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MINISTERS IN BRITTANY

In our January issue we mentioned Prime Minister Debré’s intention to come to Brittany for talks with representatives of economic associations. His decision was prompted by the growing unrest among the Breton rural population in particular.

On January 10th, Debré sent his Minister for Agriculture, Rochereau, on a fact-finding tour of the Breton départements. The minister came back well informed and apparently convinced that the farmers’ grievances were genuine. But he stated that their essential demand, the indexation of agricultural prices (in terms of production costs) could not be granted, because of its repercussions on the France’s newly won stability. He proposed some topical remedies, but of a fundamental solution, no hint.

So his consultations led to a hardening of positions; The farmers expected no more talks, only a definite statement of policy from Debré. He need not come to Rennes otherwise.

Debré’s first plan was a visit covering the five Breton administrative centres. Yet, in order says "Le Télégramme de Brest", to avoid exposing himself to a cool reception (?), he would finally not come further than the Breton capital.

Official invitations were sent not only to representatives of the Farmers' Unions, but to a few other economic associations, in particular the Committee of Defense and Coordination of Breton Interests. The farmers' leaders however were to meet Debré privately on Monday 25.

The Prime Minister was in Rennes on Sunday 24th, when the Algiers insurrection broke out. He hurried back to Paris, without any meeting, and so left the Breton petitioners waiting for the day when the French Government will have time to "listen" to them again.

PRIME MINISTER: DEPOPULATE BRITTANY!

The following item was published by the well known 'Paris-Match' 9-1-60: "Mr. Michel Debré has given to his collaborators a memento-map indicating the density of population in France and told them; DON'T FORGET THAT THE CENTRE MUST BE DEPOPULATED AND BRITTANY DECONGESTED."

Was that perhaps not meant to leak out? Or was Mr. Debré coming to Rennes to tell the Breton delegates that their mandates must pack up and march towards Aquitaine and the Auvergne?

It makes certainly curious reading to come afterwards across the praise which the very moderate "Bretagne et Paris" (15-1-60) gives to the Minister for Agriculture for so sympathetically listening to the rural leaders' complaints. In the same article, credit is given to the Breton youth for the vigorous support they have given to the December manifestations and the lead which their militant has given them in the land fight in France. This fight aims at obtaining a decent standard of living for the rural population in its homeland, without being compelled to
endure at the present catastrophic rate.

But emigration is the prospect which Debêr holds out for the Breton youth especially. His injunction lends substance to the suspicion expressed in the nationalist "Argoed", No. 7: that this country is neglected on purpose; that a strong vitality in Brittany is a threat to the French State's integrity. So let it become a land for tourists and colonists.

Debêr's statement shows a profound disregard for our people's most legitimate requests. Coming from a faithful GAULIST, it must be considered as a reflection of LE GAULE'S attitude as well. So far attention was paid to Bretons in times of French distress, when good soldiers were needed - and a glance through the "Breton" dailies shows what a heavy toll our young men pay in the Algerian war. Now, says Debêr, these Bretons can also be useful for filling what economists have come to call "the French desert", not to speak of those unemployed whom one hopes to direct towards that other "French", we mean the Sahara desert, with all its industrial marvels.

We hear at the time of writing that the Paris-Match report is causing a storm of protests in Brittany. The Mayor of Brest has been one of the first to express his concern over the Government's designs.

3,000 copies of an "open letter" to Mr. IEBRE have been distributed on the 20th of January to all mayors, General Councillors, Members of Parliament and Journalists of Brittany by the "Movement for the Organisation of Brittany", or put up in the form of posters in the main Breton towns.

Here are extracts of the

OPEN LETTER TO MR. MICHEL IEBRE, Prime Minister of the 5. Republic.

"The people of Brittany have been deeply disturbed by your recent advice to your closest associates:

DON'T forget that the Centre of France must be populated and Brittany decongested."

How tragic are these words for the people who sense your will to expel them instead of providing them with opportunities for work in their homeland. We thought that the era of DISPLACED PERSONS was over in civilised countries.

We cannot accept the objection that the density of our population is too high when we have the example of a country like the Netherlands with the same natural resources as ours, which in 1860 had the same population, but nowadays thanks to a coherent policy is able to feed easily 9 million people, and we remember what a Professor of the University of Lyon said: "Brittany, that supposedly poor country, which during the war was feeding 20 million people..."

The Bretons, Mr. Prime Minister, are not beasts of burden which can be sent to graze wherever grass happens to grow. We hold with Dr. Alexis Carrel that the supreme aim of civilisation is the development of the personality of men.

Please believe, Mr. Prime Minister, that our loyalty will be determined by yours.

The Movement for the Organisation of Brittany.

BRITTAY AND FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY. Bretons who have in mind their country's interests view the French foreign policy towards the rest of Europe from the following consideration.

One of Brittany's guarantees against the French assimilation policy in future could come from a United Europe with a confederal Government, a Europe in which France's claims to sovereignty and her strategical reasons for keeping a strong hold on the peninsula would be lessened to a great extent. In particular, a Europe built up on an ethnical basis instead of the basis of present States and boundaries would give our nation a chance of balancing the crushing influence of France by partaking in a wider exchange of ideas and goods with the other European peoples.

Judging from that angle, we favour the attitude taken by Sweden and other small European countries regarding the creation of a European Free Trade Area. France's refusal to extend the Common Market arise from the will to retain her preponderance in European Affairs and is contrary to Brittany's interests. As stressed in our political publications and recognised in a leading article of "The Irish Press" (20-1-60), our country, already far removed from the French economic arteries, risks being excluded from the activity which the Common Market is expected to engender.

Our proximity to the main trade route of Northern Europe would be a great asset to our seafaring people in a European Common Market, but will be of little avail if the present division, due to France, persists.

The Algerian War was caused by the exploitation of Moslems and the claim that a land with an 80-90% alien population was an integral part of France, and therefore should be francophiled. That pretension to "civilise" the world over has been applied to Brittany. We are in full sympathy with the Algerians' aim to secure self-government. Moreover, we share a widespread belief that one million Europeans can no
longer maintain their domination over nine million Arabs and Berbers. It would be better for future relations between Europeans and Africans if France renounced her conquest less grudgingly. If no agreement for the security of the settlers can be guaranteed by the Algerian Government, let them be resettled in those "fertile but thinly populated areas of Central France" to which De Gaulle's government plans to send Bretons. When the settlers are so passionately French, and many of them cannot have struck such deep roots in Algeria - the process should be less painful for them than for our compatriots.

THE BRETON MOVEMENT. Its main springs. We stated in our January issue that the Bretons were kept ignorant of their own history and that their Celtic language was ostracised in order to comply with the ideology of "France one-and-indissoluble." While extolling the merits of French culture and the glory of French history, their masters forcefully impressed them with the backwardness of their "patois", customs and traditions, so effectively that within half a century a complex of inferiority became an integral part of their minds, handicapping many of them severely for life. They were made ashamed of their mother tongue which was recognised neither in schools nor in relations with public services.

This policy which differs little from "brainwashing" in that it is done in the name of an ideology, is responsible for the loss of self-respect of a large section of a traditionally proud people. We blame it to a great extent for social evils connected with that loss of dignity, namely alcoholism and prostitution, so prevalent among our people.

The educational system in Brittany has failed in its true mission which is to develop man's personality from its natural and traditional foundations, and not to prepare rootless servants for an imperialistic policy.

The plans for decentralisation and industrialisation submitted by the Bretons are not implemented because they require in the last resort an energy supply and financial credits which depend on Government's decisions. France's interests are elsewhere. Brittany is valued like a colony providing France with soldiers and seamen, cheap labour and cattle, and consuming her manufactured products.

Cultural oppression and economic underdevelopment begetting a diseased social body are the main causes of the Breton question.

TILL 1946. An ever increasing section of the population has reacted to that situation. One could already before the war distinguish 3 branches in the Breton movement: a purely cultural one; another political but recognising France's sovereignty in Brittany; and the Party of Independence.

A book published in 1947 by the Welsh Nationalist Party "Breton Nationalism", gives a clear detailed account of the movement up to the time of the 1944-45 repression. We just mention the police actions in 1937-39, the progress during the war of the Breton ideas among a hitherto despised people, the cultural and political achievements made possible by the French defeat, the setting up of a military unit to fight against the return of French power, and the bloody repression which came in the wake of "Liberation". All sections of the movement were hit, but most of all the Nationalists, who were executed or jailed for "collaboration", no mention being made of their Breton convictions.

SINCE 1946. Since the war nothing significant has been done to dispel the uneasiness but Breton forces have gathered on a wider basis than ever before.

The non-political regionalist wing, already in action since 1946-50 has to-day the quasi-unanimous support of the people. Yet, in spite of its very moderate demands, it cannot be said to have obtained satisfaction from the Government. The meagre concession won in 1951 for some teaching of Breton was shown last summer to be quite precarious. A model Breton Plan for economic regional development was sanctioned officially a few years ago after considerable watering down, but it still awaits implementation. Colonial wars and other pursuits of grandeur leave no money for its realisation.

The Movement for the Organisation of Brittany - started two years ago, is now campaigning for autonomy within the French State. It appeals to all Bretons concerned with the future of their homeland and seeks to rally them around an immediately realisable moderate programme, regardless of their party affiliations or of stronger claims to self-government. Its monthly, L'Avenir de Bretagne, exposes the harm done by the over-centralised regime and the neglect of Breton interests in French politics.

Nationalism. A few periodicals maintain an unmitigated nationalist line and uphold the idea of a Brittany able to express herself freely in the concert of nations. They favour their country's direct participation in a "United States" of Europe without any French mediation. Their nationalism is an act of legitimate defence.

Among a number of publications, many are entirely in Breton, devoted to literature (Al Lisan, for instance), linguistics (Hor Yezh), pedagogy (Skol),
philosophy (Pader), actuality (Ar Bed Keltiek), and proclaim the resolution to make of this language a modern instrument of expression.

**CONGRESS OF THE FEDERAL UNION OF EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES (FUEN).** It is with pleasure that we publish the following notice: The Central Committee of the FUEN has decided to hold the 10th Annual Congress of the FUEN on the 4th, 5th and 6th of June 1960 (Whitsun). The Congress will be organised at Züri, the Crissons, Switzerland, in co-operation with the "Liis Rumantscha", cultural association of Romansh Switzerland. For reservations of participation at the Congress please address the Secretary general of the FUEN, Mr. Poul Skadegard, Polished, Rungsted Kyst, Denmark.

**NO DOUBT ABOUT OFFICIAL INTENTIONS:** "La Croix de Bretagne", a Catholic weekly published in Rennes (Rennes) reports (16-1-60) the Minister for Agriculture's proposals relative to the creation of more employment in Brittany and quotes him as saying: "This will not prevent the Government from practising a policy of rural emigration favouring the transfer of people from the congested areas towards more fertile but less densely populated regions." This report confirms Paris-Match and leaves no doubt, that the Government's solution of the Breton problem is: MASS DEPORTATION THROUGH ECONOMIC COMPULSION.

**ARRESTED FOR CRITICISING GOVERNMENT.** Three men, G. Toubianco, J-J. Mamrot le Coarcic and M. le Skaav were arrested in the evening of January 24th 1960, when Debré was in Rennes, for their leading part in the distribution of leaflets criticising the Government's policy in Brittany. After being questioned the following night they were released. They have raised a public protest against their arrest, containing the following points:

- Their arrest, at 5 p.m. and 10 p.m., were made for the sole purpose of stopping the distribution of leaflets.
- The leaflets only reproduced press reports and statements declarations. There was no reason why they should be considered subversive, delinquent or immoral.
- Their distribution expressed nothing but democratic, peaceful and justified opposition to a policy which has proved harmful by aggravating the Breton problem. It occurred at a time when the Prime Minister proposed only the strictest satisfaction to the Bretons' unanimous claims.

For these reasons, the signatories
- Protest against their double arrest and questioning as an abuse of power and a violation of liberty of opinion and expression.
- Rejoice that, in spite of police intimidation, over 100,000 leaflets could be distributed in the city of Rennes on that day.
- View the future with apprehension, that the public authorities are intent on silencing every claim, however justified.

**DENIAL.** According to "Ouest-France", 25-1-60, the statement reported by PARIS-MATCH, (see p.1) has been categorically denied by the Debré Cabinet.

We could believe this denial, if the statement had not been followed by another to the same effect, made by the Minister for Agriculture. Or will it be argued that "La Croix", also, is misleading its readers?

**COMMENTS IN THE FRENCH PRESS.** Some French weeklies have become aware of what they call "La Malaise Breton". J. Fontaine in "La Croix" analyses the reasons for disappointment and bitterness in his article "Brittany: Serious Uneasiness". Another paper, the "XVIIIe Siècle Féodaliste", 4-12-59 devotes a full page to the same problem and records a current feeling in Brittany that: "if we had felled ashes, we would also get our Constantine Plan". In "Les Echos", E. Servan-Schreiber asks openly: "Must the Bretons claim for independence before we understand? Shall we have to undertake another "pacification"? It would not be the first time". E.5-5, no doubt has here in mind the bloody repression by French armies of Breton rebellions such as the Red Bonnets (1675) and the CHOUMANS (1793) risings.

In a resolution passed at the 8th International Students Congress last Summer, the delegates, wishing to express the students' highest aspirations, affirmed, among others, the right of every people to devise and implement a system of education in harmony with their own traditions and culture. (L'Etudiant, Aug. 59, Leiden, Neth.) This right is denied to the Bretons.