

# BRETON NATIONALISM



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DEWI FRYIS

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## PREFACE

THIS little book is published by the Welsh Party in the hope that it will contribute to the understanding and solution of the Breton national question. Many have been deeply disturbed by the reports of present events in Brittany, where, it seems to them, the policy of the French Government conflicts violently with its democratic professions. No one concerned for the freedom of national minorities can be unmoved by the report, objectively set out in these pages, of its treatment of the Breton nation, whose national movement it persecutes on a slight pretext, to whose national institutions it gives no support, and whose language may not be taught in the schools of the country. It is difficult to evade the conclusion that there is a deliberate effort by a State, ostensibly democratic and attached to the liberal principles of freedom of thought and expression, utterly to destroy the life of one of the oldest nations of Europe.

The people of Wales, bound as they are by so many ties to the people of Brittany, have a peculiar responsibility to assist them in their struggle for survival. This responsibility is indeed shared by Celtic peoples everywhere, particularly by the nations of Ireland and Scotland. But no one whose love of freedom leads him to support the struggle against imperialism and power politics can but sympathise with the determination of the Bretons to withstand their ravages in Brittany and to maintain their national existence. Small nations are still the nurseries of the highest human values, and their destruction would impoverish mankind. In calling attention to the need of immediate succour for Brittany, we therefore act in accordance with a principle vital to the spiritual well-being of the human family, that the life of small nations everywhere must be respected and allowed to develop in freedom.

GWYNFOR EVANS,

*President of Welsh Nationalist Party.*

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction ... ..	5
Chapter I ... ..	7
Brittany, from her origin down to the Nineteenth Century	
Chapter II ... ..	13
The Breton Movement down to World War II	
Chapter III ... ..	20
Breton Nationalism, the war and German Policy	
Chapter IV ... ..	26
Nationalism and Regionalism	
Chapter V ... ..	33
The strength of the Breton Movement and its progress from 1941 to 1944	
Chapter VI ... ..	40
The policy of the Breton Movement towards the Vichy Government and the Germans	
Chapter VII ... ..	50
The French Resistance and the Perrot Unit	
Chapter VIII ... ..	56
The Repression	
Chapter IX ... ..	68
The true nature of the Repression	
Conclusion ... ..	76
Appendix 1 ... ..	79
Appendix 2 ... ..	82

# BRETON NATIONALISM

## France and Germany

### INTRODUCTION

**A** GREAT many instances have been given in the Welsh Press of the persecution to which the Breton movement has been subjected, since August 1944, by the French Government. However, the supporters of the French Government in Brittany affirm that the ground for the prosecutions is not the Breton activities of the defendants but their collaboration with the Germans during the four years of the Occupation. Further they hint that the Breton Movement was more or less artificially created by the Germans who used it as a tool to destroy the unity of France.

The Breton nationalists retort that such allegations are nothing but pretexts given by the French Government to try to justify a repression which aimed in fact at destroying the Breton Movement and stabbing Breton culture in the back. But far from having been recently created, the Breton Movement can be traced back to the distant past, and the French persecution of to-day is nothing but a new example of the Jacobin tradition of centralisation, antagonistic to every small nationality within the French State, which has been the policy of all French Governments.

The Celtic peoples of the British Isles cannot remain indifferent to this quarrel. The Welsh, Scots and Irish in particular do not forget their kinship with the Bretons. Public opinion in these countries is bound to take an interest in the fate of the Bretons, because their struggle is the same as the fight we have been



waging ourselves to defend our languages, traditions and cultures as well as our spiritual and material interests. If it could be proved that such were their crimes, we would be at fault if we did not protest against the methods used in Brittany by the French Government.

Therefore we think it necessary to throw some light on events in Brittany after 1940. This pamphlet aims at establishing the respective responsibilities of the French and the Bretons in the present quarrel. Our aim has been to obtain as much evidence as possible to set the Breton problem before international opinion. We have found it necessary, in order to explain present events, to give a brief account of Breton history and to explain the traditional bonds existing between Wales and Brittany. That will enable us to understand more clearly the history of the Breton Movement and its policy during the war, as well as to form a more impartial opinion about the disputed questions and the severe repression inflicted upon the Breton Movement for more than two years.

## CHAPTER I

### BRITTANY, FROM HER ORIGIN DOWN TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE history of the Breton people begins in Britain. Before and during the Roman occupation, the peninsula situated in the westernmost part of France was called Armorica. Its inhabitants were Gaulish tribes united in an Armorican confederation which was destroyed by Cæsar. The Bretons appeared in Armorica for the first time during the fifth century A.D.

In those days the Bretons, who were the natives of Britain, of the same stock as the present inhabitants of Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, were constrained to migrate to the Continent. For almost two centuries successive waves of migrants had crossed to Brittany, under the leadership of their monks and chieftains. They brought over their language, traditions and civilisation, and transformed the peninsula to such an extent that it was given a new name: Brittany (Brittania Minor). Thus the Celts of Britain and the Celts of Brittany are only two branches of one race. But while the former lost their national name, the latter retained it and founded a new country. A new nation sprang into life, whose origin and people were different from those of the French nation.

About the time that the Bretons were laying the foundations of their new country, the Franks were streaming into Gaul. Just as the Bretons gave their name to Brittany, so the Franks gave their name to the country which was to become France. From the start they tried to subordinate the Bretons to their rule. But, subdued for a short while by Charlemagne, the Bretons launched an offensive campaign against his

successors. Under the leadership of Nominoe they defeated at Ballon in 845 the armies of the Frank emperor Charles the Bald. Charles was compelled to acknowledge Breton independence and Nominoe was proclaimed king of Brittany. His successors, Erispoe and Salomon, further extended during the wars against the Franks the Breton territories which included in those days, besides Brittany itself, the Cotentin peninsula and a large part of Anjou and Poitou, i.e. an important section of western France.

But at the end of the ninth century the Northmen began to appear on the Breton and French shores. At the beginning of the tenth century their raids became more frequent and Brittany was devastated. She remained for some time in a state of political chaos. However, in 936, the Breton prince Alan Barvek who had taken refuge with the Celts of Britain—with whom the Bretons had remained in close contact—began to reconquer Brittany. After a sweeping succession of victories over the Northmen, against whom the Breton people had risen, Alan succeeded in re-establishing Breton independence and was proclaimed Duke of Brittany. He reigned over a territory whose boundaries have remained almost the same down to the present day. The Breton language, however, had receded westwards, and it has never since regained the ground lost in those days.

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During the following centuries, the Bretons fought steadily for the independence and integrity of their country, which was not too difficult at the beginning, because the size of Brittany was almost the same as that of her neighbours, but became harder and harder as the power of the two rival neighbour countries increased. Each tried to take a hand in Breton affairs in order to be able to annex Brittany at some future date. The long civil war, known as the war of the Breton Succession, which took place during the fourteenth

century, was fomented by France and England, who were at war themselves—the Hundred Years' War—and put forward their own candidates to the Breton crown. However, the Bretons did not want to become English more than they wanted to become French, and the dukes, in order to safeguard the independence of the duchy, played off France against England and England against France, their aim being to prevent one of these powers becoming too strong and succeeding some day in conquering Brittany. Through many vicissitudes the dukes managed to uphold Breton independence till the end of the fifteenth century. The wise policy of some of the dukes, such as Yann V the Wise and his successors, had made Brittany one of the richest and most prosperous countries in Western Europe. Arts, literature, architecture, social laws, commerce and industry prospered. The Breton merchant fleet was among the most powerful in Europe. The duke was helped in the government of the duchy by the "Etats de Bretagne," a representative assembly of the nation which met every year and without which no important decision concerning policy or finance could be reached.

But Breton independence was becoming more and more insecure as French power increased. Among the first aims of French policy was the conquest of Brittany. In 1488 the Breton army was defeated at St. Aubin du Cormier, and the Breton duke Francis II was compelled by the King of France to accept the treaty of Le Verger which was the first step towards the total annexation of Brittany. Anne of Brittany who succeeded her father tried, in spite of her tender age, to resume the fight, but she too was obliged to submit, in order to avoid a longer war and a disastrous occupation. In 1491 she was compelled to marry the King of France, Charles VIII.

After the death of her husband, Anne married his successor, Louis XII, and tried to secure in her marriage settlement the independence of her country. She went as far as to betrothe her daughter Claude, the

heir to the duchy, to Charles V, the heir of the traditional enemy of France, the house of Austria. But after her death in 1514, Claude was betrothed to François I of France. Brittany could no longer avoid being united with the French crown.

However, the *Etats de Bretagne* wanted to secure the future of the country and eventually accepted the terms of the treaty uniting Brittany to France, which was signed in 1532. Under the provisions of this treaty, the king of France and his successors became dukes of Brittany. On the other hand the French crown pledged itself to respect the political and administrative rights to which the Breton people were deeply attached. The king of France was not allowed to levy taxes in Brittany without the consent of the *Etats*. He was to nominate Bretons alone to public offices in Brittany, and the Bretons were not to be forced to serve as soldiers outside Brittany. The treaty of union with France meant the end of the complete independence which Brittany had enjoyed till then. Nevertheless it safeguarded the liberties of Brittany, which became, as "*Province de Bretagne*", an autonomous state inside the French kingdom.

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At first France respected the union. But while in Brittany the power of the crown was still limited by the power of the *Etats* as representative of the nation, the rule of the king of France grew more absolute. During the following centuries the French monarchy persistently tried to destroy Breton rights, in which it saw a serious hindrance to the new order it wanted to establish. Therefore Breton nationalism in the *Etats* as well as in the "*Parlement de Bretagne*" had a hard battle to fight against French policy. Brittany had to take up arms in order to defend her liberties. In 1675, when Louis XIV tried to levy new taxes in spite of the refusal of the *Etats*, a rising took place, known as the rising of the "Red Caps" or the "Revenue Stamps Revolt." The revolt was ruthlessly crushed.

The struggle began again after Louis XIV's death. In 1720 four Breton noblemen, Pontcallec, Montlouis, Talhouet and Couedic were beheaded in Nantes for having tried to restore Breton independence. From then on, down to the French Revolution, Breton opposition was expressed in the struggle of the *Parlement de Bretagne* against the centralising tendencies of the French monarchy. Members of the *Etats* and *Parlement* suffered renewed arrests, or were sentenced to terms of imprisonment or banishment. The struggle culminated, at the end of the reign of Louis XV, in the "*Procureur Général*" La Chalotais becoming the leader of the Breton resistance.

However, owing to her stubborn insistence on her rights, Brittany had managed to retain till the eve of the Revolution the administrative and political autonomy to which she was entitled. She could still govern herself freely, and was one of the most prosperous provinces, her taxes being less burdensome than anywhere else in the French kingdom.

Brittany, which had constantly opposed the French monarchy, at first readily accepted the French Revolution. But soon she realised that the revolution intended in fact to continue more rigorously the centralising policy of the monarchy. Brittany was annexed to French territory, and divided into five départements (Ille et Vilaine, Côtes du Nord, Finistère, Morbihan, Loire Inférieure). The *Etats* and the *Parlement de Bretagne* were suppressed, the treaty of union unilaterally revoked and religious freedom endangered. In 1793 under the leadership of enterprising chiefs—above all La Rouerie and Cadoudal—a general rising took place to defend the threatened faith and recover those liberties which had been suppressed.

Although these were the two main reasons for the rising, French historians have unceasingly sought to present it as a purely royalist rising. Brittany was warmly attached to her political freedom, and if additional proof is needed it can be found in the fact that the Breton republicans themselves, who had supported

the Revolution at the beginning, now joined the federalist banner and took up arms in the middle of 1793 against the Jacobin Convention.

Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century did Brittany lay down arms. Once more defeated, she had to submit to the will of her conqueror. She had lost her political autonomy; her name itself had been blotted out of the maps, but she clung devotedly to her Breton language, still spoken in the western half of her territory. She cherished above all the memory of her heroic past as a free nation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BRETON MOVEMENT DOWN TO WORLD WAR II

**I**N spite of the terrible blows it had suffered, Breton nationalism was not dead, and was destined to increase in strength throughout the nineteenth century. As among the greater part of the other Celtic countries the Breton revival first manifested itself through the works of poets, historians and philologists.

In 1836 La Villemarqué published "Barzaz Breiz", a collection of folk songs and ballads of Brittany. This work had important repercussions throughout Europe and marked the awakening of the nation. At the same time, while Ar Gonidec was publishing his grammar and dictionaries, which settled the syntax and morphology of the Breton language, Pitre Chevalier edited his Breton History. After La Villemarqué, Brizeux, Ar Gonidec and Pitre Chevalier, Breton and Celtic literature and historical research did not look back. Memories of national independence were refreshed by historians, and exalted by the poets; the Breton language, enriched and cultivated, became an instrument of national culture.

Inter-celtic relations too were resumed in those days, especially between Brittany and Wales. In 1838 the Welsh organisation "Cymdeithas y Cymreigyddion", under the direction of Carnhuanawc, received in Abergavenny a Breton delegation of which La Villemarqué and Ar Gonidec were members. The French poet Lamartine, who took part in the meeting, wrote a well-known ode about the bringing together of the two halves of Arthur's sword possessed by the Welsh and the Bretons.

In 1843 was founded the "Association Bretonne" which may be considered as the first organisation of



what is called nowadays "the Breton Movement." So the Breton Movement is nothing but the heir of the nationalist tendencies which have been repeatedly expressed ever since the Union. Far from having been, as some French circles will say, artificially created in 1939 as a weapon against France, it is nothing but the modern manifestation of the agelong Breton fight for freedom.

But, while Britain inclined to take a liberal view of the Celtic revival, France tried to strangle it. A few years before the first inter-celtic congress, organised in 1867 at Saint Brieuc by the Association Bretonne, this organisation had been suppressed by the government (1858). The first petition in favour of the teaching of Breton, made by Henri Gaidoz, the director of the "Revue Celtique", and Charles de Gaulle, on the eve of the 1870 war, was turned down. During that war, the government department of national defence, fearing that the Breton army might become a threat to French unity, allowed it to be decimated by the Prussians during the battle of Le Mans.

However, the Association Bretonne resumed its activities at the beginning of the Third Republic. Breton literature was flourishing. La Borderie edited his great *Histoire de Bretagne*. Folklorists, like A. Le Braz and Luzel, gathered popular songs and traditions. Philologists and scholars like Joseph Loth, Dottin, Ernault, F. Vallée, Le Roux, gave new possibilities to Celtic studies. At the end of the century, new Breton organisations were created, for instance the "Union Régionaliste Bretonne", whose leaders were Ch. Le Goffic, A. Le Braz and R. De L'Estourbeillon, who became deputy for Morbihan and the President of the Union from 1902 onwards. A numerous Breton delegation came over to Cardiff in 1900 to take part in the Eisteddfod. There they decided to start a Breton branch of the Welsh Gorsedd. The Gorsedd of the Bards of Brittany was founded in 1901 under the direction of Le Fustec, Berthou-Kaledvoulc'h and Taldir-Jaffrenou. Thence forward a Breton delega-

tion came over almost every year to take part in Welsh Eisteddfodau; and Celtic Congresses were held, where representatives of the Celtic nations came together.

In 1905 the "Bleun-Brug", a Breton catholic association, was founded by Father Perrot. In 1911 the "Fédération Régionaliste de Bretagne" was established. In the same year the first Breton Nationalist Party, under the direction of C. Le Mercier d'Erm, came into being. During that period numerous newspapers and reviews, devoted to the defence of Breton rights and culture, were published in Breton and French.

But while the Welsh tongue was gradually being admitted into the schools and universities, the French government steadfastly refused to comply with the Breton claims. In 1902 it went even as far as to prohibit the use of Breton in the churches. But the Breton people energetically refused to admit the French *ukase*, and the government was compelled to give way. Although all the Breton parliamentary representatives, regardless of their political opinions, asked for the teaching of Breton in 1905 and 1911, the French government refused to satisfy their claims.

Nevertheless, during World War I, the Bretons generously shed their blood to defend France. Proportionately, Breton losses were almost double those of the French. The war cost Brittany 240,000 dead, among them Yann-Per Kalloc'h, the greatest of the Breton poets. The Bretons hoped that fighting for "the defence of small nations" would entitle them to maintain their national life. They presented to the Peace Conference a petition bearing the signatures of the most important Breton personalities, asking for the recognition of the national rights and cultural liberties of Brittany; but France vetoed any discussion of the petition.

After the war the Breton Movement, still more active, resumed its propaganda. New associations were founded, new publications were edited, and Breton literature experienced a new revival. But now Breton

nationalism, exasperated by the continued opposition of the French government to its most moderate claims, began to take a more aggressive course.

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At the eve of World War II the Breton Movement could be described as follows: the cultural movement, which at first had met with some opposition, had succeeded at last in gaining the support of almost the whole of Breton opinion. The Breton language, under the influence of the young Breton writers of the "Gwalarn" school—a review founded and edited by Roparz Hemon—was giving birth to a more and more diversified and many-sided literature. Many other publications were helping the work of "Gwalarn": "*an Oaled*", the organ of the Gorsedd, directed by Taldir; "*Feiz ha Breiz*", the "*Bleun-Brug*" monthly, directed by Father Perrot; "*Dihunamb*", Loeiz Herrieu's paper; Erwan Ar Moal's weekly "*Breiz*"; "*Sav*"; "*Studi hag Ober*", etc. . . . Under the influence of Bleun-Brug, the Christian schools began to devote one hour a week to the teaching of Breton. "*Breureiz ar Brezoneg er skoliou*", an association directed by Remont Delaporte, helped to make the application of these measures effective and widespread.

On the other hand Breton was still forbidden in the State schools. "*Ar Brezoneg er Skol*" was founded in 1934 by Yann Fouéré. This association, under Fouéré's leadership, organised throughout Brittany a powerful movement to demand the teaching of Breton in the schools. This campaign was conspicuously successful. On the eve of the war, over four hundred municipal councils, mainly in the Breton-speaking areas, and the three General Councils of the Breton-speaking départements, had adopted a motion demanding the teaching of Breton in the schools and its admission as a subject for examination. The campaign of *Ar Brezoneg er Skol* was supported by all the Breton

organisations, the newspapers and the parliamentary representatives, regardless of their political opinions. The Commission for Education in the French Chamber of Deputies, impressed by the success of the campaign, unanimously recommended, on June 30, 1937, that the Breton language claims should be met by the French government. However, on the eve of World War II, no satisfaction had been given to the Breton claims.

The cultural movement had won the almost unanimous support of Breton opinion because its leaders had always kept the cause of the Breton language above political strife. Many people who supported the cause of Breton made no political claims. But, of course, all who demanded some kind of political autonomy for Brittany were quite naturally supporters of the language. But they did not agree about the political question. In 1939, two main tendencies were apparent inside the political movement: the moderate wing who called themselves "regionalists", and the more radical tendency represented by the Breton Nationalist Party.

The regionalists did not oppose French sovereignty over Brittany. They advocated an administrative reform which would at the same time give Brittany some cultural autonomy. This regionalist programme had been adopted by all the great regionalist organisations founded at the beginning of the century: "Union Régionaliste Bretonne", "Fédération Régionaliste de Bretagne", the Gorsedd of Bards, "Bleun-Brug" and "Association Bretonne." With one voice they demanded the constitution of a Breton Region and the return of liberties granted to Brittany by the 1532 treaty and destroyed by the French Revolution in 1790. In 1939, however, no practical result had been attained although one-third of the Breton representatives elected at the general election of 1936 had pledged themselves to support in the Chamber of Deputies the minimum programme set up by the "Comité du Front Breton."

On the other hand the Breton Nationalist Party, founded in 1919 by M. Marchal, O. Mordrel and F. Debauvais, had brought together an important number of young and enthusiastic supporters. The B.N.P. accused the regionalists of lack of dynamism and ineffectiveness. It held that the Breton question would be solved only when the Breton nation became master of its own destiny. If France refused to give Brittany a freedom equivalent to that of a British Dominion, the party would endeavour to recover Breton liberties by every possible means, if necessary by the creation of an independent Breton State. The fortnightly organ of the B.N.P., "*Breiz Atao*", advocated this policy.

Relations between the B.N.P. and the French Government deteriorated notably during the decade preceding the war. Acts of violence by the secret organisation called "*Gwenn ha Du*", whose direction had been attributed (without the slightest proof) to C. Lainé, began to take place. The most impressive was the blowing up, at Rennes, on August 7, 1932, of the monument symbolizing the union of Brittany with France, on the very day when Monsieur Herriot, the President of the French Government, was solemnly celebrating in Vannes the four hundredth anniversary of the Union. During the same period the B.N.P. came into contact with the other national minorities existing on the French territory: Flemings, Basques, Corsicans, Alsatians, Catalanians. It tried to co-operate with them in the political field, and the review, "*Peuples et Frontières*", created in 1936, was devoted to the defence of the national minorities in western Europe.

Some time before the war the French government decided to take steps against the Breton Movement. Active members of the B.N.P. were sentenced to terms of imprisonment for illegal propaganda. A special order was passed at the beginning of 1938 against any kind of propaganda "*likely to endanger the unity of France*." The two leaders of the B.N.P., F. Debauvais and O. Mordrel, were tried and sentenced to one year's imprisonment; the latter was given the benefit of the

First Offenders Act. In July 1939 the review *Peuples et Frontières*, was suppressed. Its main theme of propaganda had been, for some time, like that of *Breiz Atao*, of the danger of Brittany becoming involved in a European war, and it had adopted a resolutely pacifist attitude. In August 1939 Debauvais was released. At the same time a number of nationalists were arrested for distributing posters and leaflets throughout Brittany advocating a pacifist attitude. The newspaper, *Breiz Atao*, was seized by the police. A few days before the beginning of the war, judging their arrest by the French police to be imminent, Mordrel and Debauvais fled to Belgium and thence to Italy, Hungary and Germany. But the war had already broken out.



## BRETON NATIONALISM: THE WAR AND THE GERMAN POLICY

THE war brought to an end every kind of open nationalist propaganda. Those newspapers, periodicals and reviews of the Breton movement not yet suppressed by the government, had to stop publication as their editors were mobilized. Raids were made throughout Brittany on the houses of Breton nationalists; books and documents were taken away and burnt. The Breton home in Paris, Ker Vreiz, then a reception centre for Breton soldiers—corresponding to the London Welsh Services Club—was ransacked by the police and closed down. C. Lainé, a lieutenant in the reserve, who had been previously reduced to the ranks, was court-martialled for having declared himself a Breton nationalist in his private correspondence, and condemned to five years' imprisonment.

This clearly shows that as early as 1939—i.e. long before the invasion of Brittany by the Germans—an extensive attack on the Breton movement as a whole was being carried out by the French government. Every manifestation of Breton life, political as well as cultural, was proscribed. This is a point of importance, as it enables us to appreciate the true motives of the subsequent persecution which was to start in August 1944, when the Germans left Brittany, and to understand on the other hand the reactions of some Breton nationalists during the German occupation.

Treated as irreconcilable enemies, Mordrel and Debauvais, judging that France's difficulty was Brittany's opportunity, interceded with Germany for their country—just as Mazaryk and Benes did for the Czechs during World War I. They tried to persuade the Germans to set up, in case of a French defeat, an

independent Breton State. On May 20, 1940, they were both condemned to death *in absentia* by a military tribunal at Rennes. At the same time the communist leader Maurice Thorez—now deputy Prime Minister in the French Government—was sentenced to death for desertion in war time. It should be pointed out, however, that the contacts of the two Breton leaders with the Germans during the war were repudiated by the vast majority of the Bretons; among the members of the B.N.P. many people, though they recognised the Breton patriotism of Debauvais and Mordrel, did not agree with them on this point. The whole of the regionalist movement entirely disapproved of the activities of the two nationalist leaders and strongly emphasised their disagreement with the B.N.P.

Meanwhile France was attacked in May 1940 and defeated the next month. Although we have no details of what Debauvais and Mordrel did in Germany, it seems unquestionable that they succeeded in persuading some influential German circles to support their policy, since Marshal Goering declared at the Nuremberg trial that a Breton State was to be set up at the end of the war.

As Roger Casement did during World War I, so did the two Breton leaders address the Breton prisoners of war in Germany in the special camps in which they had been grouped. They succeeded in having some of them released, in particular members of the B.N.P. They followed Mordrel and Debauvais who arrived in Brittany a few days after the Germans entered Rennes, while the Flemish newspapers announced the constitution of a free Brittany. This prospect was favourably accepted by the Breton people.

But events were to differ from what had been expected: a new element had sprung up on June 24, through the signature of an armistice between the Germans and the government of Marshal Pétain. As a condition to an armistice, the French asked from the start that French territorial unity should be recognised



by the Germans. The Breton question was reviewed at the beginning of the negotiations, and the Germans, believing that a Franco-German armistice would mean the end of hostilities, decided to give them satisfaction on that point. The Berlin newspapers, which were ready to publish sensational articles on the setting up of a Breton state, were ordered to change their headlines. As a matter of fact the Franco-German armistice of 1940 was a deadly blow to the policy advocated by Mordrel and Debauvais, because, from then on, the Germans considered the cause of Breton independence contrary to their interests. Henceforward, Germany was going to place her hopes in a policy of collaboration with France.

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In order that these events, and especially the reasons why the Germans changed their policy, might be understood, we must have a look at German politics during this period.

Since the coming to power of the Nazis, two tendencies had been noticeable in German government circles. If both aimed at giving Germany the maximum power and destroying the last traces of Versailles, they disagreed as to the means of attaining those aims. According to one of those tendencies, strength was the only element to be taken into account, and France, as the main bastion against German expansionist plans, should be crushed first. This was the preliminary task to be carried out before Germany could begin the conquest of the eastern territories, i.e. that part of Europe which the Germans considered their natural field of expansion. According to the second tendency, everything had to be done to avoid a war in the west which might endanger the German conquests in the east. Hence the need for a policy of collaboration with the western powers, notably with France, since if France remained neutral, Britain would remain neutral too. In any case the latter would have no means

of landing on the Continent the slightest part of her forces. Faced with such a dilemma, Hitler weighed the pros and cons and for many years wavered between power politics and diplomatic intrigues, emphasizing alternatively both policies according to circumstances.

The result of this attitude was that two different tendencies were represented in Germany regarding France. One of them was anti-French, while the other favoured an entente with France. The former was supported by the old Prussian militarists and the members of the Nazi party while the latter had been adopted by the diplomatic corps and the greater part of the German people. While the former tendency triumphed between 1933 and 1936 in matters in which Hitler could not accept any compromise—i.e. the return of the Saar basin to the Reich and the re-militarisation of the left bank of the Rhine—the latter won the upper hand between 1936 and 1939, when the German government tried to follow a policy of collaboration with France. Von Ribbentrop and Abetz were the chief representatives of this policy, and they obtained over Hitler an ever-increasing influence. Munich, at the end of 1938, marked the triumph of their theories. Hitler believed that he had neutralized the forces which were hostile to Germany in western Europe. The passivity of the foreign powers when Czecho-Slovakia fell, in March 1939, confirmed him in that opinion. The German pact with Russia, negotiated by Ribbentrop, was in his eyes the decisive factor which would prevent the western democracies from intervening in Poland. To the end, Von Ribbentrop and Hitler did not believe in the war on the western frontiers of Germany. But the facts gave the lie to their calculations, and this was the first blow to the pro-French party. Yet Hitler still believed that the Allies had declared war for the sake of principles only, and that he could obtain a good peace treaty after mastering Poland. During the "phoney war" of 1939-1940, he acted according to this belief. His calculations, however, once more proved false.

Accordingly, the anti-French policy was allowed to prevail. Many plans to dismember France were studied. The claims of the Breton nationalists presented by Debauvais and Mordrel found well-disposed listeners. The Germans thought of forming a great Flemish state covering the north of France down to the Somme, a Breton State, and even a State of Burgundy with Wallonia and the provinces which had been once a part of the Holy Roman Empire. They decided upon war, and the attack was launched on May 10, 1940.

Meanwhile Hitler did not entirely give up the pro-French tendencies. The German troops received the order to spare the French civilian population and properties as much as they could. Hitler thought of winning over France's friendship, and the French request for an armistice was readily admitted.

Just as he thought that his victory over Poland would mean the end of the war, so Hitler believed that the end of the hostilities with France would secure peace. The Franco-German armistice appeared to him as the first step towards these ends. By negotiating with the great French soldier whose authority was then unanimously recognized by the French people, Hitler believed that he could gain French sympathy. That is why he treated France with a soft hand at a moment when he could have imposed any condition he liked. But when he signed the armistice, Hitler made his greatest political and military mistake. By leaving unoccupied the half of France and Northern Africa, he tipped the scale in favour of the Allies. The policy of collaboration with France was to become a most conspicuous German failure.

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While the pro-French policy had the upper hand, all plans hostile to France were put aside. The representatives of the German Wilhelmstrasse openly declared that the creation of a Breton State would be a mistake since Brittany would be inevitably driven

into the sphere of influence of Britain with whom she had economic and cultural connections. This explains why the scheme of a Breton state was so easily sacrificed and why the efforts of Debauvais and Mordrel were from the start thwarted by the officials of the German Foreign Office. In other words the Franco-German armistice marked a turning point in the attitude of the Germans towards the Breton question.

Now the German policy was to consist of mere toleration of the Breton movement, Germany requiring from Vichy the same toleration. But Germany had no intention of doing anything else, despite what the French government of to-day may say in this respect. This should be constantly borne in mind to understand the history of the Breton movement during the four years of the German occupation.

It is easy, then, to realize the political difficulties with which the Breton movement was to meet during those years, and the obstacles put before its leaders, with the intrigues of the French government on one hand and the vacillations of the German policy on the other hand. The Germans wanted to remain unhindered by the Breton movement in their policy of collaboration with Vichy France, which was hostile to every Breton claim, just like any other French government. Vichy tried to fight the Breton movement by every means and to persuade the Germans to take steps against it. Also the secret war between the French administration and the German services should be taken into account. Events in the Breton movement between 1940 and 1944 portray the inter-action of these various factors.

## NATIONALISM AND REGIONALISM

**H**OWEVER, from the end of June 1940 onwards Mordrel and Debauvais tried to put their programme into operation. A "*Conseil National Breton*" was founded in Pontivy on July 4, 1940. Its members were F. Debauvais, O. Mordrel, C. Lainé, and M. Guieysse. The *Conseil National* issued a manifesto in favour of the independence of Brittany. A weekly newspaper, "*L'Heure Bretonne*", was created to help its propaganda. But under the pressure of the French authorities, the Germans refused to recognize the *Conseil National Breton* as an official body. At the same time, they did not allow the Breton nationalists to obtain possession of the big press concerns established in Rennes, which had always been, before and during the war, hostile to Breton nationalism. The daily newspapers they were publishing before the war were authorised to resume publication, and they were now devoted to Franco-German collaboration. The post of military governor of Brittany, set up by the German Army after its arrival, was done away with a few weeks later, and Brittany was divided up into five *Feldkommandanturen*, corresponding to the départements as in the rest of France. During the following months the Germans gave up too the policy they had at first adopted towards Breton prisoners. The last camp for Breton prisoners-of-war at Luckenwald near Berlin was closed. The liberation of Breton prisoners was stopped.

Yet Mordrel and Debauvais went on with their propaganda. Being obliged to slow down the activities of the *Conseil National Breton*, they set up anew the Breton Nationalist Party, through the medium of which they were going now to continue their campaign. In *L'Heure Bretonne*, Mordrel launched

violent attacks against the Vichy government. After the meeting of Marshal Pétain and Hitler at Montoire, in a leading article "Question de Loyauté", which proved later to be truly prophetic, Mordrel criticized the policy of collaboration between France and Germany and warned the Germans against it. He told them that their hopes of seeing France enter into a sincere collaboration with Germany were nothing but a lure, and that if France ever tried to collaborate she would only do this to deceive her enemy and stab him in the back at a more convenient moment. As might be easily expected, such renewed attacks roused the wrath of the Vichy government. The French authorities again and again asked the Germans to put a stop to the activities of the B.N.P., to suppress *L'Heure Bretonne* and above all to arrest Mordrel and Debauvais. The German embassy, whose new officer was Otto Abetz, for many years a resolute supporter of a Franco-German understanding, advocated the same thing before the military authorities. At the end of 1940 this policy won the upper hand, and Mordrel and Debauvais were compelled to quit Rennes in order to avoid being arrested. Only the personal connections they had kept among the supporters of the anti-French section, who had helped them during the war, enabled them to escape being taken into custody by the Germans. Yet Mordrel was exiled into Germany for six months. When he came back he was no longer politically active and confined himself to his editorial work as director of the review "*Stur*" which he was already publishing before the war. At the same time the B.N.P. chose as its new leader a less known and more moderate personality who seemed capable by his cautious policy of avoiding the snares which Breton nationalism was likely to meet with. In December 1940, Remont Delaporte became president of the B.N.P. and director of *L'Heure Bretonne*.

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The choice of R. Delaporte as head of the B.N.P. seemed to be a necessity regarding the inner situation of the party as well as its foreign policy. Many people shared the opinion that the policy of Mordrel and Debauvais did not meet with the success they had anticipated. Their personalities, their policy, and their activities during the war, their extreme anti-French and separatist opinions, were not of the kind to win the approbation of the greater part of the Breton people. The fear of the occupying army had subsided, and the fighting spirit of the Resistance was beginning to grow among the public which, being unaware of the struggle of Debauvais and Mordrel against the Germans, was prone to consider them as traitors who had come back to Brittany with the German armies. The sudden change in the German attitude towards Brittany after the armistice had indeed destroyed every chance of success for the policy of the two separatist leaders.

In fact, had France not asked for an armistice, and if Breton independence had been proclaimed, putting in the hands of a Breton state the administration, press, finances and all the resources of a prosperous country like Brittany, there is no doubt that the nationalist and separatist ideas would have been approved by the greater part of the Breton people. Nationalism in Latvia, Lithuania or Esthonia was no stronger before World War I than Breton nationalism on the eve of World War II. But from the day those small countries were given their independence, the national consciousness which was but asleep among the people (as it was asleep among the Breton people) flared up at once and swept the whole nation. The same thing would undoubtedly have happened in Brittany, but conditions were different there, because France remained under the leadership of a respected chief and had saved her national unity, while the idea of Breton independence had been given up by the Germans in order to secure France's friendship. The supporters of French imperialism in Brittany regained

their composure and it seemed impossible that the Bretons would be willing to follow, for the time being, the separatist banners. Breton nationalism remained, it is true, well alive, but mixed with it was a feeling of loyalty towards France; and few people would admit that the future Breton independence could be based on the ruins of France. Therefore the B.N.P., which constituted the extreme wing of Breton nationalism and was, just like any other extremist movement, a minority party, had to revise its attitude in the new circumstances which it had to face in and outside Brittany. The new political course which R. Delaporte—who had carefully studied the political situation—intended to follow, was meant to meet those new necessities.

The new president of the B.N.P. possessed, together with his brother Yves Delaporte, the sympathies of many Breton Catholics with whom they had collaborated before the war. As a matter of fact, the personality of the new leader brought over some new supporters to Breton nationalism. New branches were founded and many hundreds of people attended the congresses of the party. Youth organisations were created, a publishing branch began to issue a great many pamphlets on educational and propaganda matters. In fact, R. Delaporte lay the main stress on the inner organisation of the party and the propaganda among the Breton people. Under his influence, *l'Heure Bretonne* slowed down its attacks and refrained as much as possible from interfering with international matters, and above all with Franco-German relations. But it remained as critical as ever of French administration in Brittany, in spite of the German disapproval of such a policy. In the purely political field R. Delaporte, while he maintained that Brittany had the rights of a nation and ought to be treated as such, declared that he was ready to come into contact with the French government to discuss the status of Brittany. He had admitted that Brittany should remain a part of the French Empire, but the



status he demanded was about as far-reaching as that of a British dominion. From then on, the propaganda of the B.N.P. was to be directed along those lines.

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However, the doctrines of the Breton nationalism remained too extreme for the greater part of Breton opinion. The whole of the Breton movement did not follow the policy of the B.N.P., and the old regionalist tendency, somewhat embarrassed at first by political events, had resumed its activities and was trying to find a way to express itself. The regionalists remained loyal to France before and after the war. They always considered that Breton problems should be solved as between France and Brittany alone. Their position was made evident in December 1940 in an address to Marshal Pétain, presented by Taldir-Jaffrenou and supported by the signatures of a great many Breton personalities. The new French government, under the impulse of Marshal Pétain, seemed more ready to permit administrative reorganisation and to restore the provinces; this would have helped Brittany to safeguard its rights and liberties. It seemed necessary that regionalist doctrines should be fostered in Brittany rather than separatism, in order that the French government be persuaded that cultural and administrative freedom was wanted by Breton opinion as a whole.

Therefore, some members of the regionalist movement resolved, on the initiative of Yann Fouéré, to start a daily newspaper which should become the organ of the regionalist and cultural movement in Brittany. They thought that there was danger in allowing Breton nationalism to express only its political views. This movement had only a minority of followers and sympathisers, although it was proved that before the war the cultural claims of Brittany received almost unanimous support by all sections of Breton opinion. Therefore it was considered that as

united and active regionalist organisation should be formed, with a policy of moderate administrative and cultural reforms which could be approved by the greater part of the Breton people. Yann Fouéré too was of the opinion that Brittany was far from ready to adopt a policy of separatism, not even the more moderate Breton nationalism represented by the B.N.P. under the leadership of R. Delaporte. Thus the important task was to educate the Breton people, to make it conscious of its rights, to propagate Breton ideals, culture and civilization, which French propaganda had tried to blot out during the last hundred and fifty years. In order to accomplish that task it was necessary to reform political institutions. The Vichy government, like any other French government, would never grant reform unless it realised that the Breton movement was strong and could become dangerous if the Breton claims were continually turned down. The aim of the new daily, "*La Bretagne*", would be twofold: first to canalise a strong current of Breton opinion, and second to obtain from France the most essential Breton claims. Could those aims be secured, it would be possible to take further steps.

Before this task could be carried out, much negotiation was necessary. But at last, the first issue of "*La Bretagne*" was published on March 21, 1941. In order to receive authority to start his newspaper, Yann Fouéré had been obliged to pledge his word to the German censorship not to embark upon any anti-French policy, and to pledge his word to the French to remain a regionalist and an enemy of separatism. From then on, Yann Fouéré wrote each day a leading article in which he unceasingly fought for his ideals and demanded the many reforms which Brittany was waiting for. He protested against the numerous attacks made upon the economic and social interests of the Breton people. He formulated a body of regionalist doctrine, building up a plan of Home-Rule for Brittany within the French state. A steadily increasing number of Breton patriots were brought together to

fight for Breton freedom. At the same time the "Amis de la Bretagne", whose members included the most prominent persons in the country, were busy establishing all over Brittany a network of sympathisers to consolidate the work of the newspaper.

At the beginning of 1942, the director of the paper "*La Dépêche*", Monsieur Le Gorgeu, the senator and mayor of Brest, was dismissed because of his hostile attitude to the Vichy government. The purchase of a part of the shares enabled the shareholders of *La Bretagne* to turn this newspaper, which ever since its foundation had been hostile to Breton ideals, into a powerful instrument of propaganda for Breton regionalism. Yann Fouéré took over at this time its political direction, entrusting to his more intimate collaborators the task of defending the Breton claims. Thus was created a body of opinion, which stood for Breton cultural and economic claims, supported by the two dailies which had become the organs of the moderate wing of the Breton movement and were propagating its doctrine every day among several hundred thousand readers.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STRENGTH OF THE BRETON MOVEMENT AND ITS PROGRESS FROM 1941 TO 1944

**W**ITHIN less than eighteen months after the beginning of the German occupation, the Breton movement attained a strength it had never reached before. The Vichy government, weakened at the same time both by internal strife and by the propaganda of General de Gaulle's Committee, had been compelled to take the Breton problem into account.

The strength of the Breton movement lay mainly in its press. The B.N.P. had still at its disposal its weekly organ *L'Heure Bretonne*, whose circulation was steadily increasing. Both this newspaper and the two daily organs of the moderate wing, *La Bretagne* and *La Dépêche*, had gained the favour of the public. They were in fact the only newspapers in Brittany which dared to adopt a critical attitude towards the French administration and to criticise openly the unjust treatment which was inflicted upon the Breton people. Therefore the representatives of the French government in Brittany were compelled to take into account the power of the Breton press.

At the same time, the purely cultural movement was going on with its own propaganda work. Almost all the reviews in Breton that had stopped publication at the beginning of the war, resumed activities during the months following the armistice. A weekly newspaper in Breton, "*Arvor*", edited by Roparz Hemon, was founded in 1941. Another weekly for children was started by the brothers Caouissin in Landerneau. The pre-war cultural and popular societies devoted to Celtic culture, music and arts intensified their activi-

ties. Many new night classes in Breton were started. Towards the end of 1941, the Celtic Institute was created; it aimed at co-ordinating the manifold activities of the cultural societies and developing every aspect of Breton researches. Roparz Hemon was unanimously elected president of the Celtic Institute.

To realise the real strength of the Breton movement as a whole, it must be kept in mind that there were personal contacts between the leaders of every section of the movement, both political and cultural. The Celtic Institute and the cultural societies stood aloof from all political activity. But they were the meeting point of all Bretons interested in the development of their own culture and nationality. Every shade of opinion was represented among them. Both R. Delaporte and Yann Fouéré took part in their activities. Notwithstanding their differing policies, the different political sections of the movement united forces whenever Breton interests were threatened. Such was the strength of the Breton movement that neither the French nor the Germans could any longer ignore it. Being now free to develop its activities along its own lines, without being hindered by oppressive action by the French government, it had become a truly national, vigorous and enterprising movement. Its strength enabled it to obtain substantial concessions both from the French and the German authorities. Following the demand of the Celtic Institute and the Breton newspapers, as well as of a great many petitions from radio listeners, the German authorities (which, as has been already said, only tolerated the Breton Movement as long as its policy did not hinder their collaboration with France) at last allowed one hour's broadcast daily in Breton from the Rennes Station on matters of Breton culture, civilisation and economy. Roparz Hemon, president of the Celtic Institute, was appointed governor of Breton broadcasting; he occupied this post till the Liberation. For the first time in history the Breton language could be heard on the radio. The works of famous Breton, Welsh and Irish

playwrights and composers were played during broadcast festivals and concerts. The annual congresses of the Celtic Institute gave opportunities for such performances, which were followed by large and enthusiastic audiences. They helped to educate the Breton people, to acquaint it with its own culture and civilisation, which the French government, before the war, had deliberately banned from schools, press and radio.

As for the Vichy government, it should be said that, in spite of a few conciliatory words and some official declarations never put into practice, it shared the same views as its predecessors on the Breton question. Having tried by every possible means to stamp out Breton nationalism, it was compelled to acknowledge the growing strength of the movement and to adopt a new attitude towards it. It had been proved that, even though the majority remained averse to extreme solutions, Breton opinion was agreed in demanding those political and administrative reforms which would restore to Brittany her national status. There was not the slightest doubt that, if none of these moderate reforms were granted by the French government, the Breton movement as a whole would resort to more and more radical methods and take an extremist and separatist course. Therefore the French were compelled to concede some Breton claims and to co-operate with the representatives of the more moderate wing of the movement, i.e. the Breton regionalists. This was the policy that was practised between 1941 and the end of the German occupation.

At the beginning of 1941 the Vichy government authorized the teaching of Breton history in the schools. About the same time, the Breton language too was admitted as a subject. At the end of 1941 schoolmasters who desired to do so were permitted to organize courses in Breton, provided that such courses be restricted to one hour a week and given outside compulsory school hours. Such measures aimed at giving some satisfaction to Breton opinion, but they were evidently insufficient. Nevertheless, Ar Brezoneg



er Skol immediately took the opportunity and decided to help financially the Breton classes and to reward both schoolmasters and pupils. Furthermore, competitions were organized at the end of each year between the schools where Breton was being taught.

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In mid-1942 the policy of co-operation with the moderate wing of the Breton movement reached its peak, with the action of the Lorraine-born Préfet Régional, Monsieur Quenette, who was the administrative head of four out of the five Breton départements. This high official had a clear understanding of the Breton question. He was perfectly aware of the fact that it must be solved lest it take a more extremist course which would endanger the unity of France. Having sought and obtained full powers from the government, Monsieur Quenette issued in October 1942 a special decree which set up an official body subsequently called "Comité Consultatif de Bretagne." Before taking this step he had sought the advice of a great many Breton personalities and of the representatives of the regionalist societies.

The new assembly was composed of twenty-five members chosen by the Préfet Régional. Some of them were prominent personalities. But most of them were chosen by the main Breton societies: Union Régionaliste, Association Bretonne, Gorsedd of the Bards, Bleun-Brug, Ar Brezoneg er Skol, Kevredigez ar C'helc'hiou Keltiek, Celtic Institute, and Union Folklorique de Bretagne. The oldest supporters of Breton ideals, Marquis de l'Estourbeillon, Father Perrot, Taldir Jaffrenou and Mocaer were nominated, besides members of Parliament, General Councillors, members of agricultural unions, businessmen and writers.

The Comité was to hold a plenary session every three months, under the chairmanship of the Préfet Régional. Between the plenary sessions, a permanent commission of seven members met once a month, to

see to the execution of the decisions of the Comité and to prepare its further work. The commission was presided over by the general secretary of the assembly. The secretary, chosen at first by the Préfet, was later elected by the members of the Comité at their plenary session. Yann Fouéré, elected at the beginning of 1944, was the second holder of this post.

However, Monsieur Quenette distrusted the traditional love of freedom of the Breton people and its antagonistic attitude to the central power. Therefore, he would not invest the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne with power of decision on matters submitted to it. The role of the new assembly consisted merely of advising the government on purely cultural reforms which they deemed indispensable. However, the Comité was also entrusted with the work of administering the reforms after they had been decided upon by the French government. It should be pointed out that the government refused to admit representatives of the B.N.P. as members of the Comité, on the ground that they were too anti-French.

Nevertheless, the creation of the Comité was a most important step. For the first time since the French Revolution and the suppression of the Etats de Bretagne, an assembly had been set up to advise upon Breton rights to the French government. Brittany had been officially recognised as a separate national entity. The members of the Comité hoped that they would be able to obtain, little by little, greater powers and the right to discuss all matters concerning Brittany. It was the constant policy of the Comité during the two years of its existence to enlarge its sphere of influence and to become a genuine Breton assembly.

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In spite of its limited powers the new Breton assembly exerted a most powerful influence. From October 1942 onward, it initiated all the reforms that were adopted to satisfy Breton claims. Among the



more important were the following measures: Towards the end of 1942, the government set Breton history as a compulsory subject for the "Certificat d'Etudes Primaires"; in 1943 an examination in Breton was instituted for the same Certificat d'Etudes and a special allowance, paid by the French government, was granted to schoolmasters who took Breton classes. These measures helped to start new Breton courses, and, from then on, thousands of children received instruction in the language. During the same year the Préfet Régional decided to institute a non-compulsory examination for candidates who wanted to become civil servants in Brittany, and the Comité asked that the candidates who had passed those examinations should receive preference in the Breton-speaking parts of the country. The Comité also succeeded in creating a Summer-School for Breton teachers—Skol-Hanv Aogust Brizeug—in order to acquaint them with Breton culture, which was then almost unknown to them as a result of official anti-Breton education. The Summer-School was inaugurated in July 1943 by the Préfet Régional, the rector of the University of Rennes and the members of the Comité Consultatif. During that summer the educational staff of the school—an elementary school inspector and high school teachers—gave lectures on the Breton language, history and geography.

At the same time, the Comité Consultatif proposed a great many reforms in Breton economy. In the political field itself (which remained theoretically out of bounds), the Comité was not afraid of adopting a strong attitude. It prepared a statute which was in fact a new constitution for Brittany, aiming at the restoration of the Breton franchises suppressed by France in 1790; and it submitted this for the government's approval. But it was not welcomed by the French government, which hardly acknowledged its receipt. Therefore the Comité decided to submit it to the approval of the municipal corporations and municipal councils, and to have it signed by a great many

prominent Breton personalities. At the beginning of 1944, more than two hundred communes and almost one thousand prominent Bretons representing every field of Breton activities had approved the scheme.

There is no doubt to-day that had the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne been allowed to go on with its work, it would have been able, little by little, to obtain from the central government still greater concessions. But the Germans evacuated Brittany in August 1944, and the anti-Breton reaction took the much-awaited-for opportunity to destroy the small gains of the Breton movement; they did this under the pretext of alleged collaboration with the Germans. In order to understand the events which then took place, the story of the Breton movement on the eve of the Liberation of France, and its attitude towards France and Germany, should be examined.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POLICY OF THE BRETON MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE VICHY GOVERNMENT AND THE GERMANS

**B**EFORE the war, the success of the campaign of Ar Brezoneg er Skol had proved what influence the Breton cultural movement had. Its strength greatly increased between 1940 and 1944. And during this period the cultural movement was no more political than before the war. Men of every political creed—Gaullists, Pétainists, Resistance men as well as Germanophiles—had been supporting the cause of the Breton language. Ar Brezoneg er Skol supported the Breton courses taken in the government schools, regardless of the political ideas of the schoolmasters. The secretary of Ar Brezoneg er Skol, a close collaborator of Yann Fouéré, was at the same time a member of the Resistance, and Yann Fouéré was himself aware of this fact. The majority of the teachers who came to attend the summer courses of the Skol-Hanv Aogust Briuzeg in 1943 were indeed rebels who had escaped from the slave labour established by Vichy and the Germans.

The Celtic Institute, the Celtic Clubs and the other cultural societies refused to side with any political party whatever. Those Reviews in the Breton language which were being published before the war, like *Dihunamb*, *Gwalarn*, *Sav*, *Studi hag Ober*, etc., continued to publish articles on literary, artistic and religious matters. None of them ever devoted a single article to politics. The publications for children and the weekly Breton newspaper *Arvor*, adopted the same attitude. The publishing firms, like "*Skridou Breiz*" in Brest and *mouleriez Bro. Leon* in Landerne, never issued a single book about politics. During the German

occupation as well as before, it was the Bretons themselves who defended the Breton language and culture. They did not consider that there was any serious reason against their fighting for the rights of the Breton language, as they had done previously.

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While the cultural movement, with the approval of the greater part of the population, abstained from political activities, it is true that the political movement, on the other hand, was compelled to take sides. Both the moderate wing, represented by the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne, and the more radical wing, represented by the B.N.P., adopted a strictly Breton policy; but none of them interfered with French or German politics.

The essentials of the political line adopted by the regionalists can be found in the plan for a Breton constitution which was submitted by the Comité to the French government. The scheme urged the creation of a Breton province or government to include the five Breton départements. (It should be noted that, in spite of the protests of the Breton people, only four out of the five Breton départements had been placed by Vichy under the authority of the Préfet Régional.) Further, it was urged that Brittany should be administered by a governor chosen by the French government, and by a provincial assembly. This assembly would be entrusted with the making of laws on matters of general interest to Brittany. It would be composed of representatives elected by the communes in proportion to their population, and by the most important social, economic and spiritual bodies. Complete cultural autonomy would be granted to the province; education was to be placed under the direction of Breton authorities. Both French and Breton would be accepted as official languages. A Secretary of State for Breton affairs would be created in the French government in Paris; and Brittany would have, in the French

assemblies and government, a number of representatives proportional to her economic importance and population.

Thus the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne was asking for a kind of Home-Rule and a political status hardly higher than that which Scotland has to-day within the British Empire.

The B.N.P., on the other hand (which, as has already been said, had no representative in the Comité) had adopted a more uncompromising attitude. It agreed, it is true, that Brittany should remain a component part of the French Empire, provided that she would be free to sever her connections with France. The B.N.P. demanded the fullest possible autonomy for Brittany; that her government and interior administration be in the hands of the Bretons themselves; and that only the army and navy, and to some extent foreign affairs, should be directed by France. Had the demands of the B.N.P. been granted, Brittany would have enjoyed, within the French Empire, almost the same status as Northern Ireland possesses within the British Commonwealth.

Those who are acquainted with the strong centralising polity of France can understand that both programmes were bound to be resisted by any French government. The Vichy government was no exception to the rule. Nevertheless it thought it advisable to make some practical concessions with the intention of preventing more serious difficulties arising in Brittany, and in order to weaken the hold of the nationalist movement on the Bretons. The help and co-operation of the Vichy government to the Breton movement thus appears in its true light. It was only a method of resisting Breton nationalism.

However, the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne proved itself to be a rather difficult council to handle; it was eager to increase its influence and to maintain its prerogatives. As early as its second session, it demanded a status for Brittany which the government was not ready to grant. As a matter of fact, Breton

regionalism was nothing but moderate Breton nationalism; it considered its task to be a truly national one and it always put Breton interests first. It should be kept in mind, in order to understand Breton politics, that the regionalists as well as the nationalists had, during the occupation, almost the same attitude towards the French government and the Germans. Towards both powers, the two movements maintained an attitude of uncompromising neutrality.

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Is it possible to accuse the Breton movement of having helped the Vichy government during the occupation? As regards the more radical wing represented by the B.N.P., such an assertion could hardly be put forward. On the contrary Vichy often urged the German authorities to take steps against the B.N.P., and it used its influence with the press and the higher clergy to abate the criticism, published in *l'Heure Bretonne*, of Vichy's policy and administration in Brittany. The same government denied the B.N.P. a right to be represented in the Comité Consultatif. Consequently the attitude of the B.N.P. towards the Vichy government remained the same as it had been towards preceding French governments; it was opposed to the central power and faithful to Brittany's position. French government, of any kind, was in its eyes nothing but a foreign government.

The moderate movement, in spite of its apparent collaboration with France, had indeed the same point of view. It is true that its attitude was different from that of the B.N.P., but it remained strictly independent of Vichy. It recognised the authority of Vichy only in the same way as it would have recognised the authority of any other French government exerting its power over French territory, and it did not fail to point this out on every possible occasion. Neither the Comité nor the regionalist movement wanted to interfere with French controversies. Their task was the



defence of Breton interests and the fight for Breton freedom. They meant to represent Breton claims and aspirations before any French government. A great many articles in *La Bretagne* and *La Dépêche* made this attitude clear. It was embodied in the wording of the scheme of the Breton constitution and in the numerous resolutions adopted by the municipal and local councils in its support.

Some members of the Comité, it is true, had a pro-Vichy attitude and assumed some official functions under that government; but whenever they sat in the Comité beside other members who were notoriously Gaullist, they considered themselves only as representatives of Breton interests, regardless of any French government whatsoever. When the Allied forces landed in Normandy, Yann Fouéré, in his capacity as general secretary of the Comité, made its standpoint clear once more in a public letter to the representatives of the Vichy government. He reaffirmed its point of view after the arrival in Rennes of the American troops, in a letter to the head of the new French government in Brittany.

So, nationalism and regionalism remained in Brittany on strictly national grounds; this explains why the regionalist and nationalist press had the same attitude towards the Vichy government during the occupation. The Breton newspapers, though they were compelled by the German censorship to remain neutral towards the principle of Vichy government, did not fail to criticise sharply its administration and internal policy. It is no overstatement to say that the only newspapers in Brittany which criticised the Vichy government were the Breton-minded newspapers. This attitude created many incidents with the German censorship because the French government did not disdain putting its claims before the German authorities. *L'Heure Bretonne*, as well as *La Dépêche* and *La Bretagne* were many times threatened with heavy fines and forbidden to criticise the decisions of the Vichy government regarding, for instance, its food policy

(which was at the time, as it remained for years, intended to suck Breton resources dry).

The French authorities did not scruple to denounce the Breton movement to the Germans on the ground of its foreign policy, under the pretext that articles appeared from time to time in the Breton press, studying the Celtic peoples of Britain and the British dominions, and describing the measure of freedom they were enjoying within the British Commonwealth and comparing their political and cultural liberties with the treatment meted out to Brittany by the French state; the Comité itself published a report by Pierre Mocaer in the review "*An Eost*" about British liberalism and the teaching of Welsh. The French authorities hoped that the Germans would put a stop to Breton activities and undertake the responsibility for its destruction. So it is easily comprehensible that the French Government will not give the correct interpretation of the policy of the Breton movement towards the German authorities.

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As a matter of fact, if the Breton movement tried to keep completely aloof of Vichy, it could only adopt the same attitude towards the Germans. Remaining strictly neutral in the political quarrels among Frenchmen, it had to remain equally neutral towards Germany. The movement was obliged to keep aloof from the problem of Franco-German relations which concerned France and Germany only. If it meant to keep its independence, the Breton movement was bound to oppose some German demands just as it opposed France's centralising policy.

The regionalist movement for its part meant to preserve towards the Germans the same neutrality that it had adopted towards French politics. It had, of course, to admit their presence in Brittany as a fact, but it wanted to ignore them as much as possible and to go on with its work as if they did not occupy the country.

It allowed its members to adopt whatever attitude they chose towards the Germans. Many members of its associations were avowedly Gaullist and anti-German, while others had quite different opinions. Among members of the Comité there were, besides well-known Anglophiles like P. Mocaer, one member of "*La France Combattante*" and one member of "*Défense de la France*", two of the most active organisations of the French Resistance. And when M. Du Fretay, a senator of Finistère, was thrown into jail by the Germans under the charge of having helped Allied airmen, the Comité elected him as one of their members.

The regionalist press maintained the same neutrality. Under the influence of Yann Fouéré, the director of *La Dépêche* and *La Bretagne*, these two newspapers made it quite evident that they intended to keep aloof from questions of foreign policy and of Franco-German affairs. They intended to be Breton and nothing else. This attitude was in marked contrast to the attitude of the Paris press as well as that of the other newspapers in Brittany, which were far more ready to submit to German demands. These two organs were the only newspapers in Brittany which refused to publish leading articles in favour of Germany and the collaboration. They increased the number of the articles devoted to Breton affairs in order to reduce the space for the articles the Germans would have liked to force them to publish. The space allowed to "inspired" articles was very small indeed, compared with the space devoted to the collaboration propaganda in other newspapers. *La Dépêche*—which had been one of the most collaborationist newspapers in Brittany (in spite of the fact that its director, Monsieur Le Gorgeu, became the future representative of De Gaulle's government in Brittany) became, as soon as it was taken over by a new regionalist staff, the most neutral newspaper in the province regarding foreign affairs. At the end of 1943, under the influence of its new editor, a member of a Resistance organisation, *La Dépêche* adopted an almost undisguised anti-

German policy while it continued its stress on Breton affairs. While the Vichy government was complaining of the unceasing attacks directed against its administration by the regionalist press, the Germans began in their turn to be aware of its unwillingness to side with them and its too apparent reluctance to serve their policy. At the beginning of 1944 the regionalist newspapers were threatened with suppression, and their directors were in danger of being arrested. On the landing of the Allied expeditionary forces, the whole regionalist press was suppressed . . .

In the field of the radio, Roparz Hemon managed to maintain the same attitude as Yann Fouéré. In spite of a great many demands upon him, he refused to allow the daily Breton hour to be used for purposes other than Breton culture and language. Towards the French as well as towards the Germans, his policy remained the same. To the very end he succeeded in abstaining from every kind of political propaganda and from taking sides in the problems of Franco-German collaboration.

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The greater part of the nationalist movement, too, adopted the strictly neutral policy which the regionalist and cultural movement was already following. It is true that at the very beginning the Breton Nationalist Party and *l'Heure Bretonne* had been avowedly germanophile. This was but a consequence of the anti-French attitude adopted by Mordrel and Debauvais. Breton nationalism was Germanophile—as the Irish Sinn-Fein was germanophile in 1914—because Germany was the enemy of France. Had Britain been France's enemy instead of Germany, the Breton nationalists would have been pro-British. They were pro-German because they thought that a German victory would destroy France and give them an opportunity to build up a Breton state. Their pro-German attitude,

on the whole, was not based upon a political creed; it was only a matter of opportunity. Therefore it is easy to realise why a large section of the nationalist movement altered its attitude towards Germany when Germany herself adopted a different attitude towards the Breton question.

In fact it appeared immediately after the armistice that Breton independence had been sacrificed by the Germans to what they deemed a vital necessity for their policy, i.e. collaboration with France. Since the day when Germany adopted her new political course, it was becoming more and more evident that Brittany had been once more defeated by French diplomacy. When the French told the Germans that sincere collaboration with France could not be put into practice as long as Germany favoured Breton nationalism, the Germans did not hesitate to drop Brittany. From that day on, a great many Breton nationalists either adopted a strictly neutral position or became definitely anti-German. As soon as the Germans ceased to be allies, they became invaders, just as the French were. From then on, the B.N.P., under the leadership of Remont Delaporte, was quite naturally brought to adopt the same neutral attitude as the regionalist movement towards Germany. The leaders of the B.N.P. were even aware of the fact that some members and officials of the party were anti-German and had joined the Resistance. Such was the case of Major Thomas, a member of the supreme council of the party, who was killed in action against the Germans in August 1944; of Mr. Dieulesaint, of Moncontour, Dr. Leclair, of St. Pol de Léon, Malard, of Questembert—all of them local leaders of the party—who were executed by the Germans.

*L'Heure Bretonne*, organ of the B.N.P., had to fight unceasingly, as the regionalist newspapers did, to maintain its political neutrality. The German censorship repeatedly tried to compel it to take sides on foreign questions, but R. Delaporte fought to the ut-

most to maintain his neutral position, thinking that the B.N.P. ought to stand aloof from the Franco-German quarrel which did not concern Brittany any more.

However, this attitude met with serious difficulties. It was vigorously opposed by some sections of the party itself. A split took place inside the Breton Nationalist Party at the end of 1943.



THE FRENCH RESISTANCE AND THE  
PERROT UNIT

SOME among the oldest and staunchest supporters of the B.N.P., who had been members of the *Breiz Atao* organisation before the war, and some young newcomers who favoured a more active policy, had found it difficult to follow the moderate policy of R. Delaporte. They wholly distrusted France and deemed useless every attempt made to collaborate with the French government. They still favoured the constitution of an independent Breton State with no connection at all with France who remained in their eyes the arch-enemy of Brittany. Adopting much the same attitude as the Irish Republicans twenty years or so before, they refused to make concessions.

As a matter of fact they had bitterly resented the collaboration between the French and the Germans. But they continued to think that Germany would sooner or later realise that she had been duped and would resume her plans to divide up France, which for Brittany would mean another fresh opportunity. Their Breton patriotism prompted them to remain pro-German like Mordrel and Debauvais whose attitude towards Germany had been a matter of circumstances and political opportunism. Therefore they fought at the same time the moderation of R. Delaporte towards France and his neutrality towards Germany which was one of the main points of the policy of the B.N.P.

The organisation of the French Resistance in Brittany, from 1943 onwards, did not fail to give them new incentives. The extreme communist and socialist left had joined hands in the Resistance with the majority of the supporters of the Jacobin and centralising movements who had always been opposed even to the

most moderate Breton claims. The latter did not constitute the great bulk of the active elements, who from 1943 on, joined the Resistance; but they soon became their intellectual leaders and developed the Resistance movement along their own lines, which were not only pro-French but deliberately anti-Breton. The pro-German attitude of the B.N.P. at the beginning of the occupation, and the return of Mordrel and Debauvais with the German army, were easy pretexts to persuade the local Resistance committees as well as the French Committee in London that the Breton movement as a whole, whose shades of opinion they did not take into account, was pro-German and collaborationist. They had quickly realised the hold that the Breton movement had taken on the population. They thought that if they did not use the opportunity of the coming troubles to destroy it, it could become too strong an obstacle to the assimilation of Brittany and the destruction of the Breton language and culture, which had been for centuries the aim of French policy. At the same time the unity of France seemed to these people to be gravely endangered.

As heirs of the traditional Jacobin policy and as witnesses of the fruitless efforts of Vichy to stop the progress of Breton nationalism and regionalism, they planned to force the Breton movement to take sides and to give up the neutrality it had been able to keep till then. Thus they hoped to be able, some day, to accuse the movement as a whole of pro-German activities, to destroy it thoroughly when the German defeat would come, and to discredit it irretrievably in the eyes of Breton and foreign opinion.

However, they realised very soon that in order to discredit the Breton movement it did not suffice to spread calumnies and lies. In spite of the underhand propaganda, Breton nationalism and regionalism went on with their work, proclaiming their neutrality in the conflict, in accordance with the beliefs of the majority of the Breton population. From then on the supporters of the anti-Breton policy thought it necessary to

take a further step. They began to organise a series of provocations against the Breton movement.

At the beginning of September 1943, a manufacturer of Quimper, Yann Bricler, a cousin of O. Mordrel and a Breton nationalist, was shot. One month later, another member of the Breton movement, Kerhoas, of Plonevez-du-Faou, was assassinated. But they were not yet satisfied. In order to secure their purpose, the anti-Breton section of the French Resistance needed to suppress a more important personality of the movement. On December 12, 1943, the purest Breton patriot, Father Perrot, fell a victim of the assassins.

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The death of Father Perrot, the apostle venerated by all sections of the Breton movement regardless of their different viewpoints, a pioneer of the Breton revival since the beginning of the twentieth century, marks a turning point in the history of the Breton movement during the German occupation. The French Resistance knew perfectly well what his murder would mean. Father Perrot could be blamed neither for being compromised with any political party nor for being pro-German. The blow fell on the Breton fighter only. His murder meant indeed a declaration of war on the Breton Movement as a whole. The French Resistance used the most atrocious and foul means to compel the movement to take a political position which it did not want to take. In doing so, the Resistance tried to make the Breton claims—nationalist as well as regionalist—appear as pro-German and anti-French activities. All supporters of Breton ideals were painfully struck by Father Perrot's murder. Regardless of their differences, they met together to pay him their last homage. Yet, the greater part of the movement did not retort to the insult. However painful Father Perrot's death might have been for some of them, neither the regionalists nor the nationalists intended to give up the neutral

attitude they had all assumed in the Franco-German feud. Leaving to the French the responsibility for such a revolting crime, being aware that history would do them justice, the majority of the movement refused to reply to the declaration of war made by the Resistance, with another declaration of war. Only the more extreme wing of the B.N.P. adopted a new attitude and sided with the Germans to fight terrorism.

Father Perrot's death crystallized the opposition existing inside the B.N.P. between R. Delaporte and the more extreme minority. A few members of the supreme council of the Party shared the views of the minority. In spite of entreaties and of accusations of being a coward, R. Delaporte refused to abandon the political line followed by the Party and refused to collaborate with the Germans to fight the French Resistance. Unable to enjoy freedom of action, the minority left the party and decided to set up another Breton Nationalist Party allegedly more faithful to the traditional nationalist policy and to publish *Breiz Atao* as its organ.

The split was made effective during the first days of 1944. Marcel Guieysse and Célestin Lainé took the lead among the dissidents. Debauvais, already undermined by the illness of which he died in March of the same year, gave his patronage and approbation to the new formation, composed of some of the younger and most enthusiastic supporters of the nationalist movement.

The second nationalist party did not want to confine itself to words only. It formally disapproved of the moderate policy of Delaporte and advocated an entirely independent Brittany. Furthermore, it took sides in the Franco-German quarrel with Germany against the French Resistance, and decided to take up arms against it. It recruited and organised a military unit consisting exclusively of Breton nationalists. It aimed at fighting the Breton maquis, murderers of Breton patriots, in collaboration with the Germans. They had to wear German uniform "in order not to

impair the good relations existing between the Vichy government and Germany." The new unit was named "Formation Jean-Marie Perrot" after the name of the martyr whom it meant to avenge. As a matter of fact, the first military operations in which the Perrot unit took part during the Spring of 1944 were directed against the Maquis of central Brittany, where they knew that the murderers of the venerated parish-priest of Scrignac were hiding.

In the meantime, the murderers of Breton patriots were going on with their work. The French Resistance, directed and used as a tool by some mysterious leaders in order to crush the Breton movement, shot down many people who were only lovers of Brittany. During the spring and summer of 1944, before the arrival of the Americans, Breton patriots of every shade of opinion fell victims to terrorist activities: A. Boscher (Barz Ar Yeodet) and his brother, both members of the Gorsedd of Bards and Breton poets, Yves de Cambourg and Louis Stephan, members of the staff of the newspaper *La Bretagne*; Madame Du Guerny (the author, under the name of Danio, of a "too Breton" history of Brittany); Paul Gaïc of Plessala and the Brothers Tattevin of Nevez—one of them was only sixteen years old—propagandists of the B.N.P. and newsagents of *L'Heure Bretonne*; Christian Le Part, a propagandist of the new B.N.P., etc. Attempts upon the lives of the principal leaders of the movement were planned. They would have been carried out if the American troops had not occupied Brittany in August 1944.

It should be pointed out, in order to be able to judge with impartiality the action of the Perrot Unit, that their one aim was to track down the murderers of Breton patriots and avenge their deaths. In so doing, the Perrot Unit, it is true, gave up the traditional neutrality of the Breton movement towards the Franco-German feud, which the rest of the Movement intended to maintain to the very end. But it must be admitted that they took arms only when the outrages

committed against Bretons by the French Resistance were more than flesh and blood could stand. It appeared that the French maquis meant to destroy the Breton movement and would use any weapon to do this. The Perrot Unit did not intend to help Germany, but only to support Breton traditions against the French imperialist Resistance. The young men who were members of the unit were not pro-German. They were only Bretons fighting the same enemy as the Germans. They considered themselves as Breton soldiers. A great many of them had refused to serve both Germany and France and had refused to join slave labour organised by Vichy. They had been compelled to leave their homes to avoid being deported to Germany. But if they denied to the French and the Germans any right to give them orders, they listened to the call of their Breton leaders who asked them to fight for the freedom of their country and to defend Breton nationalists who were then in danger. This remains true even if their strong anti-French feeling brought some of them—they were very few indeed—to adopt some of the teachings of the German philosophy.

However, as pure and unselfish as their aims might have been, as understandable as their activities might have been looked at from a Breton viewpoint, they were bound to be crushed by the French Resistance which came to power after the German retreat in August 1944.



## THE REPRESSION

**F**OLLOWING the break-through of the Allied Expeditionary Corps in Avranches in July 1944, the German defence collapsed in Brittany and the American troops entered Rennes on August 4, 1944. A few days later they had conquered the whole Breton peninsula with the exception of Brest, which resisted till the middle of September, and the pockets of Lorient and St. Nazaire which held on till the German capitulation in 1945. The authorities of the London French Committee everywhere replaced the Vichy authorities. Many disorders took place during the first weeks after their installation.

More Breton patriots were murdered during this period. Such was the fate of Father Lec'hvien, an old Breton nationalist, the parish-priest of Quemper-Guézennec; of young Philippon, an artist, shot down while praying on Father Perrot's grave. The farm of Loeiz Herrieu, the Director of *Dihunamb*, was attacked and looted, and his private library, including a great many valuable old Breton books, was burned; Loeiz Herrieu himself and his family had to take to flight in order to save their lives.

However, the local organisations of the Resistance, consisting mainly of Bretons, did not attack Breton patriots whose neutral attitude was well known to them; they only arrested the members of the French collaborationist parties in Brittany. Things took another course when the new French officials began their activities.

It must be pointed out that the authorities placed in power by the French Committee of London, were always chosen from among the most notoriously anti-Breton personalities. The name of Monsieur Le Gorgeu, a senator and former mayor of Brest, should

be mentioned in the first place. For six months he wielded from Rennes almost dictatorial powers over Brittany, before the provisory government was organised in Paris. A rabid anti-Breton, he dared even in 1933 to prohibit in Brest the Inter-celtic Congress. He had steadily opposed the campaign for the teaching of the Breton language. As soon as he arrived in Rennes, he began the repression of the Breton movement and attempted to destroy it. He found his most devoted auxiliaries in General Allard, the military commander in Brittany; Monsieur Fréville, "Press-dictator" for Brittany; Foulon, Secretary of the Comité de Libération d'Ille et Vilaine; Avril, the President of the Comité de Libération, and later the Préfet of Côtes-du-Nord; Le Goaziou and Gourvil, the two informers of the Breton movement, president and secretary of the Comité de Libération of Finistère.

Arrest warrants were immediately issued against Breton patriots regardless of their political views; in the first place against the national and local leaders of the B.N.P. in the Départements. Numerous arrests were made, and those arrested were thrown into concentration camps or into gaol, and placed with French collaborators or gunmen of the Gestapo and the French Militia. Many of the patriots were severely bludgeoned, tortured and wounded. Whenever wanted leaders could not be found, their wives or sisters, or even their children, were taken into custody. Many women were beaten, stripped of their clothing; many had their heads cropped; many were violated. The American forces were many times obliged to interfere in order to stop such violence.

At the beginning of September 1944, a big round-up was made, to arrest other people whose only "offences" were Breton nationalism or regionalism. However, the majority of the leaders of the B.N.P. managed to escape; the whole of the Perrot Unit had followed the retreating German Army. On the other hand, Yann Fouéré, who had decided to remain at his post,

was among the first to be arrested. Others arrested were Taldir-Jaffrenou, the President of the Breton Gorsedd; James Bouillé, the President of the Bleun-Brug; Francis Even, a lawyer of Tréguier; B. De Guébriant, the Président of the Breton Agricultural Unions; Florian Le Roy, the Breton writer; André Dézarrois, a curator of French Museums—all of them members of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne. Dézarrois had been a member of the French Resistance since its start; he was wearing the uniform of a Major of the American army when he was arrested; the pretext for his arrest was that he had dared to protest against other arrests and had asked Monsieur Le Gorgeu to call a meeting of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne to consider the matter. At the same time, many local leaders of the B.N.P. were taken into custody; for instance the whole staff of the party in Finistère, whose head was Dr. Delaporte, a brother of the president of the B.N.P.

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But the oppressors were not satisfied, and every day they discovered new Breton patriots. In November 1944, under the direction of General Allard, another big round-up was made all over Brittany. Almost one thousand Breton patriots, men and women, were arrested and thrown into the concentration camps of Rennes, Langueux, Sarzeau, Pont de Buis, Quimper and Chateaubriant. Among the people arrested were about thirty parish priests, soldiers of the Resistance forces, British agents, and even boys of thirteen and mothers of many children. This time the French authorities openly admitted that the holding of Breton ideals was the one and only reason for the arrest, and not some alleged collaboration with the Germans. A few days after the round-up, General Allard was made a Comandeur in the Légion d'Honneur.

This time, however, the Breton people reacted more

vigorously. In spite of the terror, a mass-meeting was organised near Folgoët to protest against the arrests; ten thousand people took part. The demonstrators were armed and intended to storm the Brest sous-préfecture (then at Lesneven). When the local volunteer troops refused to oppose them, General Allard thought it necessary to seek French reinforcements from Rennes and Paris. Bloodshed threatened but was avoided, thanks to the mediation of the Bishop of Quimper who gained liberty for some who had been arrested, especially the parish-priests who were released after two or three weeks. However, many Breton nationalists were not released, because the French authorities deemed them too dangerous; they would have had a "bad" influence on Breton public opinion. In fact, the French authorities were resolved to punish them or at least to compel them to leave Brittany; so they kept them in gaol till new laws could be passed to give some legal support to the repression. The prisoners were kept in dirty cells; their condition was appalling owing to the lack of proper nourishment and sanitation. At times, they were allowed to receive neither visitors nor letters or food parcels; they were often placed with thieves and criminals.

At the beginning of 1945, almost one thousand Breton nationalists were still in gaol or in concentration camps. However, in spite of all efforts made, the leaders of the B.N.P. and the Perrot Unit could not be arrested. Joseph Jaffré only, the editor of the *Heure Bretonne*, was taken into custody. But Roparz Hemon, who had left Rennes before the arrival of the American troops, was arrested during the spring of 1945. When Germany collapsed some soldiers of the Perrot Unit were captured and thrown into gaol, and also Marcel Guieysse, his wife and daughter.

The legal repression began at this time. After they had spent many months in gaols and concentration camps, Breton patriots were brought before the new special courts that had been set up, viz. the "Cours de Justice" and "Chambres Civiques"; these special

courts were set up to punish people found guilty of collaboration with the Germans or having been members of collaborationist parties.

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The new laws were contrary to the principles of justice generally accepted in democratic countries. It is a general principle that new laws can never have retrospective effect. However, the new French laws of 1944 provided for the punishment of crimes committed between June 18, 1940, and the Liberation of France, i.e. at a time when such activities and opinions were quite lawful. The juries of the new courts, instead of being chosen by lot, were selected from among persons belonging to the Resistance, i.e. from among the enemies of the people they had to try. What is more, the administrative and political authorities were allowed to inflict penalties of internment in concentration camps on people whom the law courts could not find guilty; it can easily be realised that such legislation enabled the French authorities to sentence Breton patriots at their convenience.

The smallest penalty provided by the new laws was internment in a concentration camp. Many members of the Breton movement were thrown into those camps without having the opportunity to defend themselves; and their condition was often worse than that of prisoners in gaol. A great many of them were kept in the camps for at least three months, and in some cases for twelve months or more. Some of them were so badly treated that their health suffered gravely. James Bouillé, the President of the Bleun-Brug and a member of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne, died a few weeks after his release owing to the maltreatment he had suffered while in a concentration camp. Such also was the fate of Father Guivarc'h, one of the parish-priests arrested in 1944. Colonel Charles, the Regional Director of the Food Services and a Breton writer, was so badly knocked about the head that he had to be treated for a few months in a lunatic asylum.

Many others, interned for a long time in the concentration camps, were tried before the *Chambre Civile*, a special court which could impose penalties of civic degradation, banishment and confiscation of properties. Civic degradation—five years at least—was a penalty unknown before in French law; it was very similar to the racial laws of Hitlerite Germany against the Jews: it meant the loss of civil rights, the cancellation of civil and military decorations, the cessation of pensions even for disabled persons and widows, reduction to the ranks, and prohibition to practise in many professions such as the civil service, teaching, publishing and journalism. The consequence was that many of the sentenced people lost their positions and were unable to earn their livelihood.

The *Cours de Justice* had been set up to try offences called crimes and could inflict, besides civic degradation, penal servitude and death penalties. Many Breton patriots were tried in these courts.

It is impossible to give an account of all the trials which took place in these various courts between the beginning of 1945 and the present day (when they are still going on with their work) because they were so many. We must confine ourselves to a few approximate figures and to mention some of the more important trials.

In all probability, about two thousand Breton patriots were arrested. More than one thousand of these people were thrown into concentration camps. Two or three hundred were tried by the *Chambres Civiques* and sentenced to heavy penalties. Two or three hundred were tried before the *Cours de Justice*, which inflicted upon them heavy sentences of imprisonment and penal servitude. About sixty were sentenced to death, and fifteen were executed up to October 1946. It should also be noted that many were sentenced to death *in absentia* and would have been executed if the police had been able to arrest them.

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This repression was the bloodiest in Breton history, except those of the French Revolution and of the 1675 Rising. In the middle of 1945, the Chambres Civiques of the five Breton Départements began to try the members of the B.N.P. The mere fact of having been a member of that party (even if no act of collaboration could be proved) was sufficient for condemnation. But many thousands of members of the movement were not arrested because the party staff and local leaders had destroyed documents and lists of members. Almost all of those tried by the Chambres Civiques were sentenced to civic degradation, and a great many of them had their properties confiscated and "were no longer allowed to live in Brittany. The greater part of the time of the sessions of the Chambre Civique of Quimper in June 1945 was devoted to the trial of the staff of the B.N.P. in Finistère, whose chief was Dr. Hervé Delaporte, the brother of the president of the Party. All the defendants proclaimed their allegiance to Brittany; at the same time they made clear the neutral attitude they had adopted towards Franco-German problems. They had no difficulty in refuting the accusations of having collaborated with the Germans. Some of them were even able to give evidence of the substantial help they had given to the French Resistance; for instance, Dr. Delaporte, who was the doctor to the maquis in the parish of Chateaufort du Faou. Yet the majority of them were sentenced to the maximum penalties and ordered to leave Brittany.

About the same time in Quimper, before the Cour de Justice, the trial of Taldir-Jaffrenou, president of the Gorsedd and a member of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne, took place. In order to justify the trial, the prosecution cited a report about the maquis in Central Brittany which Jaffrenou was alleged to have sent to the Préfet Régional. The defendant denied the accusation; the prosecution could not bring forward any formal evidence; they admitted that in any case the report had not been communicated to the German authorities and had not resulted in any harm

to the Resistance. During the trial the stress was laid on Jaffrenou's opinions as a Breton patriot and regionalist. He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, civic degradation, and the confiscation of his properties. His counsel was not allowed to read in the court the sympathetic letters which had been sent to him from Great Britain and elsewhere.

In May 1945, too, began the preliminary investigations into the case of Yann Fouéré, the president of Ar Brezoneg er Skol, general secretary of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne and director of the two regionalist dailies, *La Dépêche* and *La Bretagne*. Yann Fouéré had been in gaol since August 1944 without examination. He vigorously denied the charges made against him and easily proved that he had remained neutral in Franco-German affairs; he claimed that the prosecution intended, through him, to strike at Breton regionalism. The magistrates felt they could not deny him the right to be set free. He was released in August 1945 after one year in gaol, about the time when the Welsh campaign in favour of the persecuted Bretons was starting. Yann Fouéré was accused of having originated this campaign. The promoters of the anti-Breton reaction—notably the Commissaire Régional, Monsieur Le Gorgeu, who had a personal grudge against Fouéré—fearing his activities, raised a protest against his release. From then on, they tried to speed up Fouéré's trial and also the condemnation of his newspapers. Peremptory orders were given by the Minister of Justice himself, Monsieur Teitgen, to the magistrates of the Cour de Justice of Rennes. He appointed the middle of February 1946 as the date for the trial and he decreed that the penalties to be inflicted upon Yann Fouéré should not be in any case less than five years' penal servitude. Yann Fouéré's counsels had not even enough time to call witnesses for the defence and they were denied the right to obtain a supplementary examination. Having heard of the secret orders given by the Minister of Justice, knowing that his condemnation was pre-determined

and was inevitable, Yann Fouéré followed the advice of his friends and disappeared on the eve of the trial. He explained his sudden departure in a public letter attacking the action of the French government which aimed at destroying the whole Breton movement by inflicting heavy sentences upon its leaders. Jacques Guillemot, the President of the board of directors of the newspapers managed by Yann Fouéré, a Quimper manufacturer and the father of thirteen children, against whom no charge whatever could be brought either of political activity or collaboration, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, civic degradation for life and the confiscation of all his properties. One month later, at the end of March 1946, Yann Fouéré was sentenced *in absentia* to penal servitude for life. The reasons adduced were that Yann Fouéré, under the cover of regionalism, had in fact favoured Breton nationalism and separatism.

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A few weeks later, Roparz Hemon was brought to trial before the Cour de Justice of Rennes. He was mainly charged with having been the governor of the Breton radio during the war, the director of the Celtic Institute, as well as the author of many articles in the Breton language and culture in which he expressed strong views against the actions of the French government in Brittany. As in the case of Yann Fouéré, it had been decided beforehand to impose upon him a heavy sentence, since the French government was determined to get rid of the best leaders of the Breton movement. A press campaign against Roparz Hemon was opened by Monsieur Fréville, a political crony of Monsieur Teitgen; this aimed at justifying in advance the condemnation they had determined upon. Many newspapers presented Roparz Hemon as a 'Gestapo man' and as the secret leader of the terrorist organisation, Gwenn ha Du.

A great effort was made in favour of Roparz Hemon

in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The numerous petitions originating in the Celtic countries, articles in the press, the presence at the trial of Mr. Dewi Powell, a special correspondent of the Welsh newspaper "*Baner ac Amserau Cymru*", frustrated the plot of the French authorities. The proceedings were postponed in order to enable the political authorities to reconsider their course of action. For the first time, the French government hesitated to face the repercussions of foreign public opinion to the condemnation of a man whose only crime was Breton patriotism. New orders were given, and in May 1946, when the trial began again, the atmosphere was changed. The prosecution withdrew almost all its charges and Roparz Hemon was acquitted. He had been in gaol for one year. The Breton movement regarded this as the first victory, won by Welsh and Breton co-operation, and applauded it. However, though he had been acquitted, Roparz Hemon was sentenced to ten years' civic degradation and was later dismissed from his post as a high school teacher.

The trial of *L'Heure Bretonne* and the central staff of the B.N.P. began in June 1946. The trial had been long postponed owing to the absence of the majority of the defendants. Only Marcel Guieysse, a blind old man more than seventy years old, was in the dock. He was charged with having been a leader of the Conseil National Breton founded after the arrival of the Germans in Brittany, and with having been later a member of the supreme council of the B.N.P., and with having approved of the Perrot unit. But it was in fact his Breton patriotism that was the real reason for his prosecution, and he could not be convicted of any definite activities in favour of the Germans. Marcel Guieysse bore himself splendidly during his trial, taking upon himself the whole responsibility for the pro-German attitude of the Perrot Unit, refusing to abandon any of his ideals even in the slightest degree, and affirming his faith in the final victory of Breton nationalism for which he was ready to die.

Deeply moved, and hesitating before a martyr who offered himself as a sacrifice, the tribunal sentenced him only to five years' imprisonment.

At the time of writing (in the Autumn of 1946), the trials of the leaders of the B.N.P., i.e. O. Mordrel, C. Lainé, R. and Y. Delaporte and some other prominent members of their staff, are still to take place. It is known that very heavy sentences have been inflicted *in absentia* upon some of the most important leaders of the B.N.P., such as J. de Quélen, the head of the B.N.P. for the Département of Côtes-du-Nord, who has been sentenced to penal servitude for life, and upon leaders of the Breton movement in general, such as H. Le Helloco who has been sentenced to death *in absentia* although he was not active during the war.

However, it was the young members of the Perrot unit, as the more extreme wing of Breton nationalism, that bore the brunt of the repression. They were bludgeoned out of their senses and tortured with the most incredible brutality. Some of them were stripped of their clothing and hanged with head down. The methods of the Gestapo, against which the French rightly protested, have been used by the French police against the nationalists. Some warders in the prisons committed similar atrocities, notably in the Rennes central gaol which seems to hold the record of meting out the most revolting treatment to prisoners. Prisoners came before the examining magistrates or appeared in the dock with broken limbs and bruised bodies.

Nevertheless, the majority of these young men, with but a few exceptions, maintained a splendid and courageous attitude. They proclaimed their Breton allegiance and affirmed that they fought with the Germans only because the Resistance had declared war on the Breton movement and had murdered Father Perrot and many other patriots whose deaths they wanted to avenge. They accepted imprisonment, penal servitude and death, feeling sure that their sacrifices would not be made in vain, that Brittany would proclaim them some day her worthy sons, and that a splendid harvest

would rise from their sacrifice. The road to Breton freedom passed through the French jails, just as the road to Irish freedom passed through English jails. For these men, France remained the only enemy as long as she refused to acknowledge the right of Brittany to live her own national life. Some of them, like Bibé and Jasson, proudly refused to recognise the right of a French tribunal to judge them.

Very heavy sentences were inflicted upon them. The majority were sentenced to death or to penal servitude for life. The French government refused to reprieve many of them. When they were facing death they held the same proud attitude. Their words and writings were those of true heroes. Vissault de Coetlogon was one of the first victims. He was shot in Paris in April 1945. He had refused to ask for mercy because he did not want to owe his life to the head of the French State; and he thanked the tribunal for the honour they were doing him in sentencing him to death. In September and October of the same year, Botros and Kergoat were shot in Quimper; as they fell the former shouted "Breiz Atao", and the latter "Long live Brittany! Glory be to Christ!" In July 1946, in Rennes, Jasson, a member of staff of the Perrot Unit, and Geoffroy, a soldier in the same corps, marched to the spot of the execution singing Breton songs and died singing the national anthem "*Bro Goz va Zadou*." These are only few of the details in our possession.

It must be remembered that very strict orders were given by the political authorities to the press concerning the reports of the trials that the newspapers would publish. Systematically they were to stress everything that could be found against the defendants and to say nothing in their favour. Thus they gave false reports of the evidence for the defence and of the speeches of counsels. Articles were also published which attempted to abuse the defendants before they appeared in the dock.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE REPRESSION

**W**HEN they started this cruel repression, the French authorities took good care to pretend that the Breton patriots were put to trial and sentenced to death because they had been convicted of collaboration with the enemy. They continually sought to prove that Bretons were dealt with like other Frenchmen. They even boasted that the repression had, in Monsieur Teitgen's own words, already cost France more lives than the Great Revolution of 1789 itself.

But the accusation of so-called collaboration with the enemy was nothing but a pretext to cover the real reasons; even those people who took the lead in the repression were not, perhaps, fully aware of these reasons. Behind them all lies the traditional French policy of centralisation and assimilation which has throughout the centuries, been using every kind of weapon and the foulest means to crush and destroy a nationality whose vitality seemed to endanger the political and spiritual unity of France. The present repression is, in fact, nothing but an episode in the war which, under their various political regimes, French governments have been waging against Breton culture and nationalism. We shall have no difficulty in proving this.

The reproach of collaboration with Germany is indeed well founded as regards the members of the Perrot unit. The young men of this corps had taken arms to fight the French Resistance in collaboration with the Germans. We do not want to deny this fact, but we can say to the French that we do not liken the Breton nationalists of the Perrot Unit to the Frenchmen who, in collaboration with the Germans, fought the Resistance. One can consider the latter as traitors

to their country, but the former are no more traitors to their Breton country than were the Irish traitors to Ireland when they rose against England during World War I in 1916. The conduct of those young men in death and the history of the Perrot Unit itself prove that they were not on principle, at least the great part of them, pro-German; but that they were, above all, soldiers of Breton nationalism. Therefore they ought to be considered soldiers, and not traitors. Besides, it is impossible not to find many excuses for their attitude if we remind ourselves that the Perrot Unit came into life only because the French Resistance had opened hostilities and had purposely committed the most abominable of all crimes against an irreproachable man who was unanimously loved and respected, who was the very personification of the idealism and generosity which prompts all the actions of the servants of Breton ideals.

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But if the Perrot Unit could be rightly reproached for its collaboration with the Germans, the rest of the Breton movement can not be accused of the same fault. We have told the story of its life during the occupation and it must be admitted that the Breton movement as a whole preserved neutrality in the Franco-German quarrel—which is more than can be said for many Frenchmen who are nowadays among its most rabid persecutors. Furthermore, the regionalists many times proclaimed their loyalty to the French State.

There was nothing for instance in Roparz Hemon's case which could have justified the heavy condemnations the French government planned against him. He made not one article, not one broadcast, in favour of Germany. The truth is they intended to punish him for his Breton activities only. This becomes still more evident when we remember that only the political speakers of the French radio during the occupation

were prosecuted, and that the ordinary speakers were left undisturbed.

The reason given to justify the heavy sentence inflicted upon Yann Fouéré was that the newspapers of which he was the director had helped Germany and Franco-German collaboration. In fact, *La Dépêche* and *La Bretagne*, as well as every other newspaper published in France during the war, had been compelled to print articles written by Germans. Yet it was indeed an easy matter for Yann Fouéré to prove that, thanks to his constant resistance to German orders and to his firm determination to maintain the neutrality of his newspapers, *La Bretagne* and *La Dépêche* were by far the least collaborationist among the newspapers published in Brittany during the occupation. Fouéré himself wrote seven hundred articles during that time; but the prosecution could not find a single one devoted to the defence of Germany and to German collaboration. *La Bretagne* was, of all the papers in Brittany, the only newspaper to be suspended by the Germans for lack of docility in obeying their orders. The same paper was, at the same time, together with *La Dépêche* and *L'Heure Bretonne*, the only papers in Brittany opposed to the Vichy government.

It becomes still more evident that accusations were only a pretext if it is kept in mind that, while Yann Fouéré, the director of *La Dépêche* since 1942, was gaoled and sentenced, Monsieur Le Gorgeu who was its director before 1942 was not even prosecuted. However, under Monsieur Le Gorgeu's direction *La Dépêche* was far more collaborationist than under Fouéré's management; its printing press had published a German newspaper; it received half a million francs from the Germans who requisitioned for Le Gorgeu's benefit another printing press in Rennes. But Monsieur Le Gorgeu, a rabid anti-Breton, was elected high commissar of the French Republic in Brittany, while Yann Fouéré was thrown into gaol. Consequently it is evident that the latter was sen-

tenced, as stated in the report of the "*Délégation à L'Information*" in Brittany, only "*on the ground of having championed in the Breton Press the cause of an intolerable political regionalism.*" Put in other words, this means that he was sentenced because he had defended his country's culture and language and the right of Brittany to her national liberties.

The same holds true of the prosecutions against *L'Heure Bretonne*. The staff and supporters of the B.N.P., R. Delaporte and his chief collaborators, can hardly avoid being severely sentenced. But here, too, the prosecution will be at a loss, at least as regards the majority of the defendants, to prove collaboration. They will be sentenced for their Breton activities and for no other reason, because the fact of being a Breton nationalist is, in the eyes of the French government nowadays, a crime punishable by the penal law. In all the trials of Breton nationalists, the emphasis was laid on their Breton activities; as a rule the prosecution took no pains to conceal the true motives of the trials; even the summonses gave membership of the B.N.P. as accusation.

The schoolmaster Kerlann was sentenced to civic degradation for life and ordered to leave Brittany because he was a member of the B.N.P. and had been the director, from 1942 to 1944, of a school where the teaching was given in Breton; he had been compelled by the Vichy government to resign his position as teacher for the very same reason. Basset, a printer of Rennes who did not belong to any political party, was arrested and sentenced to five years' civic degradation because his printing press had printed *L'Heure Bretonne* and *Breiz Atao*. In November 1944, a warrant of arrest was issued against the well-known philologist and grammarian, Francis Vallée, who was then more than eighty years old, a bed-ridden invalid who could hardly have collaborated with the Germans. Marcel Guieysse was sentenced to five years' imprisonment on account of his political ideas only, for it was impossible to prove against him any positive activity

in favour of the Germans. Le Toazer, the local leader of the Nationalist Party for the district of Lannion, was sentenced *in absentia* to five years' penal servitude because he had been for four years a very active propagandist for Breton nationalism. It is a strange thing indeed that J. de Quélen, the head of the B.N.P. in Côtes du Nord, was sentenced *in absentia* to penal servitude for life whereas Major Thomas (who was invested with the same functions in Ille-et-Vilaine) was killed in action fighting against the Germans during the Libération. And the numerous cases of Breton patriots sentenced on the ground of their alleged collaboration with the enemy, while their comrades had been executed or sent to Germany by the very same enemy, are no less strange.

The main purpose of the anti-Breton repression was to deliver the Breton movement a blow which would cripple it and stop its progress for many years. With the loss of its leaders and means of action, the Breton movement would have been made powerless.

A further proof of this can be found in the fact that Breton patriots, acquitted by the repressive tribunals, are still persecuted. Such is the case of Professor Eliès (Abeozen), the translator of the Mabinogi into Breton and the author of several books in Breton on how to learn Welsh; he was dismissed from his position and forbidden to teach any more in public or private schools; he had spent fourteen months in gaol and was not given a trial. Such also was the case of the engineer, Guillou, chief man of the B.N.P. in Paris; he was prohibited by the political authorities from practising his profession as an engineer in the electricity companies. A unique penalty was adopted for use against Breton nationalists; they were forbidden to live in Brittany, whereas members or supporters of the French collaborationist parties were only compelled to leave the district or the département where they were living. This is a further proof that the government was attempting to prevent all Breton nationalist activity on Breton territory.

The fact that Breton patriots fought with the Resistance did not save them from arrest; the best instance of this is the case of Major Thomas, who, although he had been killed by the Germans, was summoned to the trial of the staff of the B.N.P. His son was detained for ten months in Langueux concentration camp. Such also are the cases of the two members of the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne who belonged to the Resistance. One of them, André Dézarrois, was arrested and kept in gaol for over three months; the other, J. Martray, escaped arrest owing to his local connections. In the big round-up of November 1944, even members of the Resistance were arrested when they were suspected of Breton sympathies; some of them were officers in the Free French Forces or the Maquis.

But the French government did not pursue this repressive and reactionary policy in Brittany alone. A few months ago, a member of the French Resistance, who was at the same time a Basque nationalist, was arrested in the French Basque Country, accused of having published "subversive" articles aiming at defending Basque liberties. Mr. Dewi Powell, during his recent journey in Brittany, was told at Rennes by high officials that Breton nationalist propaganda was strictly prohibited and that help to the Resistance could not save Breton nationalists from arrest. The B.N.P. was formally dissolved in October 1944 by a special edict of Monsieur Le Gorgeu.

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Therefore it is evident that the majority of Breton patriots are persecuted not because of any alleged collaboration with Germany but merely because they are Breton nationalists. Otherwise, why did the French authorities destroy the very associations and organisations themselves? Why should they have withdrawn all the official concessions obtained previously by the Breton movement? Why should they



have confiscated all the properties and means of action of Breton nationalism and regionalism? The Bretons had obtained from the Vichy government some practical cultural concessions which had been repeatedly demanded of the various French governments ever since the early days of the Breton movement; but the first edicts of the representative of the new French government were aimed at suppressing them; the teaching of Breton history in the schools, the concessions made in favour of the teaching of Breton, the summer-schools for teachers, the Breton Radio, the Comité Consultatif de Bretagne—the most important of those reforms—were all withdrawn. How could it be seriously asserted that the purely cultural Breton organisations helped German propaganda and were guilty of collaboration?

But the French government took a further step, in order to prevent the Breton movement from maintaining its propaganda, for this could have exerted in the long run a strong influence on public opinion. First they attacked the press. All the newspapers of the movement—*L'Heure Bretonne*, *La Bretagne*, *La Dépêche*, and *Arvor*—were suppressed and their capital and properties confiscated. The French authorities claimed that they only submitted the Breton newspapers to the same rules as applied throughout French territory. But the permits generously given to all other parties and organisations to publish new newspapers, have been repeatedly refused to the Breton movement. An organisation of Breton Resistance journalists, under the direction of J. Martray, the editor of *La Dépêche*, were denied permission to resume the publication of *La Dépêche*; thence it was handed back to the former staff of collaborationist journalists who had functioned under Le Gorgeu. The reason was simple: the former were Breton patriots, while the latter were ready to resume the traditional anti-Breton policy of *La Dépêche*, the policy it pursued before its was purchased by *La Bretagne*.

Even the reviews and other publications of the cul-

tural movement were suppressed without exception. Obstacles were continually put in the way of attempts at further publication; they were not openly denied this right, but were given the excuse of paper shortage, while other newspapers and publications—twice more numerous than before the occupation—were being permitted to double their size; only one Breton cultural review, "*Ar Falz*", was given a permit, and this was given because the director was a communist. The few new publications which have been recently launched in Brittany have as yet obtained no permits, and they therefore run the risk of being suppressed at any moment and their directors of being arrested.

The climax came in December 1944 when Monsieur Le Gorgeu obtained a special decree to dissolve *Ar Brezoneg er Skol* and confiscated its properties. By this move it was hoped to bring to an end the activities of an association which had taken a leading part during the last ten years with great success in a most active campaign in favour of the teaching of Breton in the schools. It should be remembered that this association had the unanimous support of the Breton people; it could not be accused of any pro-German activity; its secretary was himself a member of the Resistance. The dissolution was in accordance with the traditional policy towards the Breton language, already defined in 1925 by the French Minister of Education, Anatole de Monzie, who said: "*For the sake of the unity of France, the Breton language must disappear.*"

## CONCLUSION

**I**N Brittany to-day the French administration has declared war against one of the sacred principles of Western civilization: the right of a nation to express its opinion freely and to have its language taught and respected. The Breton problem to-day is no more than another stage in the traditional struggle of French imperialism against Breton nationalism. It is equally true that the present French government is merely continuing to apply the foul methods used by its predecessors. From the beginning of the nineteenth century till 1938 France had been fighting a purely negative battle against Breton aspirations and claims. She began to use repressive methods when she realised that the Breton people was unanimous behind the cause of the Breton language. Till then she had refused to listen to the demands of the Breton deputies in favour of the cultural rights of their country. In 1919, during the Peace Conference, a Breton delegation asked that the rights of small nations, and the protection given to the national minorities in Central Europe, be applied to Brittany. In 1937 the Commission of Education in the French Chamber of Deputies gave its approval to the demands of Ar Brezoneg er Skol. But later, faced with the growing strength of the Breton movement, fearing external dangers, France took another course of action. It determined to crush the Breton Movement. Interrupted during the four years of occupation, the repression was resumed in August 1944. Therefore the persecutions of to-day are merely the logical and natural continuation of a policy that began in 1938, two years before the arrival of the Germans in Brittany. There is no doubt that the 1944 repression had been already prepared in 1939. The list of Breton leaders who were to be arrested had already been drawn up. When the Germans left Brit-

tany, an ideal excuse was found, and special laws were promulgated.

The present suppression is much more cruel and extensive than in 1938 because in the meantime the Breton movement had been making tremendous progress.

Now the French authorities shoot, sentence, arrest, imprison, and confiscate properties. Books, reviews and newspapers are destroyed. A ruthless war is waged against the Breton language. When a new radio was inaugurated in Quimerc'h, in March 1946, the Préfet of Finistère expressed the hope that the new station would help French culture, language and civilisation to penetrate more easily into Breton territory and among the Breton population. Whenever a meeting devoted to Breton questions is held, whenever Bretons attend folk-dances or Breton classes, secret police are there spying on them. In the new French army, new regiments are created in which the Bretons are mixed with the French; and the old Breton regiments are filled with Frenchmen, or dissolved altogether.

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All the nations of the world have one name for such measures: Oppression. Why should France pay lip service to the great principles of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, if they are used only to screen oppressive measures contrary to those principles? France, like all the other united nations, signed the Atlantic Charter which proclaims the principle that every nation, even the smallest, should be allowed to enjoy the fundamental rights of man, regardless of language, race or religion. Her language, race and history prove beyond question that Brittany is a nation. She has a right to be treated as such, to have her language and history taught in the schools and to develop freely her national characteristics.

When the French press protested, over a year ago, against the Italianisation (first imposed by Mussolini)

of the French minority in the Aosta Valley, and when France demanded successfully, that the few thousand French-speaking people who lived there should be given the political status which would allow them political autonomy and the teaching of French in the schools, she only sought the application of the basic principles of international law generally accepted by civilised countries. How can France, famed for her spirit of logic and liberty, not realise that those same principles are as applicable to Brittany as anywhere else? How can she not realise that in Brittany she pursues a far more revolting policy than that of Mussolini in the Aosta valley? To-day there are only a few thousand French-speakers in Aosta, while of three million Bretons more than one million speak their national language.

To-day France has taken a new course of violence against Brittany. She is trying to stop the growth of the Breton movement by brute force. Yet, of all the European nations she makes the most of her sufferings during the occupation. Let France realise that she is going to bear before history the responsibility of adopting towards Brittany the policy she blames the Germans of having inflicted upon herself. But however ruthless the German occupation might have been, the Germans refrained from declaring war on the French language and from punishing people who cherished it.

If France is to regain the sympathy which she has lost as a result of the oppression, she must give freedom to the Breton movement and its leaders, she must re-establish the institutions she banned, and she must give an amnesty without delay to Breton patriots.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE FIGHT FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM IN BRITTANY SINCE 1870

- 1870—De Charencey, Gaidoz, and Charles de Gaulle (an uncle of General de Gaulle), submit to the consideration of the French Legislative Assembly a report asking for the teaching of Breton in the schools.
- 1895—Under the patronage of Kevredigez Vreiz (The Breton Association), Fransez Vallée-Abherve publishes a "Manifesto to the Christian Schools", asking for the teaching of Breton.
- 1903—The departmental note of Mr. Combes, Minister of Education, prohibiting the use of Breton in the churches brings about in the Chamber of Deputies questions from every Breton deputy. They all ask for the suppression of the note and the official recognition of the Breton language.
- 1909—The cabinet minister and deputy of Morbihan, Mr. Paul Guieysse, heading a delegation of five other Breton deputies, asks Monsieur Doumergue, Minister of Education, that Breton be taught in the elementary and secondary schools. Monsieur Doumergue answered that the "request could not be granted, as *separatism* was not to be fostered." The first Breton nationalist Party was founded in 1911.
- 1910—Mr. de L'Estourbeillon, deputy of Morbihan, asks that Breton be taught in the schools.
- 1912—Same demands by the Departement Council of Morbihan and Mr. Collignon, prefet of Finistère, supported by the Departement Council of Finistère.  
A Breton deputy, Bouilloux Lafont, and the Parliamentary Committee for the defence of Breton interests, ask the same thing of the Minister of Education.
- Jan. 1919—A petition entitled "The rights of the language and the liberty of the people" signed by 800 deputies, political leaders, writers and artists is published by Mr. de L'Estourbeillon and presented to the Peace Conference. This petition was backed in May 1919 by a delegation of the Bretons of Paris who presented it to President Wilson.
- Nov. 1919—Mr. Bouilloux-Lafont, deputy of Finistère, collects the signatures of the pupils of Kemper's High-School and sends to the Ministry of Education a petition in favour of the teaching of Breton in the secondary schools.
- Dec. 1921—Mr. Inizan, deputy of Finistère, asks in the Chamber of Deputies that Breton be taught in the schools.



- 1922—Same demand by Deputy Balanant.
- 1924—Another demand by Mr. Tremintin, deputy of Finistère.
- 1925—After Mr. De Monzie's statement that "For the sake of French Unity the Breton language must disappear", and as an answer to it, three departement councils ask for Breton in the schools.
- 1926—Mr. Inizan in January and Mr. Tremintin in December ask the same thing in the Chamber of Deputies.
- 1933—Yann Sohier, a government schoolmaster, founds "Ar Falz" (The Sickle), a monthly review devoted to the defence of the Breton language among the State-employed teachers.
- 1934—Foundation of "Ar Brezoneg er Skol" (Breton in schools). The new association begins its campaign by asking the departement and municipal councils to adopt a motion in favour of the teaching of Breton. Three departement councils and many municipal councils adopted it immediately.
- 1935—Senator Brard, senator of Morbihan, and Deputy Inizan, of Finistère, ask the Minister of Education to allow the teaching of Breton in the schools.
- 1936—Following the remonstrances of many deputies, the Committee of Education in the Chamber of Deputies adopts a motion inviting the government to consider immediately allowing the teaching of Breton in the primary, secondary and teachers' training schools of the three Breton-speaking departements of Brittany. As a result of the propaganda made by Ar Brezoneg er Skol, the same resolution was adopted by: (1) The parliamentary group of Breton deputies. (2) The three departement councils of Breton-speaking Brittany, and 306 municipal and local councils. (3) The greater part of the chambers of Agriculture and Commerce, the Regional Economic Group and the Federation of the Breton touring associations. (4) All the scientific societies of Brittany, all the cultural associations and groups of emigrated Bretons, in particular the very active and important leftist association of the Bretons in Paris called "Bretons Emancipés".
- 1938—Deputies Le Bail and Desgranges at the head of a delegation of Breton students and officials make a new request to the Minister of Education.  
Since Esperanto could be studied in the schools outside class-hours, a teacher of Ploughrescant asks that Breton be allowed also. He is authorised to do so in his school.
- Oct. 1940—An official note authorises the children to speak Breton *in the school-yards* when they are playing, and the teachers are allowed to use Breton to explain French words.
- 1940—Breton history becomes a subject in the teaching and examinations of the elementary schools.  
A petition presented to Marshal Pétain by Mm. de L'Estourbeillon, Taldir-Jaffrenou and de Kergariou, asks for the teaching of the Breton language.

- Dec. 1941—The teachers are authorised to teach Breton during an optional after-school-hour a week. But they do not receive any payment for it.
- Oct. 1942—Foundation of the "Comité Consultatif de Bretagne" of which the President of Ar Brezoneg er Skol is a member. Under the influence of the Comité the Government takes a few steps: (1) Payment for the teachers who teach Breton outside school hours. (2) Breton becomes a subject of examination in the Elementary schools, and in the examinations for some small administrative and local posts. (3) Creation of a summer-school for the State-employed teachers who want to learn Breton.
- 1943—Creation of the review "An Eost", specially intended for Breton teachers.
- 1943-44—Ar Brezoneg er Skol carries out an enquiry among 400 teachers of South Finistère: 75 say they are for Breton and can teach it; 280 are for Breton but can only speak it and read a little; 30 are indifferent; 50 are against.  
In June 1944, 560 municipal and local councils adopt the parliamentary motion of 1937 in favour of Breton.
- End 1944—The French Government suppresses every concession made during the war and even in 1938. Ar Brezoneg er Skol is forbidden and its property is confiscated. Teaching of Breton and Breton history are strictly prohibited.
- 1944-45—A motion asking for Breton in the Baccalaureat is presented to the Minister of Education by the professors of the Rennes Arts Faculty, first in 1944 and again in 1945.
- June 1945—Five hundred Breton students from the Rennes and Paris Universities sign a petition asking that Breton be taught in schools.
- 1945-46—The group of government teachers "Ar Falz" collects hundreds of signatures from leftist teachers, officials and political leaders for a petition they are preparing.  
The Dean of the Rennes Arts Faculty and the Rector of the Rennes Academy himself (Director of Education) repeatedly ask the Minister of Education to allow Breton to be taught in the schools.
- 1946—A petition is started by Breton students to ask the government to have Breton taught in the schools.  
The Departement Councils of Finistère and Côtes-du-Nord make the same demand.

## SOME DATA ABOUT THE BRETON POLITICAL MOVEMENT SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

- 1789-90—The Vacation Court of the Breton Parliament refuses to ratify the suppression of the Breton autonomous province by the French Constituent Assembly and the partition of Brittany into five départements. On January 18, 1790, its President, La Houssaye, renews the protest at the bar of the Constituent Assembly and points out that as long as the *Etats de Bretagne* have not been summoned to renounce formally and legally the 1532 treaty, the Parliament will hold it as still valid and binding on both parties. On February 13, 1790, the *Procureur Général Syndic* of the *Etats de Bretagne* raises the same protest in the form of a public manifesto. He renewed his protest every year till his death in 1805 in London, where he was compelled to live in exile.
- 1801—Foundation by La Rouerie, of the first *Association Bretonne* asking that Brittany be given back her rights according to the provisions of the 1542 treaty.
- 1804—Georges Cadoudal is beheaded in Paris. His death means the end of the Breton Resistance known as "*Chouannerie*", which had been waged for fifteen years against the First Republic and the Consulate.
- 1805—The Celtic Academy is founded by Ar Gonidec and Cambry, who make a request to the government, asking for far-reaching political and economic reforms.
- 1815—General Sol de Grisolles asks that Brittany, which had consistently opposed the Revolution and Empire, should not be occupied by the Allies after Napoleon's defeat.
- 1830—Breton Republicans set up a league to refuse to pay taxes as long as Breton liberties are not re-established.
- 1832—A group of Breton monarchists make the same protest.
- 1843—The second *Association Bretonne* is created. It was suppressed in 1868 because it was suspected of separatist tendencies by the government of the Second Empire, and reconstituted under the Third Republic in 1873.
- 1870—During the war against the Prussians the Breton army is sacrificed by the French at the Battle of Le Mans, because of its separatist tendencies.
- 1898—Setting up of the *Union Régionaliste de Bretagne*, a new association asking for a Breton constitution which would give Brittany administrative and cultural freedom. From then on, on the occasion of its annual congresses, the U.R.B. asked for the recognition of the rights of Brittany.
- 1901—Creation of the *Gorsedd of Breton Bards*—another Breton and regionalist association, similar to the Welsh *Gorsedd*.
- 1905—Creation of *Bleun-Brug* (Heather Flowers), the great catholic association to further Breton language and history and demand more liberties for Brittany.
- 1909-11—Mr. de Landivy-Tredion edits "*La question Bretonne*" and "*Vers une Bretagne organisée*", being a plan for solving the Breton question by granting Breton liberties.
- 1911—Foundation of the "*Fédération Régionaliste de Bretagne* (*Unvaniez Arvor*), another regionalist Association.
- The first Breton Nationalist Party is founded in the same year.
- 1919—A petition for the recognition of the rights of the Breton people according to the principles sanctioned by the Allies in Central Europe is presented by Major Jacob to President Wilson and by Deputy de L'Estourbeillon to the Peace Conference. This petition had been signed by 800 prominent people—deputies, senators, general councillors, and the five Breton bishops.
- Creation of the second Nationalist Party, asking for self-government for Brittany.
- 1920—The Congress of L'Hermine in Breton Parliament building in Rennes asks for the constitution of Brittany as a distinct province with political and administrative liberties. A petition protesting against the project of the government to divide up Brittany once more is signed by more than 300,000 people.
- 1926—Maurice Duhamel edits "*La question bretonne dans son cadre européen*", being the compendium of the policy advocated by the Nationalist Party, in favour of a federalist solution of the Breton question together with a reorganisation of France and Europe on a federalist basis.
- 1928—Congress of the Nationalist Party at Kastellin (Chateaulin) in the presence of representatives of the French National Minorities—Flemish, Alsatians, Basques, Catalans, Corsicans.
- 1932—Blowing up in Rennes of the monument commemorating the Union of Brittany with France, on the very morning of the celebration in Gwened (Vannes), in the presence of the French Premier, Monsieur Herriot, of the 400th anniversary of the Union.
- 1936—Setting up of the Breton Front, with a programme of economic and cultural reforms. This programme was accepted by 41 candidates at the general election. These candidates obtained 207,000 votes, out of a total poll of 686,000. Fifteen candidates of the Front Breton were elected.

1940—A petition signed by a great many Breton personalities is presented to Marshal Pétain by Mm. de L'Estourbeillon and de Kergariou, senators, and Jaffrenou-Taldir, to ask that Breton liberties be officially recognised by the French State.

1942—A scheme for a Breton statute is presented to the French government by "Les Amis de la Bretagne." It provided for the creation of the "Province de Bretagne" and had been signed by over 150 local and municipal councils and thousands of prominent personalities.

1943—Another project for a Breton statute is presented to the government by the "Comité Consultatif de Bretagne" with the signatures of a great many Breton personalities.

## THE WELSH NATIONALIST PARTY

THE WELSH NATIONALIST PARTY has the following principles as its aims:

1. *To secure for Wales the same status and constitution within the British Commonwealth of Nations as is now possessed by Canada, Australia, South Africa, Eire, etc. To secure for Wales a Parliament having full power to make laws for the good of Wales, with a Government responsible to that Parliament.*

2. *To safeguard the culture, language and traditions of Wales by giving them the official recognition and support of the government.*

3. *To secure for Wales the right to become a member of the society of nations.*

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