

STROLLAD BROADEL BREIZH
BRETON NATIONAL COMMITTEE

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To the Representatives
of the Member-Countries
of the United Nations Organisation

November 1960

APPEAL ON BEHALF OF BRITTANY

As the appointed spokesmen for the Breton National Committee which represents the Breton Nation in its struggle for liberation, considering the United Nations' Resolution 217-C (III) of December 10, 1948, in which the General Assembly declared that the United Nations cannot remain indifferent to the fate of minorities and Resolution 532-B (IV) of February 4, 1952, listing the protection of minorities as one of the most important branches of the positive work undertaken by the United Nations, we have the duty to acquaint you with the policy of oppression and assimilation pursued by France in Brittany.

A Celtic nation of more than 3 millions to-day, Brittany has lost her political freedom through military defeat but she has never surrendered her right to existence as a nation, and to self-government. Yet it has been the aim of the successive French governments since the suppression of Breton autonomy in 1789 to destroy Brittany's national characteristics. The French State has used its control of Brittany's economy to break up the cohesion of the Breton people and enforce the emigration of its most active elements. It has used its control of education and administration to stifle the cultural development of a Celtic people and to try and eradicate the language of one million Bretons. It has applied its power to suppress Brittany's national consciousness and to make the Bretons subservient to its interests at their own detriment. All the attempts to obtain a revision of the French policy in Brittany have met with ineffective measures, silence or outright repression on the part of all the French governments. This disregard for the Breton rights has been aggravated by the increase of State control in the people's lives. Thus the existence of our nation is threatened physically and culturally to-day. There is no hope of national recovery for the Bretons unless they regain control of their own affairs. In our struggle for liberation, we appeal to the solidarity of all the peoples who value national freedom. We appeal in particular to the protection of the United Nations Organisation.

The origin of the Breton nation goes back to the 5th Century when the Bretons emigrated from Britain and settled in the West of the European mainland. Brittany maintained her independence for a thousand years, but in 1532 she was forced, following military defeat, to accept union with France. Yet by treaty her political autonomy was guaranteed and preserved during 250 years. In 1789, the treaty was unilaterally annulled by France. Troops were used to enforce the abolition of the Breton institutions. The last Breton official act however was to reject the authority of France in Brittany by declaring void, as far as the country was concerned, all the acts of the French National Assembly (February 1791). A national rising lasting several years aimed at reconquering the Breton liberties but was crushed. Brittany had to submit to superior force, but in law she has never abdicated her national rights.

During the last 170 years, a Brittany deprived of her institutions was subjected to an intensive policy of assimilation. This policy is to be held responsible for many manifestations of social degradation among Bretons as well as for the lack of a vigorous collective defense of their interests during that period. In order to assist in suppressing their national consciousness, the Bretons have been left ignorant of their own history but have been constantly indoctrinated exclusively on the merits of the French culture and the glory of French history. The Breton language, akin to Welsh and Irish, more different than English from French, is spoken by about 1 million people. Yet, and in spite of the popular

demand for its teaching in public schools, it is refused official recognition. In fact it has been repeatedly declared officially that "for the sake of French unity the Breton language must disappear". The system of education has aimed at eradicating it by methods contrary to all accepted principles of pedagogy and contrary to the dignity of man. The Breton-speaking population has been instilled, during the past 80 years especially, with a sense of inferiority which handicapped tens of thousands for life. The process, instead of freeing the mind of those subject to it, had a degrading effect.

It may be pointed out that the Breton language, far from being an "uncultivated patois" as the French propaganda would have even the Bretons believe, is a modern instrument of expression as witnessed by its publications and its present literature. Textbooks, dictionaries and grammars, a unified spelling, new methods, stand ready for its teaching.

The Breton economy, formerly prosperous, has steadily declined under French control. Existing industries lost heavily as a result of political favoritism or of trade relations between France and other European countries. Numerous instances can readily be provided to attest this. The Committee for Study and Co-ordination of Breton interests, a body which unites representatives of economic organisations, trade unions and professional groups as well as Breton Members of Parliament regardless of political affiliations, has established that, since the end of the 19th century, Brittany has been constantly disfavoured in the allotment of State credits. "Whether it was for rural equipment, vocational education or large investments of public concern, the Breton region never received the share of credits to which it is entitled on a demographic account. That is the essential cause of Brittany's economic difficulties". Such is the conclusion drawn in 1960 by the Committee after years of research.

Two lines of action have been followed by the Bretons in the struggle for political freedom. A regionalist movement started in 1890 presented moderate claims ranging from decentralisation and administrative reforms to special concessions in the cultural domain and a Breton Parliament, all however without disputing the question of French sovereignty. This movement did not obtain any worthwhile concession, since a special treatment for any part of the French-controlled territory is regarded as dangerous for the French unity. The leaders of the regionalist movement in 1919 presented a petition to the delegates to the Peace Conference and to the members of the Commission for the League of Nations, asking for the recognition of Breton cultural and administrative freedoms. But the victors of the first World War did not recognise any "minority" in their own camp.

A nationalist movement started at the time of the First World War claimed political independence for Brittany. The Nationalists hardened their attitude in the face of French provocation and attempts at intimidation. Preparations were made for an armed rebellion on the eve of the second World War. A Breton military unit constituted in 1943 fought with the Germans against France, the common enemy. Other nationalists adopted more peaceful means to prepare the Breton people for self-government. The main task was one of national education.

But the whole nationalist movement was broken by the severe repression of 1944-46, when hundreds of its members were shot, jailed or driven underground as well as deprived of their property.

This disruption, and the application of a decree banning all attempts to remove territories from the French sovereignty, has impeded the reorganisation of the nationalists. But their activity has increased during the past few years. Numerous arrests were carried out in recent months among the younger members of the movement.

To-day the Breton people are conscious of the need to defend collectively their interests. The cultural movement is receiving their often enthusiastic support. But the French policy in Brittany remains unchanged. The Breton language is excluded from the schools and public offices. Because of this, the relatively numerous publications in Breton cannot reach a wide public. "Not to teach a language is to kill it. And killing a language is a crime".

The Breton plans for economic development cannot be implemented in the absence of official sanction. The spreading of unemployment in industrial areas and the emigration of the most industrious elements at the excessive rate of 20. to 30.000 a year -- for a total population of 3 millions -- are weakening the country materially and socially.

The Bretons are doing what is in their power, by peaceful means, to prevent the disappearance of their nation. But their initiatives however well organised cannot prevail against the French State.

The conclusion to which all modern nations have come, that a national culture cannot be preserved and developed without self-government, applies to Brittany: The Bretons can no longer expect a satisfactory solution of their national problems from direct appeals to the French government. The Breton nation is being destroyed in order to satisfy the ideology of the French State. This is genocide.

Brittany lost her freedom when France gained supremacy in Europe. To-day the direct threat to her existence as a nation makes it imperative for her to regain this freedom. In this struggle, we place our hope in the organisation of a world where the rule of law will have replaced militarily imposed dominations, and where the right of existence of all national entities, however small, will be guaranteed by international agreement.

It is in expression of this hope that we appeal, in the name of the Breton nation, to the solidarity of all the peoples represented at the United Nations Organisation.

For the Breton National Committee

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