fair remuneration of the work of those who produce the wealth of the country
- industrial expansion in the area;
- productive and social investments (building of schools, houses, hospitals, road work, harbour installations);
- a reform of the distribution circuits, so as to reduce the discrepancy between producers' and consumer's prices;
- a reorientation of the economic policy towards peace and social progress by reducing unproductive expenses (no H-Bomb).

A communiqué by the Fougères branch of the C.F.T.C. Union states that decentralisation is left to the good will of the employers; it is not carried out according to any plan that would take the needs of the working population into account. "During the last 2 years the working class has borne the cost of an economic recovery which benefits only the financial groups.. The present liberalism in economic matters does not allow a true decentralisation, considers the workers as instruments of production, leaves them little power."

Similar accusations were contained in the protests made by the workers of the Morbihan industrial centres (Henbont, Lorient) who asked for new employment in Brittany.

ARE THEY TOUGHER? An inquiry conducted recently at the French Students Sanatorium revealed that 25 out of 26 T.B. patients from the Paris, Marseille, Toulouse, Metz, Valenciennes and Poitiers military regions were relieved definitively from the obligation to join the army later, whereas in six cases out of six from the Breton military region only temporary exemption from the obligation was granted. It appears that the procedure is systematic on the part of the Rennes military authorities. Ref. BREMLZ, Sept. '60, special edition for the Breton Students. Brittany lost 1 inhabitant in 14 in the first world war, while for France the proportion was 1 in 28. The Breton regiments were the first to be sent to fight the Algerian insurgents. Brittany is a good reservoir for the French infantry. That may be one of the reasons why France holds the "province" so dear.