

BRETON NEWS



A Bulletin issued by
The Breton Information Bureau

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No. 8

DUBLIN. ÉIRE.

AUGUST 1960

Our next issue will appear on the 1st of October 1960.

Against the Partition of Brittany

Among the 21 administrative regions recently created by a French reform, there is one called "Brittany". It is in fact Brittany less the Loire-Atlantique département (Nantes).

This area has been attributed to the region of "Loire-Océan" which includes also Le Mans and Angers. A well documented pamphlet published by the Movement for the organisation of Brittany, "Against the Partition of Brittany", gives the reasons why the Bretons will not accept this decision. We can only give a brief summary of it. Ethnologically: the coastal zone of Loire-Atlantique was one of the bases for the Breton settlement in the 5-7th centuries. Breton was still spoken in some places there at the beginning of this century.

Historically, Nantes was for 4 or 5 centuries the capital of independent Brittany. The 1st Breton University was founded by the Duke Francis II at the end of the XVth century in Nantes. The representatives of this town were with those of Rennes and St-Malo the most resolute in defending Brittany's freedom and integrity against the French kings and the Revolution.

Culturally. The folklore of Loire-Atlantique belongs to that of Upper Brittany. The whole area of Nantes-St-Nazaire participates through numerous Celtic Circles in the lively folkloric movement of the last 10 years. Many urban councils have asked repeatedly for the teaching of Breton.

Economically, the industry of such a vast rural area as represented by the official "Brittany", with a high labour surplus, can be developed only around an already established industrial complex such as provided by Nantes and St-Nazaire. It was thanks to the influence of Nantes that industries such as canning, developed along the Southern coast of Brittany. Nantes and St-Nazaire should have a capital role to play in the economic renovation of the rest of Brittany. Nantes has undoubtedly commercial interests to the East and South, but they could be safeguarded by agreements between Chambers of Commerce. There is no such live connection between Le Mans, in the Paris orbit, Angers, in itself a minor metropolis, and Nantes, which owes its prosperity to the Loire estuary and the sea, as between Nantes and the 4 départements of this truncated "Brittany". Cutting Nantes from them in economic planning (the main pre-occupation of the reform) amounts to depriving them of the only industrial centre capable of providing them with the necessary stimulus, skill and capital for their industrialisation.

The administrative reform has shown once more that French governments are not concerned with the Bretons' interests.

Holiday-makers, if you are going to Brittany, get in touch with "The Breton Tourist Association", Ker Arvor, 21/23 R. Melinière, NANTES 1 C. The only such association covering all of Brittany.

SGRAFFITI. "Large tar inscriptions appeared on different walls in Kemper during the Festival of Cornwall, in particular on the walls of the Préfecture (seat of the representative of the French Government)", announces "Ouest-France" (26-7-60). O.-F. appears scandalised and modestly avoids to tell what the inscriptions were. We have learned it though. The slogan "ALGERIE FRANÇAISE" had previously been painted in white on walls in various places in Brittany. Surely Ouest-France found nothing vulgar in that. But unknown hands came and painted (in black!) LIBRE (free) over FRANÇAISE and ut BRETAGNE beside ALGERIE. The slogan became:
ALGERIE, BRETAGNE FRANÇAISE LIBRES

That was of course very bad taste!

THE SCANDALOUS TREATMENT OF THE BRETON PLACE-NAMES

Strong protests are being voiced in Brittany against the distortion of place names, in particular on the sign-posts which are now being erected at every cross-road. All newspapers and periodicals concerned with the respect for the Breton name are campaigning against this treatment and for a proper transcription of names which are not French but Breton. The magazine "Ar Soner" has published a booklet by a topography engineer,

Y.P. BOUCHER, which gives numerous examples of ridiculous "adaptations" of our "barbaric" vocables to the genius of the French language.

Here are some of them:

Kroaz-Rent (Cross-road) becomes Croissant (Crescent), ar Salver (The Saviour, Calvary) La Salle Verte (The Green Hall), Ker Puns (Farm of the Well) Ker Puce (The Villa of the Flea). There is much more humorous: Garzh Mari (Mary's Hedge) turns out as Gras-Marie (Fat Mary?) and Garzh ar Saoz (The Englishman's Hedge) has been trimmed into Garce ar Sausse (The hussy of the Sausse??). There is no doubt, that is good taste for you, with a touch of Rabelaisian or rather Gallic wit!

Bretons are perhaps too serious. They will never understand properly the superiority of French culture! Y.P. Boucher and a number of other people have written to the officer-in-charge of the Department of Bridges and Roads in "Finistere" asking that the inscription of place names be carried out by taking due account of the rules of Breton spelling.

This gentleman has given an answer which is typical of the underhand and relentless hostility of the French authorities towards the Breton language: 1) The road user is not necessarily a Breton speaker or even a Breton. 2) Everybody knows that there are four Breton dialects; that pronunciation varies from place to place....

All fallacious pretexts, as Yann Moger in "l'Avenir" (July 1960) points out: 1) The place names are always written in the language of the country in which they are situated -- even in France, one does not write Nouillorque for New York although it is so pronounced. (The fact is that Bretons are treated like a subject people.) 2) There are dialects in every language including French, but there is also a unified Breton spelling as there is a unified French spelling. The unified Breton spelling is used in all nationally minded publications, but, typically again, it is not recognised by the Rennes University whose authorities do all in their power to boycott it (by refusing permission to use textbooks in this spelling in State schools, for instance). By favouring the parcelling of dialects, the language is further deprived of its value as a common bond between its native speakers.

The Balance of Europe. On May 31st. 1960, General de Gaulle referred to Western Europe as the indispensable condition of the world balance. "Europe cannot contribute to the equilibrium of the world unless it is well balanced itself", replies the editor of "Ar Vro" (June 1960). And it will not be well balanced so long as all its nationalities are not recognised. France has avoided a spreading of the Algerian war by de-colonising her former possessions in Western and Central Africa. Similarly the organisation of Europe on the basis of its nationalities will put an end to the internal strife which has so often ruined it. A number of States have understood it: Yugoslavia and Switzerland are federal States; Denmark and Austria practise towards their minorities a very liberal policy. And others also. But the Westerners of Western Europe, England, France and Spain, have not yet, or hardly, begun an evolution which is bound to come. We Bretons will combine our efforts with the other nationalities of Western Europe to bring about the solution of peace, progress and wisdom."

Criticism of "Breton News". A Breton teacher has pointed out some inaccuracies in the article "Breton at the School Door", published in our June issue.

We wrote that the teaching of Breton in the public schools was allowed only "outside the regular teaching hours" and that "no training course is provided for the teachers".

The law states that "any teacher who will apply may be authorised to devote an hour per week from the directed activities to the elementary teaching of the local languages and dialects, as well as to the study of selected samples of the corresponding literature". Two or three hours of the time-table come under these directed activities. They may include the initiation to various hobbies, drawing, subjects in any case outside the prescribed curriculum.

The law states also that optional courses will be organised as far as possible in the training colleges. Much seems to be left to the good will of the directors of such colleges as well as to the private "enterprise" of the occasional teacher. We learn that such an optional course is provided in a training college in St-Brieuc, where many students have written end-of-course monographs in Breton.

According to information received so far, Breton lessons are given only in 3 national schools. The general attitude of parents and teachers is the same as towards physical training and drawing: the subjects are not on the examinations list and therefore distract the pupils from the drive to get results. The conclusion is: the Breton language must conquer its right as the official language in the area where it is spoken.

The 1951 law is a sham. New propositions of law were tabled in May by representatives of Brittany and Occitania (area of the Oc language including most of the South of the French territory). The proposals aim at a more effective teaching of the "regional" languages. The law of 1951, by leaving aside the methodical organisation of the teaching and failing to give proper recognition of these languages at examinations, has proved a sham.