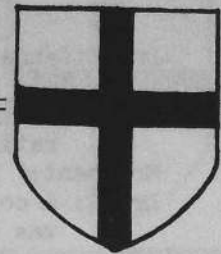


BRETON NEWS



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The Etienne case: THE FRENCH STATE CLAIMS ALL THE RIGHTS

For the last 9 months Dr. Etienne has been deprived of family allowances for his two eldest children because he is teaching them in Breton at home.

The details of the correspondence between Dr. Etienne and the French Educational Authorities published here reveal the peculiar conception of human rights prevailing in France.

Not obvious: r 300 11

On April 9, 1963, Dr. Etienne wrote to the Recteur of the Rennes Academie and drew his attention on the victimization to which he was subjected. In contradiction to the Academy Inspector in Kemper, he denied that it was obvious from the regulations that the teaching must be in French for an effective controle of the education by the school inspectors to be possible.

In reply (17-4), Mr Le Moal quoted from a number of regulation concerning the controle of education given at home and referred to eventual sanctions if they were not complied with.

Dr. Etienne wrote back to him on April 23: "After carefully reading your letter, I have to admit that I don't see what bearing the quotations have on the case which I submitted to you." He explained it again, pointed out that all the conditions required by the law were fulfilled and that the school certificates were being refused solely because the teaching of the children was given through the medium of Breton, their mother-tongue.

"I regret," Dr. Etienne added, "that I should have to defend an elementary right which has been defined and guaranteed by almost every country."

Letter to Minister

This time, Mr Le Moal did not reply. Dr. Etienne then wrote to the Minister of Education, restating the case as well as the arguments used by the Educational authorities, and asking for a reconsideration of the Inspector's decision.

Referring to those arguments, he said:

"It is not correct that the refusal to give school certificates to children who are taught in Breton can be based on the regulations quoted. And I submit that it is contrary to all commonsense and realism to argue that in a region where the Breton language is spoken the Educational authorities are not capable of controlling the teaching given in the language of the country."

Missus Dominicus ^x

Following this request Dr. Etienne received the visit of the Deputy-Inspector to Mr Le Moal, Mr. Coant. He came to acquaint himself with "the frame of mind and the intentions" of the Etienne family. Mr. Coant is a former Principal of the St-Brieg Teachers Training College. He is not unknown to the Breton political circles since he contributed from 1942 to 1944 to the magazine AN EOST devoted to the problem of teaching Breton in schools.

The talk did not go beyond the question of form which Dr Etienne insisted on putting before any further examination.

French in danger?

Mr. Coant made it clear that the State claims all the rights on the education of children: the family has no rights here except those delegated to it by the State. If a family is allowed to look after its children's education at home, it is on the understanding that the teaching must be identical to that given in the schools. In particular all the subjects must be taught in French from the very first school year.

^x Missus Dominicus: lit. Messenger of the Lord. Title given to the emperor's envoys at the time of Charlemagne.

Dr. Etienne:

"In examining the facts, would you agree to refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although until now France has refused to ratify it?"

Mr Coant: No.

Dr. E: A convention on the Prevention of Discrimination in the field of Education was signed by France on Dec. 15th, 1960, at the General UNESCO Conference and ratified by her on Sept. 11. 1961.

Mr. C: I know, but it is only a convention and France does not have to take it into account.

Dr. E: Yet a decree was made by the French government and published in the Journal Officiel of Nov. 6th and 7th, 1961, based on this convention. It even stated that the contracting parties undertook to cancel all administrative measures and to put an end to all administrative practices which would amount to a discrimination in the field of education..

Mr. C: France has its own laws. So long as they have not been cancelled, international conventions are void. French law prescribes that school teaching must be in French from the very first school year. The inspector's decision is thus perfectly lawful.

Dr. E: The French are the only people to find such a law natural. The others see in it a crime, internationally defined under the name of genocide. The fact that genocide has been lawfully practised in Brittany for many generations is no reason why we should practise it on our own children.

The teaching which we give to our children is in all respects consonant with the UNESCO principles, and we keep ourselves informed of what is being done in the countries which apply these principles.

Mr.C: You refuse to teach French to your children?

Dr.E: Not in the least. We conform to the school practices of the more progressive countries. But if we teach our children other languages than their mother tongue, it is for their own sake, not because of the oppressive pretensions of a State.

Mr. C: We cannot follow you on that ground -- that would open the door to all sorts of fantasies(...) Brittany belongs to France, it is natural that the French would seek to defend their language here.

Formation of the child's mind

The declarations of Mr. Coant were confirmed in a letter sent on July 30 from the French Department of Education in Paris to Dr Etienne. It stresses that the law binds on the parents to teach the elements of French in the first school years "as it is of primordial importance for the formation of the child's mind." It stresses also that if teaching is given at home, the family must carry out the State's mission: "a decree from 1887 specifies that French only can be used in the school". The Minister does not mean to say that the study of regional languages is of no interest. The 1951 law guarantees that (!) But Breton cannot be substituted for French, particularly at an age when the child acquires the fundamental elements of knowledge (B.N. note: even if Breton is his mother tongue he must be taught as if what he had learned up to the age of 5 through Breton was nothing). France by undertaking in 1961 to respect "the" minority languages did not put an end to the priority reserved in teaching to the national language. Dr. Etienne was warned that the inspector will be around to see him again immediately after the Summer holidays. "If he can get your word that you are teaching in French,, the law will be safe", said Mr. Coant.

It may be noted that Mr Coant is a member of AR FALZ, the association of school teachers who are trying to obtain the right to teach Breton as a regular subject. But AR FALZ has often protested its loyalty to France. And Mr Coant is employed to defend the French language in Brittany. As if it were French, not Breton, which was in danger of extermination in this country.

The Annual volume of the Celtic League (84 pages) - in English - contains 15 contributions by writers and leading figures in the national movements of the six Celtic countries. The editor is Dr Ceinwen Thomas of University College, Cardiff. Contributions include a survey of the Breton Movement by Yann Fouere, translations of articles by Maodez Glanndour (Modern Breton Literature) and Dr Etienne-abAnna (Application of Phenomenology to the Breton problem), a report on the prospects of the Dutch (Flemish) language in Belgium by Neven Henaff, and (in translation) the text of a lecture by Dr H. Kloss: "Problems of Nationalities in Europe to-day" The other contributions deal with recent political changes in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, with Inter-Celticism and cultural activities in Ireland, with Tynwald (Isle of Man).

The copies cost 12/6, but members of the Celtic League can get theirs, as well as the quarterly CELTIC NEWS on payment of the annual fee of 10/- . Only a few dozen copies are left. Write to Breton Information Bureau.