

BRETON NEWS



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The Breton Information Bureau

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Teaching of Breton: GOVERNMENT VETO

Proposals for a modest improvement of the conditions for the teaching of Breton, Occitan, Basque and Catalan were the subject of a report prepared on behalf of the Parliamentary Commission for Cultural Affairs and circulated in May among all the members of the French National Assembly.

The report stated that 7 years of experience had shown that a coherent and efficient teaching of the "regional" languages was impossible because of the restrictions brought by subsequent ministerial regulations to the application of the law passed in 1951 in favour of these languages.

In recent years, Breton organisations had asked the French Department of Education to issue new regulations. The invariable reply was that an improvement of teaching conditions was not possible under the existing law.

A New Law? Bretons and Occitans decided therefore to direct their efforts towards getting a new law. The new proposals represent the conclusion of two years of study and discussion by the Commission for Cultural Affairs. Its promoters found no opposition in the parliamentary process and expected to see the bill on the agenda of the French National Assembly before the Summer recess. It had the support of all Breton and Occitan deputies.

Debré: NO. The services responsible for the agenda kept silent for a few weeks, but on July 8th, the rumours according to which the French Prime Minister opposed the tabling of the bill were confirmed. It had been discovered that it was anti-constitutional, that it did not fall within the competence of the Assembly to decide such question.

Legal path blocked. This veto needs no justification. No improvement of the Breton language's position is now possible under the present regime.

It means the failure of cultural organisations such as the "Falz" group and the "Breton Cultural Foundation", which have been vocal in their professions of loyalty towards France, to obtain the concessions they had hoped for. On the contrary, whatever was gained 10 years ago has been gradually whittled down to practically nothing, as the report testifies.

LOYALIST WARNINGS. Ar Falz, the bulletin of the public school teachers who favour the Breton language, published in July a supplement in which they still wonder if the refusal represents the true view of the Department of Education. They warn in veiled terms that this opposition throws an increasingly important number of young people into the ranks of the Breton nationalists.

A similar warning is given by the "Fondation Culturelle Bretonne" which beseeches the Breton deputies to act rapidly and firmly in order to present "a new and particularly irritating element being added to the Breton uneasiness"

* After the acts of violence last June "the government is heading for new complications in Brittany". "...By putting an end to an experiment undertaken by Bretons whose loyalty cannot be doubted, the authorities will cause a large number of young Bretons to change radically their orientation and to seek by other means than purely cultural action the fulfilment of their aspirations."

Ref. Supplement to Ar Falz, Nr. 3, 1961

The surprise demonstration organised at the end of the festival of Cornwall in Kemper, 23/7/61, in protest against the rejection of the new bill for the (optional) teaching of Breton united all sections of the Breton movement, MOB, CELIB, CAR, KAB, Kendalc'h, ECB, FCB, JEB, BB, ar Falz, BAS, etc.

Preceded by pipe-bands, the demonstrators walked towards the Government building (préfecture) carrying posters and streamers demanding a Breton Plan. The préfet gave them a short reception, after they had agreed to remove their posters. He walked away while they sang the Breton national anthem. Riot police had arrived on the scene in 4 lorries.

Leaflets published by the common front of Breton organisations were posted up all over Brittany on August 14th.

FARMERS FEDERATIONS AND CELIB FOR JOINT ACTION: The Breton deputies and senators and the Breton farmers' leaders have established that "the specifically Breton claims made by the farmers last June have not brought about any favourable decision by the Government." They have asked the general secretary of the Committee for Study and Coordination of Breton Interests to organise a big campaign among the Breton population in order to show "that the interests of agriculture are closely linked with those of all Brittany and that in our country the prosperity of the rural world conditions that of all the other social classes." ...A meeting held at Pondivi on August 19th gathered representatives of CELIB and of the Breton professional organisations (including those of the Nantes area). The French government was given till Sept. 15th to give satisfaction to the Breton demands. They were no longer deceived by promises. This meeting was regarded as the "States-General of Brittany," (The Breton States-General maintained the right of self-government in Brittany between 1532 and 1789).

(From a special correspondent).

CELTIC LEAGUE FOUNDED

At a meeting held in Rhos, North Wales, August 9th, a Celtic League was constituted to foster the national rights of the Celtic Nations, political (including the right to govern their own affairs), cultural and economic.

Present at the meeting were representatives of Brittany, Wales and Scotland.

One of the delegates proposed the following aims for the new organisation:

- 1) to establish a close link between the leaders of the national movements in the Celtic countries;
- 2) to increase the awareness of similar interests among the Celtic peoples and organise mutual support when necessary;
- 3) to work out a common approach to international bodies in the efforts to secure recognition of their national rights.

The principle uniting the movements represented was that the Celtic nations could survive only if they attained effective self-government. The new organisation was therefore to be political and did not intend to replace or duplicate the cultural Celtic Congress. By co-operating, the delegates of each nation would not interfere in the internal affairs of the others; it remained for each national movement to define its own policy, methods and objectives.

These points were discussed under the chairmanship of Mr. J.E. Jones, Secretary of the Welsh National Party. Apart from defining the aim of the league, the meeting decided on the constitution of the Central Committee, membership of the League and appointments to the Executive Council.

Gwynfor Evans (President of Plaid Gymru) was elected chairman of the League.

A. Graham will publish "Celtic Voice", the first issue of which appeared last May, as the League-sponsored quarterly. A. Heussaff will provisionally be general secretary-treasurer.

Applications for membership of the League are invited. Members will be required to pay an annual fee of 10/- and will receive Celtic Voice as well as an annual volume.

Correspondence to be addressed to "Celtic League, 9 Sion Hill Road, Drumcondra, Dublin. Celtic Voice is published by Graham Bros., 5, The St., Didmorton, Badminton, England.

Resolutions

The Central Committee of the Celtic League adopted a Welsh resolution demanding official status for the Welsh language in Wales. The following resolution put forward by the Breton delegation was also adopted;

"The Committee of the Celtic League, having considered the situation in Brittany in connection with the recent unrest among the Breton farmers and the refusal of the French government to take sufficient steps to solve the Breton economic and cultural problems - wishes to express its sympathy with all sections of the Breton people fighting for their rights, - is of opinion that none of the Breton problems can be adequately solved without Breton self-government."

Want new facts.

Petitions signed by 1000 secondary schools students from Brest, Lorient, Kemper and Gwened (Vannes) were sent last January to the French minister for Education. They expressed the wish "that henceforth the Breton classes be integrated with the normal time-table, thus allowing a much larger number of pupils to study their regional language. Under the present regulations, these classes had to be held at hours when other functions claimed all the pupils attendance. They were only asking for the Breton language equality of treatment with the Arabic of North Africa, which is now compulsory in Algeria and can be used as first living language in all the academies of Algeria and metropolitan France.

After 6 months came the reply: the 1951-law does not permit a methodical teaching of local dialects. There is no new fact.