

BRETON NEWS



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All correspondence to be addressed to 9, Br Cnoc Sion, Dromchonrach, Baile Atha Cliath 9, Eire

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A SEMINAR was organised by SKOURR AN DESKADUREZH VROADEL (the National Education Branch) in Gourin (August 10-25) with the aim of enabling young Bretons to accelerate their education. It was entirely in Breton. The intensive programme was strictly adhered to. There were five courses graded according to age and proficiency in Breton. Each day began with lessons (economics, history, literature, etc.) At 10.30 a.m. sessions under the direction of 4 different tutors or teachers were devoted to the study of Breton literature. In the afternoon there were conferences, lectures, discussions, exercises, examinations. The day closed with entertainments (theatre, music, dancing, poetry reading).

At least 20 people (mainly under 30 years of age) took a leading part in the execution of the programme.

On Sunday 18, there was a symposium between delegates of the Union Democratique Bretonne and of the Breton-language political magazine EMSAV. The three UDB men answered questions about their reasons for creating 5 years ago a Breton Socialist Party, their co-operation with the Breton sections of the French Leftist parties, their policy relative to the Breton language. ("The latter is very important but it is more urgent to win autonomy" - an attitude which is at variance with the U.D.B.'s principle that socialism and political freedom must be achieved simultaneously).

A NEW BRETON PARTY called SAV BREIZH was founded at the end of June during the commemoration of the Battle of Ballon. In the introduction of its manifesto it refers to the ills of the Breton collectivity, the decline of its economy and language and the heavy emigration. It explains in what way Brittany has become a colony of French imperialism: her economy is subordinated to foreign interests while her social and cultural life is characterised by the phenomenon of alienation.

"We reject reformism, i.e. a policy which would tackle the effects of under-development and not its causes ... Our aim is to create a social-democratic Breton State controlling all the under-developed sectors: the economic and cultural means now in the hands of the agents of colonialism as well as the key sectors of the Breton economy will be nationalised". Investments and planning will be subject to State control. Since liberalism increases inequality between two unequal competitors, the Breton economy and culture will have to be protected so long as they remain relatively weak. Capitalism is to be rejected. Breton life must be organised by integrating enterprises, and farms in particular, into co-operatives; these as well as educational institutions will administer themselves.

SAV BREIZH proclaims Breton as the first national language, the inalienable heritage of all Bretons. The party will welcome Breton membership of a "social federation" of the European peoples, but formally opposes the neo-liberalistic, imperialistic Common Market with its "Rhineward" shift of activity. "We fight the same struggle as the people of the Third World and all the oppressed national, racial, religious minorities.

SAV BREIZH proposes that the Breton State should immediately:

- defer payment of all the debts made by farmers in recent years to modernise their farms;
- exempt farmers in financial straits from tax payments for 5 years;
- enable workers to control any enterprises threatened with closure;
- organise the teaching of Breton language and history at all levels;
- recognise the right to use the Breton language in public life;
- develop autonomous universities in Nantes, Rennes and Brest.

ORTHODOX-CELTIC MONKS: Four Breton monks belonging to the order of Saint-Columban which is attached to the Patriarchate of Glastonbury (England) have set up a monastery in the hamlet of Seizh-Sant in the parish of Ar C'Houerc'hed, near Lannuon. They hold their religious services in a chapel which is used only once a year by the Catholic Church. They celebrate mass according to the Catholic rite, not in French as is generally the practice of the Catholic clergy in this predominantly Breton-speaking area but in Breton. This fact made them at first very popular, but people were soon warned by the bishop of Sant-Brieg that they are not recognised by Rome and the parish priest made an unsuccessful attempt to lock them out. By law the chapel belongs to the State. The "Seven Saints" who are honoured there have for some obscure reason also been adopted by the Moslems and the latter are allowed to use the chapel for their devotions. It is not clear yet if ecumenism can be stretched so far as to allow these Christian - Orthodox monks the same freedom.

One conclusion can be drawn from this episode: Although the Breton-speakers are conditioned to accepting without protest the exclusion of their language from public life, its use in the spiritual domain moves them deeply. Political considerations and a false conception of progressivism alone can explain the refusal of the catholic hierarchy to give its rightful share to Breton in liturgy.

BRETON LIBERATION FRONT ANNOUNCES TRUCE

In a communique issued on August 25 by the Free Brittany Committee (Bray, Ireland) on behalf of the F.L.B., this clandestine organisation announced that it would suspend its military operations "for a period before, during and after the forthcoming visit of President de Gaulle to Brittany". The statement went on:

"We shall thereby mark our sympathy for the attempts being made by the President of the French Republic to federalise France. If the General remains faithful to his historic mission, he cannot fail to bring to the Bretons, by means of the reforms he is preparing, the freedom which he has already granted the Algerians and which he claims for the French in Quebec".

It ends with a warning that if de Gaulle's will is opposed on this point the FLB will resume its operations and thus "show that our struggle will end only with Brittany's return to the society of free nations within a federated Europe".

The wording of this statement and the intentions it attributed to de Gaulle were surprising on the part of an organisation whose resort to violence arose from a loss of faith in the French government. An armistice was being declared before having secured more than a vague promise of decentralisation (see below). So far de Gaulle has not dissociated himself from the historic mission of the French State in Brittany, i.e. the destruction of our nationality.

In the night of August 31 to September 1, attacks by plastic explosive were carried out by F.L.B. commandoes against tax offices and police stations in Nantes (S.E.), Lannuon (N.), Rochefort-en-Terre, Questembert and Pluvigner (S.Brittany), causing considerable material damage. Six nights later, similar attacks were carried out against the tax offices of Rosporden and Pondaven as well as against three high tension electric poles in the Konkornev area (S.W.Brittany).

In a second statement issued by the Free Brittany Committee on September 15, affirming the authenticity of the communiqués relayed by it, the F.L.B. announced that "co-ordinated operations by our commandoes have been renewed against French State forces and installations in Brittany in order to make it clear that the Bretons will not be satisfied with half-measures from the regional reform being prepared by the French government. We expect the Head of the State to give to Brittany, in spite of all opposition, the same political, economic, social and cultural liberties as he claims for the Quebec Frenchmen".

Further, the FLB reiterates its decision to suspend attacks "until we hear General de Gaulle's declarations in Brittany and until the texts of the promised reforms are published. If freedom is not given to Brittany, the FLB will renew its military operations with increasing violence and frequency.

The poet and musician Glenmor, now famous for his compositions on the theme of freedom, was detained for 24 hours after his house in Gronvel (Central Brittany) was encircled by two lorry-loads of C.R.S. They searched and questioned but could not find any evidence for illegal activities on his part.

It was rumoured that De Gaulle would come to Kemper in October and make a momentous announcement. A new rumour says it will be in November.

EVOLUTION OF BRETON POPULATION

The first results of an official census carried out in March 1968 show that the population of Brittany increased from 3.199.954 in 1962 to 3.329.063 in 1968, i.e. by 4%. For the first time in a century, there is an increase (by 0.8%) in the Côtes-du-Nord department). Nearly half the increase occurred in the Loire-Atlantique department (around Nantes-St.Nazaire). The overall rate of increase in the French State was 7.1% so that Brittany's demographic importance has relatively diminished. More important, an analysis of the census figures according to cantons (of which there are about 220 in Brittany) shows that the midlands are losing people at a greater speed. In the four departments of the administrative "Region Brittany", 113 cantons recorded a decrease as against an increase in 57 cantons (mainly in and around Rennes, Lorient, Gwened, Kemper, Brest, St-Brieg, Lannuon). The detail of exchanges between Brittany and other areas is yet unknown, but the migratory balance has improved: from 1954 to 1962 there were annually 8400 more people leaving than (re)settling in "Region Brittany", while in the past 6 years the difference was annually 2200. It remains to be seen whether this improvement was due to a reduction in the number of young people emigrating or (most likely) to a large return movement among retired people. The number of "active" people, which determines the level of economic activity, showed a steady decline since 1900 and the 5th French Plan did not reckon with a reversal of the trend. (Le Peuple Breton, Nr 59)

THE CELTIC CONGRESS held in Fougères (Upper Brittany) from August 20th to August 25th was attended by about 500 people of whom a hundred came from Wales alone. It brought to the people of Fougères and its neighbourhood a realisation of the liveliness, wealth and beauty of the Celtic tradition, particularly in its linguistic and musical forms.

The Congress was devoted to lectures, singing, pipe and harp music, dances and excursions. One of the themes was the importance of a knowledge of history for the survival of the Celtic Nations. Fr. O Laoghaire, from Dublin delivered his contribution in Breton and in English. Ireland was represented also by a few accomplished dancers and singers.

One of the highlights of the Congress was the ceremony at St-Aubin-du-Cormier in memory of 6000 Bretons who died there in 1488 defending Brittany's independence. Participants were elated at the sight of "Bagad Lann-Doue", the pipe-band of the 41st Infantry Regiment (stationed in Rennes), leading the way and paying tribute as soldiers from Brittany to Breton soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice for their country (Will the Bagad next be allowed to parade in the annual commemoration of the victory of Ballon (845) through which Nomenoe laid the basis for 650 years of Breton independence? ...)

The Congress helped to make the Breton people more aware of their links with the other Celts. (Will the enthusiasm it generated lead them to query more insistently the official neglect and hostility which keeps the elements of this common culture out of the schools and Radio-TV programmes?)

Most of the Congress functions were conducted through the media of Breton and English. For participants who did not know these languages special lectures were provided in French to introduce them to the Breton language and history.

Judging from accounts in the most read daily of Brittany, better information is needed indeed. This newspaper would not admit that the Bretons had immigrated from Britain, but revealed that "in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries, the Welsh came frequently to Brittany". . "The Celtic Congress was held every 6th year in France". The air of Bro Gozh Ma Zadou is common to the Welsh and the Bretons, the paper said, without mentioning that it is the air of their national anthems. It did not report that the French Gaullist M.P. who chose the occasion for extolling the annexion of Brittany by France was booed with shouts of "Ar C'Hallaoued er-maez" (Frenchmen get out).

Mr.Freville, Mayor of Rennes, gave a reception to the oversea Celts and spoke of "people oppressed in their freedom of expression". Did he mean the Bretons? Mr. Freville, who comes from Northern France, distinguished himself in the prosecution of Breton nationalists in 1945, and was asking for police reinforcements to deal with the F.L.B. a few months ago. Hardly was the Congress over that one of its organisers was being questioned by police about some of the Irish participants.

Radio-Telefis Eireann, BBC-Wales and Deutsches Fernsehen covered the Congress. Recordings were made also for Rennes-Radio. ORTF seems to have been absent: for the French State, Celtic culture remains dangerous ...

FRENCH GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS CELIB PROPOSALS

On the 26th July, Mr. Couve de Murville and Mr. Olivier Guichard had a talk with a CELIB delegation and accepted its proposals for two four-lane motorways to be built in the North and in the South of Brittany - they would be completed by 1975; credits

to be granted to improve the central road Rennes-Kastellin; telephone system to be modernised; a wharf to be built in Brest to receive oil tankers of up to 200,000 tons by 1974 and a refinery to be constructed also in Brest to meet the petrol needs of Brittany (3-4 million tons a year); a deep water harbour to be built at Roskov to facilitate the export of agricultural products to England; a reduction in the price of high-tension electricity (for industrial purposes); financial help to new as well as established industries; tourism to be regarded as complementary to industry.

CELIB takes the credit for these promises, most of which will have to wait 4-6 years for their realisation. It is not admitted that the CABRO ultimatum or the F.L.B. attacks had anything to do with the government decision.

The annual volume of the Celtic League for 1968, titled: *Maintaining a national identity*, is a book of 168 pages, edited by Frank Thompson. Among its 36 contributors are leaders of the national movements of the six Celtic countries as well as expert commentators in economics and linguistics. Its contents are classified under three main headings: Celtic Nations to-day -- Celts and the Common Market -- The Celts in North America. It is available from the Secretary General of the Celtic League, 9 Br. Cnoc Sion, Ath Cliath 9, Eire. Price 15/-

It contains the following articles by Bretons: Political Importance of the Breton Language; Various Ways to Freedom; Brittany and the Regionalist Movement; the Common Market and Breton Agriculture; Common Market or N.A.F.T.A. ?; Ireland and the Common Market; Bretons in North America.

L'Europe aux Cent Drapeaux, by Yann Fouere. Available from L'Avenir, 6 rue de Siam, 29N-Brest. 16 francs. CCP Rennes 1132-86. About the transformation of Europe through a federalist revolution. Particularly interesting chapters: Federations succeed only on certain conditions; The abolition of sovereignty : a crime to be committed. In favour of monoethnic regions. "Un livre explosif." In French.

REGIONAL REFORM

The students' revolt and the general strike last May led De Gaulle to offer "participation" not only in universities and factories but also in regional development. Great hopes have been generated among regionalists by his promises of reforms which would devolve on provincial organs some of the powers accumulated in Paris during centuries of centralisation. Instructions were issued to the regional superprefects to invite local assemblies and organisations to express their wishes and views on various aspects of the proposed reform. The replies are to be collected, summarised and transmitted by the Superprefects to the Elysee Palace before the end of October. The impression is thus given that the French Government is anxious to establish a close contact with the population and will take the consensus of opinion in the different provinces into careful account before deciding what form and nature regional participation should have.

In Brittany, the "economic" as well as the "cultural" regionalists have responded eagerly to these hints of an impending recasting of the French State machine. Some moderate nationalists, believing perhaps that at last things are beginning to move in the right direction, have joined in the campaign of discussions and memoranda to General De Gaulle. The only advantage of all the agitation and talk may be that the Breton people will have been made to think more about the solution of their problems. If their expectations are not fulfilled they may press the French Government for further concessions. The danger is that before the inadequacy of the reform becomes evident Brittany will have been gravely weakened.

Official pronouncements concerning a regional reform have so far been scanty and rather contradictory.

In Lyon last March, de Gaulle had declared that there was no longer any need for the French State to pursue its multiseular policy of centralisation. "On the contrary it is from regional activities that her economic power will grow to-morrow". Did he realise that France's neighbours were able to forge ahead of her because they left greater freedom to their regions?

He spoke of regional participation at the end of the May crisis. Rumours went around, fostered apparently by highly placed officials, that he was determined to go very far towards giving real autonomy to the regions. He would be opposed by people like Debré who are afraid for French unity, and he needed co-operation from the people. The F.L.B. should give him a chance! In July, Couve de Murville sent out a circular to the 21 regional prefects urging them to consult some well-recognised administrative, political and socio-professional bodies in their areas. He warned however that "the institution of a federal State would be divorced from France's historic, sociological and human reality": no question for him of recasting the State machine.

In his press conference on September 9, de Gaulle said little about the regional reform. He spoke of the "ethnic character of the region" (*Le Peuple Breton*, Nr 59). But on October 7 Minister Jeanneney said that the dimensions of the region would be determined by four considerations: 1) economic space; 2) the radius of influence of

the main cities ("métropoles d'équilibre"); 3) requirements of the State administration; 4) and last: the notion of "territorial collectivity". Neo-capitalist and technocratic considerations took precedence over ethnical characteristics.

There is also the problem of the mode of election to the future "Regional Council". Will it be the universal suffrage or some kind of indirect representation? Minister Marcellin stated in Gwened (21 September) that half the assembly could be elected by the region's municipal councillors (they are chosen in each commune by universal suffrage) and the other half would be composed of representatives of the social and economic forces".

This second or third-degree representation would remove the regional council from too close a contact with the population. It would deprive it of a political character and of the authority to contest decisions by the central government. Jeanneney himself stated that genuine legitimacy arises only from universal suffrage. Such an assembly would resemble the present regional CODERS in which the mass of the people are not in the slightest involved as they are composed of "notables" whose advice is practically ignored by the Government.

WISHES AND VIEWS

One of the first to welcome the opportunity to give advice to the French Government was Mr. Martray, formerly secretary general of the Committee for the Study and Liaison of Breton Interests (CELIB). Mr. Martray, who resisted attempts to embark CELIB on political activity in the past four or five years on the ground that it would divide his organisation and who opted instead for "dialogue and persuasion", took the initiative of creating a Movement for Decentralisation and Regional Reform for the whole territory of the French State. In it economic and administrative bodies for the different regions are represented. At a Press Conference held in the centre Elysees-Bretagne on July 4, Mr. Martray proposed that the region be recognised as a judicial collectivity alongside the department and the commune, that it be endowed with real autonomy, an elected assembly with advisory attributions, a regional executive and a regional budget; real powers to be obtained through a partial devolution of those now held by the central government. He further recommended that regional finances should come from a transfer of part of the State budget, and that a regional civil service should be set up.

Mr. Martray assured the French Government that his movement wanted not to undermine the authority of the State nor "national" unity but on the contrary to reinforce them by establishing a link between State and Nation. They would accept the present limits of the 21 administrative regions, that is, in particular, the partition of Brittany: the reason being that wrangling about limits would cause long delays and it was better to see that the reform was adopted quickly. They left open the question of the mode of election and would accept the regional Superprefect (central government commissar) as head of the regional executive. The aim of the Movement was to prepare public opinion for a referendum on the regional reform (no mass demonstrations though!) and to be a partner in discussions with the government.

Representatives of the cultural organisations Kendalc'h, Bleun-Brug, Kuzul ar Brezhoneg, Al Leur Nevez, Bodadeg ar Sonerien, Gorsedd, met on August 14th in Kastell-nevez to discuss the proposed reform and agreed that it should recognise Brittany in its historic limits but they were prepared to admit the possibility that some districts within the economic orbit of Rennes and Nantes be included in the same region. They wanted a regional assembly endowed with advisory powers elected by universal suffrage, an executive responsible to it; this regional government being habilitated to deal with all problems concerning Brittany especially. Engleo Breiz urged the acceptance of the historic limits.

The Breton Section of a newly created Union for a Federal Constitution asks for the Bretons the right to determine the limits of Brittany and to choose its capital. Going further than the above mentioned organisations, it wants a budget built up from regional and State contributions, the creation of three autonomous universities, gradual bilingualism, the replacement of the division of Brittany into 5 departments by a division into three "lands" centred around Brest, Rennes and Nantes, the setting-up of semi State bodies for the realisation of big projects under the exclusive control of the region. More concretely, the Breton section proposes that the regional assembly be elected from lists including in each constituency a political, an economic, a social and a cultural candidate; that the head of the executive be chosen by the French government from a list of nine nominees proposed by the regional assembly; that the universities be in the service of the region; bilingualism being instituted at all levels of education, Breton and French should both be official and strictly equal; the semi-state bodies should be at the disposal of the local authorities so as to help economic development on the line of the community-minded co-operatives which have been so successful in Denmark; industrial development should start on the sea-board, particularly around one or two harbours of international importance. (L'Avenir, September).

In the view of the Breton Committee for Regional Action, the region should be a genuine territorial entity capable of deciding not only economic and social but also cultural and political matters. Brittany should be recognised in its historic limits.

The overlapping of interests between her and neighbouring regions should be the concern of interregional co-ordinating committees (this proposal is a Breton alternative to the suggestions that the Mayenne department should join in with Brittany and that Nantes with its sphere of influence extending into Poitou and Maine-Anjou should remain cut off from her). In order to counteract the powerful attraction exerted by Paris and other Eastern centres, the capital of the region should be in the West. If Brittany's future is to be linked with her maritime position, the choice should fall on Brest. The B.C.R.A. makes detailed proposals concerning the attributions of the region (powers of decision and impulsion, facilities for planning, animating and co-ordinating) ^{and} its financial means (to come not from new taxes but a re-allocation of taxes now collected by the State, as well as from credits and loans). There should be two assemblies, one based on universal suffrage so as to stimulate the participation of all the citizens, the other composed of representatives of the active forces (such as professional organisations) so as to reflect economic and social reality

The representatives of the Breton federations of the Democratic Socialist Left, and of Parti Socialiste Unifié as well as of the Union Democratique Bretonne met in St.-Brieg on September 14 and agreed that a Region of Brittany constituted in its historic limits should have an assembly elected by universal suffrage, an economic and social council and an executive responsible to the assembly. The organisations AR FALZ (pro-Breton teachers) and the Breton Students Organisation supported the statement.

The Lannuon municipal council favoured the election of a "governor" by a Breton parliament composed of two chambers.

In Loire-Atlantique, a meeting of mayors followed the lead of the Nantes municipality in asking for a large region including Brittany and other areas further East and South East: they are motivated in this by economic considerations. They are quite willing to entrust the regional executive to a super-prefect appointed by the French government. The General Council of Loire Atlantique voted also for a union of the two administrative regions Brittany and Pays de la Loire.

The Ille-et-Vilaine General Council, possibly under the influence of the Rennes municipality which would prefer to dominate the region without competition from Nantes, expressed itself in favour of associating the department of Mayenne with the present administrative "Region Brittany"

CONCLUSION: Many of the organisations which owe their existence to the administrative system created by the French State are indifferent to the need for a reform which will respect Brittany as an entity and give it a political form. Petty rivalries show that genuine organs of defense of the common Breton interest cannot be seated in excessively Frenchified cities like Nantes or Rennes. A Breton capital worthy of the name, capable of promoting original developments, would have to be built from scratch. No essential change will come from this "reform" the terms of which will in fact be decided between technocrats and the "regional establishment". The main thing is that the Bretons become fully aware of the Breton problem in its totality. The current consultation will not have been useless if it contributes to increase this awareness.

"Mentally-diseased" out of Jail.

In 1960 Guy Poulain refused military service because as a Breton nationalist he would not fight the Algerians. He fled to Switzerland. When he returned after 6 years a Judge declared him "mentally ill". A similar tactic was used in an attempt to discredit G. Toublanc 7 or 8 years ago when he refused to recognise the validity of French law in Brittany. It is not only in the Soviet Union that those who reject the ideology of the State are certified insane. Poulain however was imprisoned, and not released till last July, shortly after Gilles Jacques, who also had refused, as a Breton, to serve in the French Army.

F.L.B. AT IT AGAIN

A bomb attack was carried out in the night of October 26th to 27th against a high tension pole in the vicinity of Kemper (S.W. Brittany). It seriously damaged the pylon but did not disrupt the supply. Leaflets were found on the spot urging "Let us fight French maladministration in Brittany with the Breton Liberation Front".

Over 2000 Breton teachers and students have signed a resolution, to be put before trade union and cultural organisations, asking for an adaptation of school programmes to regional realities and needs, in particular the teaching of the Breton language.

The Commission of Regional Economic Development (CODER) for "Region Brittany" expressed itself in favour of a reform giving real powers to the region in matters of economic planning and public equipment, with corresponding financial means derived from the State budget. Only 27 of its 47 members appear to have taken part in the vote. They could not agree on the mode of election to the regional Assembly. The Rennes CODER is a conservative body - a quarter of its members are government-nominees.