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The Breton case for regional autonomy: Centuries of struggle in Brittany, France

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THE BRETON CASE FOR REGIONAL AUTONOMY: CENTURIES OF STRUGGLE IN BRITTANY, FRANCE

A Thesis

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by

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALB - Armée de Libération de la Bretagne

CAR - Conscription d'Action Régionale

CELIB - Comité d'Etude et de Liaison d'Interêts Bretons

CFTC - Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens

CGT - Confédération Générale de Travail

CREE - Commission Régionale d'Expansion Economique

FLB - Front de la Libération de la Bretagne

FO - Force Ouvrière

MOB - Mouvement pour l'Organization de la Bretagne

PCF - Parti Communist Français

PNB - Parti Nationaliste Breton

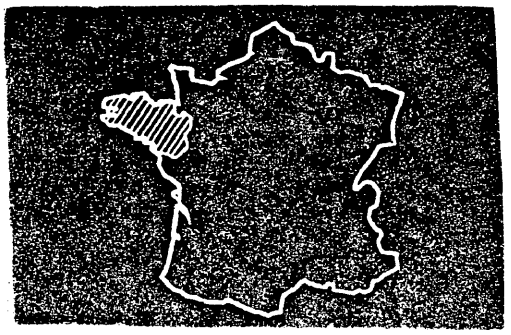
UDB - Union Democratique Bretonne

LIST OF MAPS

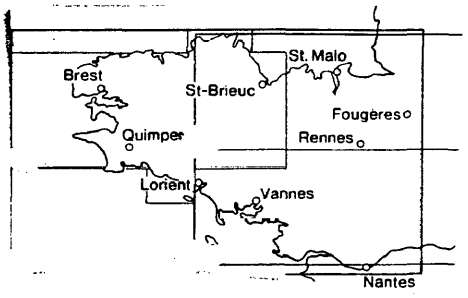
THE TRADITIONAL PROVINCES OF FRANCE

Historical Regions

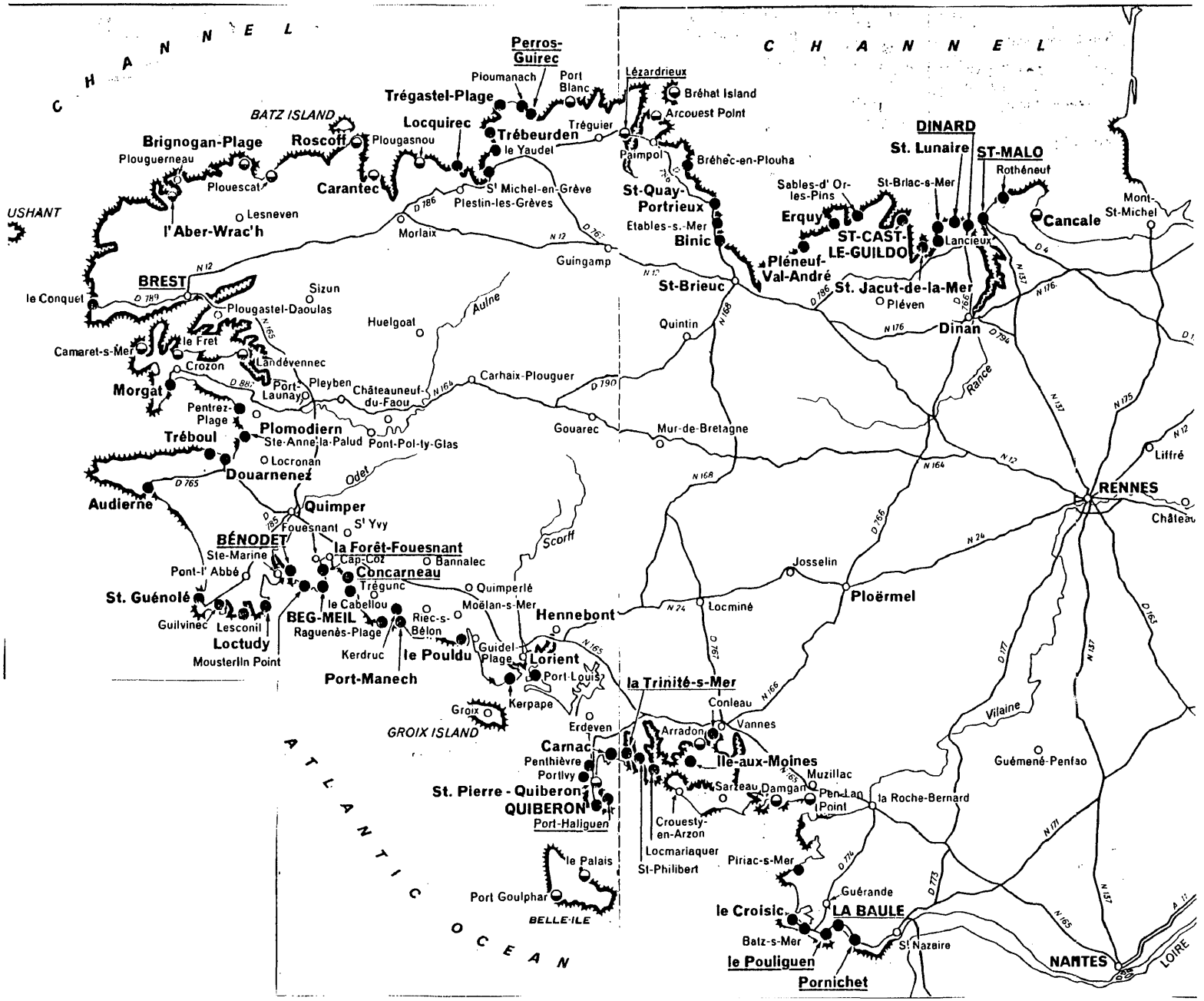
THE BRETON PENINSULA



MAJOR CITIES IN BRITTANY



DETAILED MAP OF BRITTANY, FRANCE



PREFACE

My first encounter with Brittany, France, came in 1973 when I was bicycling through the Breton countryside with a group of Concordia College students. I befriended a Breton activist named Sylvain Phlipponneau, then twenty-one years of age, who made what I found to be an intriguing parallel between the plight of the American Indian and that of the outlying regions of France. He criticized the French government as over-bearing, excessively centralized, and with what he called a reckless disregard for the cultural integrity of the provinces. I was then seventeen, anxious to experience some of the residual youthful activism of the previous decade. I attended a few of the meetings of the Front de la Libération de la Bretagne, (FLB), at the time the most radical of French autonomist groups. Often speakers at FLB meetings would break into Breton phrases, however, so as to keep French gens d'armes uninformed of their activities. Unfamiliar with this dialect, I was not as aware as I might otherwise have been as to the operations of the FLB during its heyday.

Sylvain's father, Michel Phlipponneau, is cited extensively as a reference throughout this thesis. He is a widely recognized authority on French regionalism, and has chaired many committees promoting Breton interests in that regard. He is a professor of geography at the University of Rennes. I only regret that, at the age of seventeen, I had not done more extensive note-taking while a guest at the

Phlipponneau home. I lost contact with Sylvain shortly after he finished his studies in applied urban geography at Oxford.

My second Breton interlude took me to the southern Breton coast, where I spent six months in 1976 as a student of French History in Nantes, Brittany. Here I continued to participate in many of the Breton cultural events, such as the fest noz, or Breton dances, which were still popular and still somewhat of a "political statement" among the young.[1] The following summer I moved to Paris to study French civilization at the Sorbonne.

The real research phase for this thesis began in 1984, after a succession of Breton house guests renewed my interest in present-day political activism there. I returned to Brittany in the late spring of 1985 to assess the current state of autonomist activities, and to conduct more formal research, both at the local archives and in the National Archives in Paris.

The National Archives in Paris proved to be the best resource for primary materials pertinent to this study. In a reference carton labeled "F7 13244" were contained publications of the Breiz Atao, which is Breton for "Brittany Above All," dating from 1919 to 1939. Much of the material in the Archives file was marked "confidential." But having access to it anyway, I discovered it consisted mostly of letters from the Commissioner of Police to the various local authorities in Quimper, Vannes, Saint-Briuec, and other hotbeds of autonomy. The letters from

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[1] Fest Noz's often attracted over one hundred teenagers, dancing to traditional Breton music skillfully played by young Breton musicians.

the delegates of the Ministry of the Interior were most often followed by dutiful responses on the part of the prefects to keep close tabs on the activities of the autonomists, and to report on their status to the Director of Security in Paris.

The Archivist at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris recommended that I visit the Bibliotheque Mazarine, near the Hotel de Ville, which houses most of the writing of regional interest. Besides being treated to some of the most exquisite interior architecture in these two libraries, I soon learned that the Parisian librarians and archivists, though gracious and pristinely professional, found my choice of topic somewhat peculiar. They advised me to go to the local archives of the region I was researching, which I, of course, was planning to do, though they expressed doubt that their colleagues in Brittany would be of much more assistance than they had been. In this assumption, they were mistaken.

Though the Bibliothèque Nationale contained copies of the municipal records of every French village, many dating to the early nineteenth century and open for my perusal, they were not indexed by date other than by decade. Fascinating though it was to begin reading at random, despite the excellent exchange rate of dollar to franc during the summer of 1985, my husband and I could not stay in Paris forever.

The next phase of research took me to Brittany. The indexing problem proved to be identical in the local archives. But the impetus of my return to Brittany was not so much to spend time in the Archives as it was to spend time with the people. It was disappointing to learn,

however, that much of the Breton activism I had witnessed in the early 1970's was no longer apparent.[2]

Much of the information cited, therefore, has been drawn from secondary sources. The most notable French experts in this area are not historians, but sociologists, political scientists, journalists, and politicians. Among those cited are two French sociologists: Michael Crozier, who complained of the French bureaucratic "traffic jam" in his Societe bloquée, and Alain Peyrefitte whose work is entitled Le Mal français, or The Trouble With France.[3] Journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber wrote Le Défi americain, or The American Challenge, in 1967 as a way to complain of the complacency of his fellow Frenchmen in the suffocating French political community.[4] Parallel autonomist movements were surveyed in Charles R. Foster's Nations Without A State, which provides great insight into comparative studies of Breton separatism with other active movements in western Europe.[5]

Finally, my indebtedness to the faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha must be acknowledged. Dr. Mark O. Rousseau, professor of Sociology, shared with me his bibliography and first draft of a study

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[2]Personal observation in Brittany, May, 1986.

[3]Michael Crozier has since published Strategies For Change (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1982), and Alain Peyrefitte, The Trouble With France (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

[4]Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, Le Défi americain (Paris: Denoel, 1967).

[5]Nations Without A State: Ethnic Minorities in Western Europe, Charles R. Foster, editor (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980).

he is presently undertaking of the decentralization of western Europe. His sources were most helpful and have been extensively cited in this study. Dr. William C. Pratt, my advisor, has consistently urged me to "see the larger picture" in the course of this investigation, to apply my findings to a broader world dilemma, and to keep in mind the original inspiration for this study. For that, and his many hours of work of a more tedious nature during the numerous re-write sessions, I am very grateful. And lastly, to Dr. Ert Gum, under whose sponsorship I originally began this research and who died in August of 1985, I express my deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks for the encouragement and pluck he encouraged in me under his sponsorship. He is much missed.

CHAPTER ONE

A Brief History of the Spirit of Autonomy in Brittany, France: From Original Settlement to the Present

In August of 1975, a bomb planted by a regional autonomist movement destroyed a small section of Versailles. The group claiming responsibility was the Front de la Libération de la Bretagne, or the FLB. The incident was the culmination of the regional reaction against the domination of Paris over the province of Brittany. In the 1970's, there were several such regional efforts determined to preserve local tradition and color.[1] However, after such expressions began to assume such a vehement pitch, they grew to command an attention that went beyond that of a quaint effort to preserve regional folklore. An exploration of Breton history might help to explain why the Bretons feel exploited by the French government.

Brittany is the western-most province of France. This stormy peninsula with its rugged coastline has long distinguished itself as remote and removed from the rest of France. Both the language

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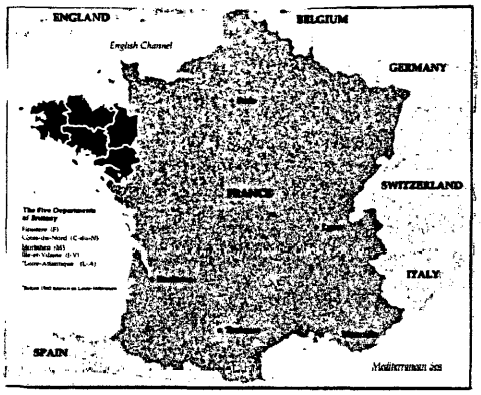
[1]This period also marked high activity for the Basques and Corsican separatists.



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and the stock of people are unique to Brittany.[3] The Breton race came, for the most part, from English Cornwall in the sixth century.[4]

By 753 Pepin the Short had amassed enough of the Breton interior to form "la Marche de Bretagne," or "the Breton frontier." The region then included the present-day cities of Nantes and Rennes. Charlemagne consolidated Gaullic control of the peninsula in 790. It was not until the year 826, under the reign of Louis the Pious, that a native-born Breton received administrative responsibility for governing the province. This appointment proved to be a significant one in Breton history, as the figure of Nominoë, deputy of Brittany from 826 to 848, defeated Louis' successor Charles the Bald in a decisive battle near Redon. He was consecrated "King of Brittany" at Dol-en Bretagne

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[2]Jack E. Reece, The Bretons Against France (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), xxiii.

[3]The ancestral language of Brittany is Breton, a Celtic dialect more related to Welsh and Irish than to French.

[4]Jean Thoraval, Les Grandes Étapes de la Civilisation Française (Paris: Bordas, 1972), 12.

on November 22, 848. Nominoë is thus considered the first Breton national hero.[5]

Breton resistance to the Norman expansion of 1066 proved successful. By 1154, however, the Plantagenets assumed royal control of the region. Henry II appointed his son Geoffry II as Duke of Brittany in 1181. The Plantagenet line continued to administer Brittany through the thirteenth century. Then the fiefdom became the target of the rival powerful French nobles Jean de Monfort and Charles de Blois in the fourteenth. Edward III of England regained control in 1355, but Charles V of France reconquered the Duchy in 1380.[6]

The most significant figure in early Breton history is the Duchesse Anne, who, by marrying Charles VIII in 1491 became Queen of France. Upon Charles' death in 1498, Anne married his successor, Louis XII. Their first-born son assumed the throne as Francis I in 1513, the same year as Anne's death. These two _marriages de convenience_ procured the last acquisition of territory needed to create the hexagon of modern-day France. Breton nationalists have thus viewed Anne of Brittany as a symbol at once of regional pride and of irrevocable regional compromise.[7]

Under Francis I, Brittany was officially annexed as a province of France by the terms of the Treaty of Plessix in 1532. Though the

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[5]Jean Markale, _Histoire secrète de la Bretagne_ (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1977), 115-16.

[6]_Ibid._, 170-72.

[7]_Ibid._, 184.

Treaty marks the end of Breton independence from France, its terms were quite liberal. Among its provisions were the right of Bretons to refuse conscription in the royal armies, the right of Bretons to be tried in Breton courts, and the right of Bretons to refuse taxation from Paris except in the event that such revenue be used exclusively in Brittany.[8] Much as the twentieth century American Indian later came to realize that the treaties of the late eighteenth century were often far more generous than subsequent arrangements, Breton regionalists have often cited the Plessix Treaty in recent years as a model for modern-day autonomy policy.[9]

The annexation, though petitioned for by some of the more politically ambitious Breton nobility, was not well received by the Breton population as a whole. The municipal records of the city of Rennes, the provincial capital, register incidents of regional resistance as early as the mid-seventeenth century. In 1675 the town's tax office was destroyed by a crowd of more than two thousand people. The residences of over fifty aristocrats, thought to be collaborators with the King, also were burned.[10]

The most famous Breton revolt, however, occurred during the French Revolution. It is also the most misunderstood. The Chouans Revolt, often described as a royalist insurrection encouraged by the

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[8]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Librairie Francais Maspero, 1977).

[9]Olivier Mordrel, Breiz Atao ou Histoire et actualite du nationalisme breton (Paris: Editions Alain Moreau, 1973), 29.

[10]Ibid., 33.

Church, was actually a regionalist upheaval.[11] It was only after the revolt was well underway that the royalists, mostly from the Vendée region to the south, exploited the unrest to their own advantage.

The Breton role in the French Revolution is both pivotal and ironic. Still steeped in seigneural tradition, a heritage that Brittany retained longer than the rest of France, it was nonetheless a committee of Breton nobles which history must credit with initiating many of the idealistic tenets of the French Revolution. The Jacobin Club owes its founding to the Club Breton, a group of Breton delegates to the States General.[12] Though soon disassociated with the Jacobins, history records that this most reactionary of provinces, this royalist stronghold, ironically lays claim to that of the birthplace of Jacobinism.

Brittany suffered for its subsequent allegiance to the ancien regime. By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, hundreds of nobles and priests had been massacred in the towns of Angers, Nantes, and Quiberon in the south, and Rennes and Saint-Mâlo to the north.[13] Though not unique to Brittany, the consequences of the Counter-Revolution did not spare the convents, monasteries, and aristocratic chateaux.[14]

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[11]Donald Sutherland, The Chouans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

[12]Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 52.

[13]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 23.

[14]Ibid.

The years following the Revolution continued to bring hardship on the ever-out-of-step Bretons. For example, the abolition of the private school system in favor of the national lycée system of Napoleon arrived at a time when scarcely one of fifty Bretons could speak French, the only language of instruction.[15] Needless to say, despite the grand visions of the Empire, the general education of the region did not improve.

Napoleon also restored the office of the prefect, often thought of as the bête noire of the French administrative system. As a replacement of the intendant of the ancien regime, these envoys from Paris were sent out to all ninety-five départments, or administrative districts. Their function was to coordinate local needs with state services. More often, however, they were viewed as meddlers and, in times of active autonomist efforts, as informers to the Ministry of the Interior.[16] They came to symbolize provincial distrust of Parisian authority.

Though the early nineteenth century was in many ways a politically repressive era in Brittany due to an overzealous perfectoral system, the literature of the provinces bloomed. The Romantic movement of the nineteenth century inspired a newly awakened interest in the folklore of Brittany. Hersart de Villemarqué compiled an important collection of

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[15]Jacques Godechot, La contre-révolution: doctrine et action, 1789-1904 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 233.

[16]Brian Chapman, The Prefects and Provincial France (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), 17.

Breton poetry in 1874, complete with a glossary of the Breton language.[17] Unfortunately, partly because of this romantic nostalgia, there resulted a persistent confusion between actual Breton history and the legendary, or romanticized accounts. Even present-day students of the region tend to think of their own regional history as a quaint fairytale, often confusing actual historical figures with fictitious legends!

Among the legends Brittany claims to have nurtured is that of Tristan and Iseult, the love story of forbidden passion and chivalry which later evolved into the King Arthur tale.[18] Brittany claims to be the residence of the wizard Merlin, where he and Vivian are said to still walk in the forest of Paimpont, deep in the interior of the province. The Druid ruins of Carnac, in south Brittany, are said to pre-date those of Stonehenge. Nature worship and pantheism are still reflected in Breton folk customs, despite the fact that Brittany is a stronghold of Catholicism. One does not have to dig too deeply, however, to discover that roadside shrines to the Virgin Mary were formerly shrines to pagan goddesses, or even to Anne

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[17] Jean Botherel, La Bretagne Contre Paris (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1969), 42.

[18] The first written version of the Romance of Tristan and Iseult is credited to Béroul, in the twelfth century. The oral tradition traces the tale to Brittany in the preceding centuries, and perhaps to the Moors of southern France before that. Both Brittany and Languedoc have a strong oral tradition: the Breton bards and the troubadours of Occitania perpetuated this love story for centuries before Chrétienne de Troyes translated it into Old French, changing the names from the Breton derivatives to the Lancelot and Guenivere of the King Arthur legends. Joseph Bedier, Le Roman et Tristan et Iseult (Paris: L'Edition d'Art, 1946), i-vii.

of Brittany.[19] The cosmetics have changed, but the Celtic roots go deep.

Thanks to the scholarly interest that Villemarqué had initiated in Breton ancestry, the credibility of the region's actual heritage began to be recognized. The Breton language also began to enjoy a new appreciation. In certain circles, the Breton language had become the preferred language of erudite scholars. Yet, in the general population of the region it had become taboo, to such a degree that young Breton school children were punished if they were caught speaking it.[20]

The issue of language has remained a volatile one. Breton is not a dialect, but a Celtic language. It is more related to the Gaelic spoken in Ireland or Wales than to modern French. It is a testament to the isolation of Brittany that the language has remained intact over the many centuries of its incorporation as a French province. Though Welsh has survived in Wales and is commonly spoken there, the number of Bretons fluent in their native tongue is much lower than in other Celtic regions. The language most directly linked to Breton is a Celtic dialect spoken only in Cornwall. After a century or more of disuse, the last documented speaker of this ancestral Breton tongue was an elderly woman living outside of Southampton. She died in the 1930's.[21]

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[19]Personal observation, Brittany, summer of 1973.

[20]Maurice Duhamel, La question bretonne dans son cadre européen (Quimper: Cahiers de l'avenir de la Bretagne, 1978), 22.

[21]Mordel, Breiz Atao, 33.

Though an obvious comparison might be made with the attempts of the Quebecois to make Canada a bilingual, bi-cultural state, the proportion of Bretons actually capable of speaking their ancestral language is so small as to make it more of a symbolic demand than a response to a pressing, unaddressed concern. Perhaps a more accurate parallel is that of the American Indian. Breton activists in the heyday of regionalist efforts in the 1960's and early 1970's often compared the plight of their province with that of the American Indian: both races were ultimately contained to a limited area as the conquering race advanced; both races are struggling to keep their languages alive and preserve what they can of their native traditions and customs.[22]

In 1843 the first Breton Society, the Association Bretonne, was founded.[23] Intended as a social support group for Breton farmers and basically non-political in orientation, the association was dissolved nevertheless in 1857 by Napoleon III, who objected to its anti-centralist tendencies. The first Congress of Celtic Concerns took place in Saint-Brieuc, Brittany in 1867. Subsequently, a petition allowing for the right to teach the Breton language in public schools was presented to the French government.[24] One of the early promoters of this regionalist effort was Charles De Gaulle I, great uncle of the twentieth century president. Nothing came of this petition. The mid-

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[22]Personal observation, Brittany, summer of 1973.

[23]Bothorel, La Bretagne contre Paris, 57.

[24]Michel Phlipponneau, Debout Bretagne! (Saint-Brieuc: Presses Universitaires de Bretagne, 1970), 39.

nineteenth century still saw Brittany in the throes of a harsh and vigorous prefectoral system. Through the return of the monarchy, on to the Second Republic, through Napoleon III and into the Third Republic, the province of Brittany exerted only as much political activity as the prefects would allow.[25]

In 1898 a second effort at regional education, that of the Union Bretonne Régionaliste, founded by the determined Marquis de l'Estourbeillon, briefly appeared on the political scene. Instead of charting a progressive course for efforts toward cultural preservation, however, regional expression in Brittany deteriorated. By 1909 the Breton language was officially prohibited at Mass, and two years later it was forbidden in the schools by the Ministry of Education.[26]

Another incident of that same year, 1911, is also worthy of mention, though it is not directly tied to the language or education question. A ceremony was planned in Rennes, the provincial capital, to present town officials with a gift from the French government. The gift was a sculpture, meant to commemorate the union of Brittany and France, showing the Duchesse Anne on her knees, imploring Louis XII to become, at the same time, master of Brittany and master of herself. A young student in the crowd began to throw rocks to demonstrate his displeasure with the message conveyed, and soon the assembled crowd

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[25]Brian Chapman, The Prefects and Provincial France (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1955), p. 27.

[26]Ibid., 45.

had to be dispersed by state police.[27] University students have often been the most visible element of the more radical efforts toward autonomy. The 1960's would see a similar student involvement in Brittany.

During World War I, public concern over the destiny of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine understandably was a more pressing concern than Breton autonomy. But soon after the Great War, the most notorious of all Breton autonomist movements was founded, the Breiz Atao. As viewed today, the first publications of this remarkable organization are strikingly modern in content. They speak of the dangers of a consumer-oriented society, of the necessity of a strong and persistent regionalism in France, and of the idea of a European federation which could protect the rights of all European minorities. The publications also discuss, as early as 1918, the dangers of the industrial cartels which were about to align themselves with the centralized nations, and which would serve to unduly influence international politics.[28]

Brittany's economic potential has indeed been underdeveloped. At the time of its annexation in 1532 it had harbored one of the greatest mercantile fleets of all Europe. Brittany is geographically situated so as to enjoy access to the commercial activity of England, Spain, and North America. But the history of France, unfortunately, proved such that Brittany often found itself at war, unwittingly, with

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[27] Ibid., 47.

[28] Breiz Atao, Archives Nationale de France, Paris, France. Reference F7 13244.

the first two markets. Even today, the vast potential of Brittany's strategic location as a point of departure is unrealized. A chastizing editorial in the daily Le Monde (1969), charged that:

> France has succeeded in the exploit of transforming into a sterile Sahara the living ocean of which the Breton peninsula is the bridgehead. What could be delivered cheaply to Brittany by sea she is forced to buy from the Continent: her coals from the North, her steel from Lorraine, her cattle from Beauce. What she produces she cannot export by sea; what should be a point of departure has become a cul-de-sac.[29]

In the 1930's, the Germans began to appeal to this economic potential of Brittany. Cleverly, the German government began making overtures to the Bretons, and soon the region was labeled sympathetic to the Nazis. The German tactic succeeded: Brittany, like certain regions in eastern France, was considered friendly territory to the enemy during World War II. One historian asserts that after the war years, one needed only to have a Breton book in one's library to be subject to arrest.[30]

It was at this time that some of the most extremist movements began to appear on the Breton political scene. The secret society Gwenn Ha Du, "Black and White," openly fascist and anti-Christian,[31] was founded in 1932. The leader of this movement, Celestin Lainé, was an eccentric who wanted a return to the ancient practices of the

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[29]Le Monde, February 4, 1969, 13.

[30]Mordel, Breiz Atao, 45.

[31]Michel Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les régions (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967, 28.

Druids. He had few disciples. However, those he did convert were probably responsible for the "accidental" train derailments which often beset the itinerary of Parisian officials on their way to Brittany in the 1930's.[32] Lainé is also credited for having overturned the above described statue of a supplicant Anne of Brittany during a governmental ceremony.[33]

Once World War II began, the most outspoken of German sympathizers were exiled. As if to negate its reputation as a collaborist stronghold, Brittany sent a large number of her soldiers to the front: twice the number of any other French region. She also lost the largest number of men: one out of four, as compared to the national average of one out of eight.[34]

Following the war, political resistance in Brittany resumed. This time, Brittany found some support from other regions in her struggle against the "Parisian technocrats." The 1940's saw a nationwide protest against the exorbitant cost of the transportation of produce from the countryside to the major French markets. Transportation costs made it difficult for a small commercial enterprise to survive any distance from Paris.[35] One of the greatest shortcomings of the modern-day French State is its method of calculating its national economic policies from

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[32] Ibid., 30.

[33] Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 55.

[34] Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les régions, 56.

[35] Ibid., 83.

Paris, with no regard whatsoever for the individual economies of the provinces it so relies upon.[36]

By 1949, Brittany was one of the first of the peripheral provinces to respond to this problem. The Comité d'Etude et de Liaison des Interêts Bretons, or the CELIB, was founded. René Plevon was its president from 1949 to 1972. Its faith in the government of the newly elected Charles De Galle was, at first, unquestioning. But soon it became clear that his highly touted regionalist program would begin only after he had first secured the "glory of France," and perhaps, more accurately, the "glory of Charles De Gaulle." The conflict became so impassioned between De Gaulle and the regionalists that in 1961 it was necessary to stifle the microphones at a welcoming rally in Quimper, where the mayor had just challenged the President, asking him to please explain to the crowd his "non-existent regional reforms."[37]

The 1960's were, of course, a period of political activity in many fields. In Brittany, the decade was especially productive. In 1962 Mouvement pour l'Organization de la Bretagne (MOB), was formed. This group was a short-lived off-shoot of the more moderate Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB), a decentralist group with autonomist leanings that still exists today. Records in the archives in Vannes attest that the UDB enjoyed a strong showing in the municipal elections there in the Spring of 1985. The organization's concerns included the

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[36]Alain Peyrefitte, Le Mal Français (Paris: Librairie Guillmard, 1979).

[37]Phlipponeau, La Gauche et les régions, 56.

plight of the farmers in their struggles against Common Market price ceilings, the unemployment problem, and the depressed regional economy.[38]

In 1966 the Front de la Libération de la Bretagne (FLB) was created. This group's aspirations were more radical. The membership was predominantly university students, and the mood and tactics were very much in keeping with the general malaise and subsequent student activism prevalent in western Europe and the United States in the late 1960's. No one was killed in what the FLB billed as its terrorism souriant ("smiling terrorism"), but in the mid 1970's the organization began to associate, informally, with the Irish Republican Army, causing the Breton organization to go even further underground.

The 1980's version of the FLB seems to be the Front Culturel Progressiste Breton. It presently publishes its own newsletter, La Liberté Morbihan. Morbihan is the name of the département in which Rennes, the Breton provincial capital, is located. In a 1984 edition it championed the cause of bilingualism in Brittany, advocating the use of both Breton and French on radio, local television, and during official banking transactions.[39] The prospect of the use of the ancestral language is unlikely. More realistic is a proposal that residents have access to an interpreter fluent in Breton, upon request, before official transactions are completed.

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[38] Ouest France, May 16, 1985, 1.

[39] La Liberté Morbihan (Rennes, Brittany), May 5, 1985.

The UDB publishes a more moderate newsletter, Le Peuple Breton.[40] Here, it champions the causes and concerns of Breton farmers and fishermen, and seems to be less enthusiastic about efforts toward autonomy, and more concerned with economic improvements in the region. The present Socialist administration, though now with an opposition parliament,[41] had advocated a program of regional reform, but Bretons have seen such platforms before, and from both sides of the political spectrum.

Most of the Breton autonomist groups of the twentieth century have been left-wing. Though it is perhaps not surprising that the more radical factions, such as the FLB, be considered leftist, support for Breton autonomy had not always come from the Left. Breton autonomy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was considered a right-wing movement. The political labeling seems to alternate; Breton concerns do not.

Brittany has consistently rejected the persistent posturing of Paris as the superior, controlling force of French government. The impetus for keeping Paris in check has been at times born of political ideology, at times motivated by economic advantage. From the revolutionary rhetoric of the Club Breton, to the reactionary zeal of Breton

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[40] Le Peuple Breton, a publication of the Union Démocratique Breton, Brest, Brittany.

[41] The March, 1986 legislative elections resulted in a new, unprecedented era of power-sharing in French government. Mitterand's remaining two years as president will now be shared by Gaullist Premier Jacques Chirac, who replaced Mitterrand's Socialist colleague, Laurent Fabius. The Socialists presently hold a minority 206 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly.

royalists, to the romantic nostalgia for provincial innocence of the nineteenth century, to the precarious politics of the twentieth, Brittany has sounded a chord all its own.

CHAPTER TWO

Brittany During the French Revolution, 1789-1815: An Inconsistent Legacy

Feudalism died hard in Brittany. Some historians claim that a feudal economy persisted in the province until 1921, when the language of a state land title bill replaced the term *locataire*, meaning one tied to the land, with the twentieth century term *propriétaire*, meaning property owner. Though the feudal title was abolished in France by a decree of August 15, 1789, only the peasant who already owned allodial land along the parameters of the feudal estate, was free of financial bond to his *seigneur*. Tenant farmers and sharecroppers remained subject to levies.[1] While primary sources are difficult to procure, the inventory of lands and revenues, then referred to as the *assiettes*, reveal that at the time of the Revolution, there were more leased lands in Brittany than the rest of France.[2]

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[1] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "The Deserted Villages of France," *Rural Society in France: Selections from Annales d'histoire economique et sociale*, Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, editors (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 257-290.

[2] *Ibid.*, 290.

The south of France had long been receptive to the private ownership of small plots of land. However, a census of 1723 showed that in Normandy and Brittany the proportion of the population which enjoyed private ownership was only 20 percent, the lowest in the nation.[3] In France, as in many other places, those who fed the rest of the world had the least to eat themselves. An English historian visiting the Breton countryside in the Spring of 1789 described what he saw as nothing but "poverty, brutality, and filth."[4]

Two concentrations of power remained vital in Brittany long after they had lost their political influence over the rest of France: the nobility and the Church. The noblesse d'épée, those territorial lords who laid claim not only to most of the countryside but to the towns and cities as well, including the provincial capital of Rennes, stayed in power in spirit, if not in law, long after the Revolution. A demographic study of the village of Plonivel, in Haute Bretagne, shows how slight was the change in social structure after the Revolution.[5]

Although the consistent strength of the local nobility can be cited as the key to Breton resistance to the Revolution, thus marking the province's first gesture of political autonomy, the nobility was not diametrically opposed to the revolutionary rhetoric of individual

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[3]Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 259.

[4]Will and Ariel Durant, Rousseau and the Revolution (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 931.

[5]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Librairie Française Maspero, 1977), 89-90.

liberties. The character of the nobility was changing. Brittany, along with the rest of western Europe, was rapidly establishing a mercantile economy. Long involved in the lucrative slave trade to the colonies, the port town of Brest became a center of mercantile wealth in the late eighteenth century.[6] The landed nobility still ranked in the upper class, but it now shared its prestige with a fast-growing upper middle class. This transformation of wealth was more prominent in other areas of France than in Brittany, but the shift does help to explain initial Breton support for the Revolution.

More consistently repressive was the administrative vanguard of the noblesse de robe, those members of parliament who ruled the province from far-away Paris. A Parisian envoy disclosed his abhorrence of the area by calling its inhabitants "amongst the most ignorant, cruel, and religious in the country."[7] Here begins the most consistent and deep-seated anxiety in Breton history: the resentment of the provincial natives toward the Parisian political hierarchy. The hated figure of the provincial prefect, the local officer who reported to Paris and who lived more sumptuously, ate more conspicuously, and had no friends in the community which he purportedly served, became the target of provincial resentment since the office was first created.[8]

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[6] Ibid., 89.

[7] J. M. Thompson, The French Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 378.

[8] Brian Chapman, The Prefects and Provincial France (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), 12.

Originally given the title of intendants,[9] the Parisian envoy to the provinces was part of the centralization plan orchestrated by Cardinal Richelieu under Louis XIII. The post was temporarily abolished in 1648 with the first convening of parlement of Paris, but was reinstated in 1654.[10] At the time of the French Revolution there were thirty-two intendants in the provinces. The intendant had the power to issue ordinances for the administration and execution of law. In addition to controlling the local police, he was the supreme tax collector.[11]

The resistance of the nobility to what it perceived as foreign taxation took on a political tone on the eve of the Revolution. As early as 1788 the provincial parlement of Rennes, made up mostly of landed nobility, was espousing some of the most democratic rhetoric of the era. In a declaration of that year, liberal references to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the "general will" were evident.[12] The parlements of Grenoble and a few other French cities were making similar statements at the time, but one of the greatest ironies of the Breton role in the French Revolution was its early commitment to the Jacobin cause, and its subsequent early denunciation of the Revolutionary regime.

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[9] Ibid., 12.

[10] Ibid., 13.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Durant, Rousseau and the Revolution, 849.

The Breton parlement was articulate and courageous in its early demands for individual liberties and religious freedom. Breton intendant Bertrand de Moleville declared in 1788 "that man is born free, that originally men are equal, [and] that these truths have no need of proof."[13] The earliest formal association to espouse such ideals was the Club Breton, originally founded in that same year by the Breton deputies of the States General.[14] The membership included many highly educated and respected landed nobles who were receptive to seigneurial reforms. Most were supportive of the abolition of seigneurial banalities and other feudal fees.[15] Deputy Cottin of Nantes made a motion to abolish the manorial court system, while other Breton deputies condemned the tithe.[16]

Not all topics under discussion were so wide-sweeping, nor were all the reforms enthusiastically received. A portent of counter-Revolutionary sentiment was in evidence as early as August 3, 1789, when six Breton nobles left a meeting to protest the Club's stance on the suspension of the Church tithe. Other members were more interested in issues of a more local nature, such as hunting rights and other practical concerns.[17] These more moderate

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[13] Ibid., 849.

[14] Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the Revolution (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 158.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 159.

[17] Ibid., 160.

voices were soon overtaken by the heady excitement of pre-Revolutionary France.

In September the Club opened its membership to non-Bretons, including such revolutionary figures as Mirabeau, Seiyes, and Robespierre. The Club met in special committee as the one hundred members resolved to "obliterate the privileges of classes, provinces, towns, and corporations."[18] By October of 1789, the Club Breton moved its headquarters from Rennes to Paris, and renamed itself the Société des Jacobins.[19] Thus did the "stronghold of feudalism" give birth to the ideals of the French Revolution. Yet this same province is equally championed in history texts as the birthplace of the Counter-Revolution. This is but one of many ironies in the contradictory history of the independently spirited province of Brittany.

To understand the ambiguous role of Brittany in the French Revolution one must remember that membership in the early Jacobin Clubs consisted of deputies, and, later, men of science and literature. Dues were relatively high. Among the cherished liberties they professed to safeguard was that of private property. Jacobin rhetoric already appeared too diluted for the tastes of Marat, Danton, and Robespierre, who founded the more radical Cordeliers Club. Lafayette, Talleyrand, and Lavoisier found it to be too radical, and hurriedly founded the Société de 1789 to voice

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Thompson, The French Revolution, 113.

support for the monarchy. The Breton nobility underwent a similar shift in allegiance late in the year of 1789, casting its lot with the monarchy, thus condemning it to fall with the King.[20]

The strongest pro-monarchy sentiments came from the wealthy coastal city of St-Mâlo on the English channel; from Rennes, the provincial capital; and from south Brittany, in the present-day département of the Loire-Atlantique.[21] Breton historian Yannick Guin claims that rural Brittany, the region of Finistere, never lost its revolutionary fervor and to this day has a markedly more socialist stance on most issues than does the rest of the province.[22]

The severing of Brittany's affiliation with the French Revolution is best explained, however, by the mere fact that the Jacobin Club was no longer the proud offspring of the Club Breton, but the ungrateful son who left the countryside for Paris, and promptly lost all affection for his rural roots. It was Paris, not Louis XVI, that became the focus of resentment for the alienated Breton nobility. Brittany quickly became host to the regionalist aspirations of the Girondins. Though still associated with the Jacobins in the beginning, the Girondins soon resented the rule of all France by Paris alone. Among the proposals of the Breton Girondistes was the creation of a federal republic of self-governing provinces. Though not as

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[20]Jean Markale, Histoire secrète de la Bretagne (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1977), 185.

[21]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 55.

[22]Ibid.

blatantly autonomous in its program, government-sponsored reform movements of the late 1950's drew on some of the Girondins' original ideas when forming their own proposals.[23]

By early 1790, the Girondin impulse in the provinces consolidated. Resistance to the radicalism of Marat and Robespierre grew especially strong in Brittany, where the trading centers of Brest and Nantes showed increased protectionalism. The town of Brest nearly conspired successfully to open its port to a British squadron cruising nearby in April of that year.[24] By May the Club Breton changed its name to the Société des Amis de la Constitution. Its meeting place was a former monastery near the Tuileries in Paris. Though the membership now boasted a dramatic increase from the original few deputies of the delegation, Brittany was in the throes of a federalist reaction against the centralist tenets of the Constituent Assembly.[25]

The centralist efforts of the Directory were immediate and sweeping. On September 13, 1789, a Committee of Eight, four Parisians and four provincials, proposed to divide France into eighty-three départments. A further law of January 8, 1790, decreed that each département had an elected assembly of thirty-six counselors, whose executive would be responsible for administrative and police actions, as well as tax assessment. The Revolutionary Assembly came to rely

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[23]Michel Phlipponneau, Débout Bretagne! (Saint-Brieuc: Presses Universitaires de Bretagne, 1970).

[24]Lefebvre, Coming of Revolution, 102.

[25]Ibid., 103.

more and more upon its own commissaires, the Revolutionary replacement for the office of intendant, who were sent out from Paris to stifle Counter-Revolutionary movements in the provinces. Appointed by the Committee of Public Safety, these commissaires assumed dictatorial powers in the provinces to which they were sent.[26]

If Breton nobility grew to resent the spirit of '89 for taking away its potential economic initiative, the Breton peasantry feared the dismantling of the two structures it had looked to for centuries of support: the monarchy and the Church. Far from seeing themselves as exploited victims of these hierarchical giants, the common folk were fiercely protective of their King. This much of old seigneural order did remain intact in Brittany: a majority of peasants remained economically dependent upon the landed nobility.[27]

The old order was tested and true in Brittany. Landless peasants professed their devotion to the lord of the manor; in return, they were allowed to earn a subsistence level existence off his land. This dynamic had a parallel with that of the landed nobility and the monarchy: the former professing its allegiance, both economic and personal, to its leige lord, the person of the King. Such allegiances persisted. Regret over the demise of the monarchy can be heard to this day around the dinner table of the more astute pillars of the venerable communities of Saint Mâlo and Quiberon.[28]

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[26]Chapman, Prefects, 13.

[27]Markale, Histoire secrète, 187.

[28]Personal observation, June, 1973, Quiberon and Saint Mâlo.

After the execution of King Louis XVI in 1791, the Revolution entered its most violent phase.

The region of Vendée, just south of Brittany, suffered the most casualties in the brutal uprisings that swept the countryside during the Terror. On March 10, 1793, 1500 citizens of the town of Machecoul attacked the office of the National Guard, killing him along with the constitutional curé and the justice of the peace. One hundred Bretons had been killed in Saint Brieuc two years earlier to prevent an impending collaboration with sympathizers of the imprisoned King. When the King and Queen were finally guillotined, the provinces were outraged. Barbaroux, the Breton representative under the Directory, claimed in 1793 that

> it was for the Bretons and Marseillais to reverse the tyrant Robespierre; it was a Breton and myself who stood up against the assassins; it was for the Bretons and Marseillais once more to save the Republic from these Jacobin anarchists.[29]

The Counter-Revolution was further strengthened in Brittany by the staunch and consistent support she gave to the Church. The town priest, though often maligned in local lore, was nevertheless the patriarch of village life.[30] The local church was not simply the site for Sunday mass, but the town's focal point. It often served as the site for schools, farmers' associations, and political meetings. Unlike his colleagues in Paris or the other large French cities, the

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[29]Thompson, French Revolution, 399.

[30]An example of such irreverence is evidenced in many Breton folksongs, most notably Les filles de Forges.

local curé in Brittany was often as poor as his flock.[31] Though granted immunities and privileges which made the Church a consistent target of criticism in many parts of Europe, Brittany remained a Catholic stronghold, emotionally devoted to its parish priest and respectful of its imposed order. It is the boundaries of the individual paroisse (parish) that defined the administrative division of the canton which date from the ancien regime. The local curé was thus the authority figure who was linked most directly to the people.[32] When the curés began to be persecuted and murdered during the Terror, the Breton response was one of horror and panic, not of liberation.

Bolstered by the weakening of the Revolutionary Council, the local départments in Brittany, as in many French provinces, began to usurp more and more control from the Parisian envoys. The supervision of revolutionary law was handed over to the local départments. The official link between the Convention and the provinces was now that of the Vigilance Committee of each canton.[33] Hated by the communities they administered, these outsiders from Paris were drummed out of service by the local assemblies, often leaving the cantons in virtual anarchy. Without any remaining framework of state-sponsored local government, Counter-Revolutionary activities ran rampant. Counter-Revolutionary insurrections in Saint Mâlo, Rennes, Quiberon, and

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[31]Durant, Age of Voltaire, 254.

[32]Markale, Histoire secrète, 42.

[33]Thompson, French Revolution, 434.

Nantes all occurred in the Spring of 1793.[34] The decisive collaboration between the peasant revolts and the Counter-Revolution of the Breton aristocracy came at the end of March. The priests and the local elites, perhaps because their hand was forced by the peasantry, perhaps because the timing was right, came out from the shadows and took charge of the ideological, political, and military aspects of the Counter-Revolutionary movement, later to be termed the Chouanerie.[35]

The departmental assemblies became instruments of the various political factions: royalists, Girondins, and moderates used their influence to ferment discontent against the Jacobins. The Jacobins retaliated. On June 15, 1793, hundreds of Girondists met at the Nantes cathedral on the Place St. Pierre, in the shadow of the chateau of the Duchesse Anne, patron Saint of Brittany, to declare their resistance to the Jacobins of Paris. The famous resistance of the Chouanerie, that unlikely coalition of Breton nobility and a peasantry loyal to both its social superiors and its Church, had begun. Breton historian Yannick Guin sees tremendous socio-political significance in this collaboration of diverse classes united in their resistance to Revolutionary demands:

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[34]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 55.

[35]The Chouanerie Revolt was the best known insurrection in western France after the Revolution. Though Breton nobles from Saint Mâlo and Rennes were known to have been participants, the Chouans are more accurately placed as residents of the Vendée, a monarchist stronghold south of the Loire River, and thus not part of Brittany proper. Donald Sutherland, The Chouans: The Social Origins of Popular Counter-Revolution in Upper Brittany, 1770-1796 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

> The fickle nature of bourgeois revolution and the rumblings of a civil war reveal the violent antagonism which was beginning--as a result of a disintegrating feudal system--which had pitched an agrarian bloc, cemented in by religious idealism against an urban bloc, already smitted with the first glimmers of proletarian consciousness.[36]

In July of 1793, several Breton notables, including many priests were imprisoned in Nantes.[37] The Breton clergy, staunchly opposed to the secularism of the Civil Constitution of 1790 and 1791, now faced the far more concrete application of Revolutionary ideals: the nationalization of Church property. Though the Bretons were outraged by the slaughtering of their curés, they, too, benefited from the release and subsequent sale of Church lands.[38] In typical Breton fashion, the province was at the forefront of both impulses of the Revolution: anticipating the lofty ideals of the revolutionary radicals, only to respond just as quickly to its own undeniable self-interest. With Robespierre's arrest and execution in July, 1794, the Revolution was again returned to the bourgeoisie.

Historians who hold to the "Great Man" theory of history love to speculate on what would have been the course of France had it not benefited from the vision, dynamism, and military skill of Napoleon Bonaparte. The impact of his organizational and administrative transformation of France is incomparable. The rigorous efforts of Napoleon

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[36]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 83. My translation.

[37]Ibid., 58.

[38]Ibid., 60.

to centralize, standardize, and consolidate his Empire made the period in which the bourgeoisie in Brittany was able to enjoy a tax-free, bureaucracy-free existence very short-lived.

The provinces were left without any administrative authority after the Terror and the fall of the Directory. The office of intendant under the ancien regime, and that of commissaire under the Constituent Assembly, had both been dissolved. Napoleon was to find their ultimate replacement in the prefect. The first time the term préfet was used was during the Counsulship. It was suggested by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyes, who modeled the office on that of the Roman Prefect.[39] Napoleon referred to the prefects as the "empereurs aux petits pieds,"[40] or little-footed emperors.

Historian Jacques Godechot gives a detailed account of how the Napoleonic prefectoral system was organized in his Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire.[41] The system continues to operate much as Napoleon had originally devised. Beginning with the lowest echelon is the commune, the smallest administrative unit in France. So many villages and hamlets qualify as separate administrative entities that, to this day, France has the highest number of distinct administrative posts in all of Europe. The fertile ground for a spiraling bureaucracy had begun. Each cluster of communes had

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[39] Chapman, Prefects, 18.

[40] Ibid., 17.

[41] Jacques Godechot, Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1968).

its chef-lieu, roughly the equivalent of a county seat. The chef-lieu became the administrative center of each département, whose boundaries were intentionally drawn in such a way that no one within the département would be farther than a day's horseride from the administrative center.[42] Napoleon increased the number of départments from the eighty-three created by the Constituent Assembly, to the present-day number of ninety-five.[43]

Each department was served by a departmental prefect. All prefects during the Empire were appointed and removed by Napoleon. Their authority was thus unchecked by local supervision. The prefect was provided with special funds, furnished by the state, to augment his living expenses. The rationale was that such supplemental funds would put him beyond the temptation of reaching into the local coffers. But such provisions did not always prevent such abuse.[44] Like the commissaires before him, the prefect assessed and collected taxes. This role, his being an outsider, and his sumptuous living conditions all made him a target of resentment among the local residents.

Each prefect appointed a sub-prefect, whose task was to provide for the public welfare of his department. The mayor of each village was responsible for carrying out the instructions of the prefect and sub-prefect. The prefects themselves answered directly to the

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[42]Peter A. Gourevitch, Paris and the Provinces (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 33.

[43]Godechot, Les institutions de la France, 733.

[44]Chapman, Prefects, 24.

Minister of the Interior and to the Minister of Police.[45] It was inevitable that the post of the prefect be seen by the various outlying provinces as nothing more than a tool for Napoleon's efforts to secure his Empire. A letter to Napoleon from the Count of Castellone of Languedoc, a region which, like Brittany, had a long tradition of proud independence, attests to the transparent use to which Napoleon put his prefects and the resentment it caused:

> It is true, Sire, that the Prefects make people pay their taxes, that they provide you with the men to carry on your wars. . . . In a word, the Prefects are the scullery boys of your glory; they prepare the dishes: your generals eat them.[46]

The role of the departmental prefect as government agent and police informer did not end with Napoleon's exile to St. Helena. The abuse actually grew worse as the nineteenth century wore on. But one other innovation in French government must be addressed before leaving Napoleon: the radical changes he initiated in the educational system.

On March 22, 1800, Napoleon declared that the central schools, which had been an attempt on the part of the Constituent Assembly to replace the private and religious instruction of the old regime, had been a failure. He called for a formal centralization of the school system, a mammoth undertaking comparable to the restructuring of the Imperial justice and finance systems. Jean Etienne Portalis, a member of the Council of Ancients and a close aide to Napoleon, endorsed the

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[45] Ibid., 30.

[46] Ibid., 31.

First Consul's concern that it was the role of the state, not that of the Church, to instruct the citizenry on its proper orientation in life. To his confidant, Louis de Fontanes, a penniless noble who became the Grand Master of the French University in 1808, Napoleon voiced a more blatant aim: to make French schools serve as "a soldiers' nursery" for the designs of the Empire.[47]

Though many provinces saw an improvement from the shambles of schools left by the Revolution and its aftermath, Brittany did not. In the department of the Côtes du Nord, there were forty-one lycée instructors in 1804. The number dropped to thirty in 1812.[48] Both pay and benefits were minimal, and it is not unreasonable to assume that most of the instructors were less than enthusiastic about the regions to which they were dispatched. Rarely did the native instructors remain in their post during the Napoleonic overhaul of the educational system.[49] The result was that instruction was given in Parisian French, not Breton. Thus little gains were made in the educational improvement of the general Breton population.

The continued efforts of the Chouan Rebellion, monarchists from Brittany and from the Vendée to the south, made the province especially suspect throughout the Napoleonic period. Activities of the Chouanerie were abated with the return of the monarchy in the reign of

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[47] Godechot, Les institutions de la France, 734.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 735.

Louis XVIII.[50] But the prefectoral system, as initiated by Napoleon, was to keep a tight reign on the provinces throughout the nineteenth century.

Brittany's role in French history from 1789 to 1815 was crucial yet inconsistent. Still entrenched in a deep feudal tradition, she nonetheless initiated some of the earliest revolutionary rhetoric in her local parlements. The Club Breton, originally a body of like-minded, far-sighted Breton nobility, was the precursor to the foremost political organization of the French Revolution, the Jacobin Society. Once the Jacobins achieved power, however, the delegates of the Breton contingent reverted to a more traditional stance: allegiance to the monarchy and to the Church. For this allegiance, many nobles and priests paid their lives.

The eighteenth century closed with this abrupt about-face in Breton affiliation. The province began to symbolize a stronghold of Catholicism and political conservatism. This legacy was strengthened by Napoleon, who continued the hard-line tradition of keeping the provinces in tow with his rigidly administered prefectoral system. Thus, the nineteenth century began a long-standing tradition of Breton support of a strong centralized State government.

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[50]Sutherland, The Chouans, 311.

CHAPTER THREE

Brittany in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: From Cultural Renaissance to Political Activism, 1815-1932

The prefectoral system, as created by Napoleon in 1800, was a deliberate effort to fragment the provinces of the ancien regime by dissecting them into two or more departments. In the case of Brittany, the region now consisted of five administrative districts: Côtes du Nord, with its seat in the medieval coastal town of Saint Mâlo; Ile et Villaine, its seat in the provincial capital of Rennes; Morbihan, the rural interior; Finistère, in the extreme western edge of the peninsula, with its seat in Brest; and the Loire-Inferieur, to the south, with its seat in Nantes.

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[1]Jack E. Reece, The Bretons Against France (Chapel Hill: University Press, 1977), ix.

The result has been much as Napoleon had intended: a loss of a unified force of regional identity. The prefect, the administrative authority who answered to Paris, further distanced himself from the historical and geographical identity of the province which he served. Now more than ever, the departmental prefect of nineteenth century France was feared and despised as an agent of the central government.

To understand the somewhat surprising coalition between the prefects and those Bretons yearning to be included in the Parisian elite, it must be remembered that Brittany, after the Jacobin takeover, was solidly royalist. Even the peasantry was largely impatient with the radical tenets of the first Constituent Assembly, and staunchly supported the return of Louis XVIII to the throne. The Monarchist constituency continued in Brittany through the austere reign of Charles X (1824-1830), whose reactionary policies provoked the insurrection of July, 1830. The July revolutionary fervor was, as it had been in 1789, predominantly a Parisian class-conscious struggle. The government of Charles X was toppled, and a somewhat less conservative Louis Philippe assumed the throne. The old aristocracy, as historian John Buckler described, was left to "retreat to the provinces to sulk harmlessly."[2] Meanwhile, corruption at the prefectoral level continued.

The first recorded incident of widely known corruption in the Breton prefectoral corps occurred in Morbihan, in 1837. Prefect Lorois and his sub-prefect rigged an election in Ploërmel for their favorite

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[2]Jean Thoraval, Les grandes étapes de la civilisation française (Paris: Bordas, 1972), 361.

candidate. Since their selected contender had not been a resident of Morbihan for the required six months prior to the election, the prefect and sub-prefect allegedly burned down their own prefectoral office, thus destroying all records and causing the election to be delayed--exactly six months.[3] The public, evidently accustomed to such abuses in political office, did not protest the action.[4]

The prefectoral corps maintained a watchful eye on local notables to detect any sign of opposition to state policies. Departmental prefects were usually Parisian natives, or worse, local residents who aspired to the position of prefect in order to leave for Paris, using their native region as a stepping stone. The people who held this office, therefore, often had little interest in the plight of the Breton farmer. The first political organization devoted exclusively to Breton interests did not come, therefore, from within the ranks of the political establishment. Much like the beginnings of the People's Party of late nineteenth century in the United States, the first Breton rights association began as a farmers' alliance.[5]

The 1840's in Europe were years of economic hardship and political upheaval. The revolt of 1848 which toppled Louis-Philippe and initiated the Second Republic betrayed the same contradictions for Brittany as had 1789. Though poverty and despair were again afflicting the streets of

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[3]Brian Chapman, The Prefects and Provincial France (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), 34.

[4]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1977), 110.

[5]Ibid., 112.

Paris, the newly propertied middle class in Brittany, mostly merchants and small shopkeepers, was just beginning to prosper.[6] A more diversified economy had begun to replace the strictly agrarian one of the eighteenth century, and, overall, the nineteenth century would prove to be a period of relative prosperity for most Bretons.[7] There were destitute in Brittany, of course, as there were in all regions, but its poor were not a political voice as they were in Paris. The truly poor in Brittany and other provinces most often headed for Paris to find work in the sweatshops, thus swelling the ranks of the Parisian disgruntled and unemployed.[8] The Breton contribution to the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 was thus indirect, in the form of the displaced, unpropertied peasant who joined the urban poor behind the barricades of Paris.

In Brittany the political mood remained reactionary. The Second Republic never inspired the ideological rhetoric that the French Revolution had in Brittany. There was no Club Breton which championed the rights of every man, which served as the voice for the forgotten or abused. Instead, a coalition of large and small landholders formed a fraternity which was fiercely protective of the rights of the propertied classes. Alexis de Tocqueville, historian and then representative in the second Constituent Assembly, toured Brittany and Normandy in 1849 and was struck by the peasants' "universal hatred of radical

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[6] Ibid., 117.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jean Markale, Histoire secrète de la Bretagne (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), 195.

Paris."[9] The interests in the hearts of Bretons in the mid-nineteenth century were practical, protective, and decidedly unrevolutionary.

The Association Bretonne was founded in 1843 by Jules Reiffel, a farmer who had arrived in Brittany in the 1830's. He had built a model farm on reclaimed wastelands in the Loire-Inferieur. Originally founded as a farmers' support group, the society was declared illegal in 1858 by a decree of the French government. It would reappear in 1873 as a politically moderate social club for the larger landholders, stripped of any regionalist nationalism.[10]

By 1844, however, the Association Bretonne already had become a viable political force. A bad potato harvest of that year, followed by an early freeze in the winter of 1845-46, increased the number of farmers interested in forming a Breton coalition. The following years were witness to a drought, and a second potato blight wreaked havoc on the Breton agricultural economy.[11] The Association Bretonne helped the Breton farmer maintain emotional and social support. Because the size of the average farm was so small, only a few hectares as opposed to the numerous acres which made up an American homestead at that time, cooperatives as we know them were impractical.[12] The Association

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[9]Thoraval, Les grandes étapes, 362. My translation.

[10]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 126.

[11]Jean Bothorel, La Bretagne contre Paris (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1969), 55.

[12]Gordon Wright, Rural Revolution in France: The Peasantry in the Twentieth Century (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964), 15.

Bretonne, unfortunately, was nearly a century too early to respond to the need.

Suzanne Berger, an American political scientist who has traced the roots of twentieth century Breton revolt in her Peasants Against Politics, claims that in 1840, only 57 percent of all arable land in Brittany was cultivated.[13] Speculation on these lands accelerated in the 1840's. The completion of the Nantes-Brest canal in 1850 reduced by one-third the cost of transporting produce to urban markets. The 1850's was perhaps one of the best decades ever in terms of agricultural production in Brittany. Such prosperity, however, alarmed the prefectoral corps, who, despite its inert political stance, still looked askance at the formation of the Association Bretonne.[14]

In 1852, Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte and contemptuously referred to by the great Victor Hugo and many others as "Napoleon le Petit," was preparing his coup d'état. He wanted to elevate his status from "President of the Republic" to "Emperor." Under his direction, the provincial prefectoral corps quietly and methodically created "la peur de 1852," instilling panic in the general French population over rebellion in the provinces. Alarmist reports sent back to Paris, describing conditions in Brittany and other provinces as revolutionary, created the Red Spectre of 1852. The established bourgeoisie of Brittany and other outlying regions was duly frightened, and began

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[13]Suzanne Berger, Peasants Against Politics (Harvard University Press, 1972), 20.

[14]Bothorel, La Bretagne contre Paris, 61.

to withdraw active support from regional affiliations, including the Association Bretonne.[15]

The reign of Louis Napoleon, who in 1852 took the title Napoleon III, marked the resurgence of an assertive, centralized government. This renewed spirit of nationalism had a dampening effect on efforts toward regional autonomy. Louis Napoleon was politically adept at securing the election of his own candidates to the post of deputy. As the election of the hand-picked delegates was the key to the building of roads, schools, and the securing ot tax rebates, the Emperor's chosen were destined to re-election. Throughout France, the universal male suffrage instituted in 1848 served to solidify a growing conservatism, and some historians would venture to say backwardness, in the provinces.[16]

The election of Louis Napoleon is often explained by a general provincial reaction to the instability of Paris in 1848. The same impulse toward conservatism continued to support the Catholic Church in Brittany. The peasantry and nobility had long been faithful to the traditions of the Church. Now the rising local middle class espoused the values of its teachings as well. As a local merchant is quoted to have said in the mid-nineteenth century: "There is only one recipe for making those who own nothing believe in property rights: that is to make them believe in God, who, by dictating

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Thoraval, Les grandes étapes, 363.

the Ten Commandments, promises eternal punishment to those who steal."[17]

Both the Church and the aggressive prefectoral corps, who under Napoleon III were described as préfets à poige, or, roughly, "crack-squad prefects," served to strengthen this conservatism.[18] Described as haughty, authoritarian, and loaded with honors by the Emperor, the departmental prefects had become more unscrupulous and more ruthless than ever.[19] Yet Brittany prospered economically in the 1850's and 1860's.

In 1851, Brittany was still overwhelmingly rural. Its three largest cities, Nantes, Brest, and Rennes accounted for less than seven percent of the province's population.[20] The province's politics were primarily conservative, ruled by a faction which historian Jack E. Reece had labeled the "clerico-aristocratic elite," describing late nineteenth century Brittany as "a deliberately peasant society, still tied to the rectory and the chateau."[21]

Strong central governments, such as that of Napoleon III, often experience a period of political dormancy. The luxury of an improving economy, such as that which France enjoyed in the mid-nineteenth

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[17] Ibid. My translation.

[18] Chapman, Prefects, 39.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Eugen Weber, Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 6.

[21] Reece, The Bretons Against France, 45.

century, also served to encourage a certain political complacency. This period, perhaps not coincidentally, also represents the era of a Romantic Renaissance of Breton folklore and native literature. Never before had the popular poets and racconteurs been so numerous or so prolific. The old Celtic songs were sung, and the old Celtic dances were danced. Breton historian Jean Markale remarks in his Histoire secrète de la Bretagne that the ignorant and despised regions tend to most successfully preserve their unique way of life.[22]

Hessart de La Villemarque (1815-1895), became the chief promoter of this Celtic renaissance in literature. In 1873 he published the Baraz Breiz, a collection of Breton folklore, complete with a codified glossary of Breton words and their derivations. The resulting work gained an appreciation, not only for Breton folklore, charm, and song, but inspired a true following of devotees to Breton literature and tradition.[23]

Brittany shares many legends with the Welsh and the Irish. A 1981 article in Folklore examines the shared myth of the "sunken city" which is a common legend in both cultures.[24] The geography of Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany encourages a certain air of mystery and belief in the unseen. All Celtic cultures have a rich heritage of "invisible people": dwarfs, trolls, gnomes, leprochauns,

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[22]Markale, Histoire secrète de la Bretagne (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), 225.

[23]Ibid.

[24]J. Doan, "Legend of the Sunken City in Welsh and Breton Tradition," Folklore, 92 (June, 1981), 77-83.

and elves who populate the lakes and forests. Magic potions, often made from a secret combination of herbs privy only to a wise old hermit, are also a recurring theme.[25]

The best known Breton literary legacy is the King Arthur legend. Much speculation surrounds this claim, as Occitania, the langue d'oc region in the south of France, a region rich in oral tradition, also claims to be the birthplace of the legend. Though the troubadours of southern France undoubtedly served as the purveyors of Moorish romances with similar themes, the King Arthur legends, as we know them, are distinctly Celtic in character. The most direct precursor is the Romance of Tristan and Iseult, an Irish legend which more accurately traces its roots to Cornwall. Proper names and place names can be pinpointed to historical figures and specific locations in Brittany as well.[26] Tristan et Iseult was first written in Breton in the eleventh century, and in French by Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth. Whatever the exact date the legend was committed to writing, it is certain that the oral tradition long preceded it.

Oral tradition prevails in Brittany, where the Forest of Paimpont is said to still be the home of the wizard Merlin. The Druid ruins of Carnac still stand ominously by the sea to the south, some extending hauntingly into a neighboring farmer's field. Garlic, mistletoe, and oak trees still have supernatural powers, according to local lore.

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[25]The hermit also plays a significant role in the original Tristan et Iseult.

[26]Markale, Histoire secrète de la Bretagne, 91. See also footnote 18, Chapter I.

Though a discussion of folklore and twelfth century legends may seem a digression in a treatment of nineteenth century Brittany, it was this very mystique and intrigue that made the province so enticing to her Romantic contemporaries. It might be noted that a recently published history of Brittany devotes two hundred of its two hundred and fifty pages to Celtic tradition, covering post-1789 Brittany in the scant remaining pages.[27] As for Breton oral tradition, this same author begins his work with a Breton phrase: Piu e zo kriv er hoalh er bed eit cherrin beg en Vretoned? Translated roughly, "Who could possibly silence the throats of the Bretons?"[28]

René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), was a noted proponent of the great Romantic literary tradition. The tenth child of a Breton nobleman, Chateaubriand was born in Saint Mâlo, on a night of a howling tempest.[29] He grew up in a grim, solitary, castle on the stormy Breton northern coast. His closest companion was his sister Lucille, frail, excessively emotional, and allegedly gifted with psychic powers. Chateaubriand, not surprisingly, had a tormented childhood and attempted suicide at least once during his adolescence. He made popular what came to be called the mal du siècle, or "sickness of the century," which described the excesses of a romantic disposition, especially as it afflicted sensitive, tormented young men in the mid-1800's. It became

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., vii. My translation.

[29] Andre Lagarde and Laurent Mechard, Les grands auteurs français du XIXe siècle (Paris: Bordas, 1969), 28.

fashionable to "confront the world with loathing and despair, to patrol lonely cliffs on stormy midnights, to be at the same time a misanthropic hermit and a volcano of passion."[30] The writings of Chateaubriand, La Vie au Château de Combourg and the autobiographical Réné, have greatly contributed to the image of Brittany as a stormy, romantic, and mysterious province.

There was such a resiliency of Breton tradition in the mid-nineteenth century that Napoleon III, on a visit to Pontivy in rural Brittany in 1858, gave his address in broken Breton! It may well have been the only era, short-lived as it was, in which Breton was actually learned by a number of cultivated and literary Frenchmen as a second language. The city fathers of Pontivy were so impressed by the Emperor's gesture that they briefly renamed the town, Napoleonville.[31] But the disastrous Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 soon dampened this "era of good feeling."

The Prussian armies surrounded Paris in January, 1871. Louis-Napoleon abdicated and the Third Republic began. Though the Bretons helped, futilely, to stave off the Prussians as they advanced on Paris, it was the poor of Paris, once again, who suffered most from the seige. Living off rats and zoo animals until they were literally starved into submission, the Parisian population had paid dearly for the glory of France. When national elections that Spring sent a majority of conservatives and monarchists to the National Assembly, traumatized

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[30] Ibid. My translation.

[31] Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 91.

Parisians exploded and proclaimed the Second Commune. The Assembly ordered the French army into Paris and brutally crushed the communards, killing 20,000. As in 1848, a radicalized Paris fought against the staid, conservative countryside.

One positive political legacy of the Third Republic was the weakened role of the prefect. No longer subject to a permanent, authoritative head of state but to frequently changing Ministers of the Interior, the prefectoral corps began to lack the continuity of purpose and spiraling prestige that it had enjoyed during the Second Empire. Aging and docile Adolphe Thiers, first president of the Third Republic, tried to instill a sense of national unity by maintaining a republic of a moderately conservative stance. This would be, he said cautiously in 1875, "the government which divides us least."[32]

Under the leadership of Jules Ferry (1879-1886) a degree of political autonomy for the provinces was granted in the direct election of mayors. On March 28, 1882, the mayors of the county seats were no longer appointed by the Ministers of the Interior but elected directly by the voters. On April 5, 1884, the municipal councils were also elected directly. The 1880's saw much improvement in the providing of social services in the provinces. Roads, bridges, and public meeting places now were better funded and better maintained. A series of laws passed between 1879 and 1886 established free, compulsory, co-educational schooling. The tax-supported state school system began to undermine the

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[32]Thoraval, Les grandes étapes, 289. My translation.

role of the parochial education, though Church-run schools continued to outnumber those of the State.[33]

Encouraging as these improvements of the late nineteenth century appear, underlying them was a growing effort on the part of the state administration to nationalize, consolidate, and downplay regional differences. Perhaps more important, though less tangible, was the general public's growing distaste for the seeming backwardness of Brittany. What had been heralded a little more than a generation earlier as romantic, mystical, and captivating now was chided as ignorant, slovenly, and repugnant. One explanation for this sudden change of mind was that it was no longer the erudite who was interested in Brittany, but the middle-class tourist. The rugged beaches and untamed forests of Brittany were "discovered" by the French en masse, it seemed, in the 1890's. Void of literary or historical appreciation of the Celtic race, much misunderstanding, indeed, true maliciousness, was directed toward the Breton race. One minor example is a song still sung, though not by Bretons, titled "Ils portent des chapeaux ronds, vive les Bretons!" The phrase roughly translated is "Long live the round-capped Bretons." The traditional Breton cap has never been round, but the adjective in French conveniently rhymes with the second syllable of Breton, as do the vulgar references of the ensuing verses.[34]

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[33]Jacques Godechot, La contre-révolution: doctrine et action, 1789-1904 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 281.

[34]Personal observation, Rennes, Brittany, June, 1973.

Adding injury to insult, the 1890's was a decade of economic hardship and agricultural decline. The farm economy in Brittany was still very much a small family operation. Plots of land were scattered piecemeal, a legacy of seigneural allotments. Records show that in 1882 the département of Finistere was divided into more than 1,500,000 enclosed pastures. The average size of each parcel was less than an acre.[35] By 1900 the once touted Nantes-Brest canal had fallen into neglect and disrepair. The ensuing poverty evidently proved unsightly to the vacationing Parisians, and the expression "sales Bretons," or "dirty Bretons," became a euphemism.[36] Even harsher expressions were heard, such as "the potatoes are for the pigs, the peels are for the Bretons."[37]

In 1898 the Union Régionaliste Bretonne (URB) was founded by an aging aristocrat, the Marquis Regis de l'Estourbeillon of Vannes. The URB was conservative, pro-Catholic, and isolationist.[38] It served to consolidate a growing anti-Parisian sentiment in the province. Its membership comprised a growing number of the new middle class, who was rapidly replacing both the peasant and the nobility as the force behind the Breton autonomy movement. The agenda for these newly prospering Bretons, among whom numbered many landholders, merchants, and a growing professional class, was to maintain a stable mercantile economy, while preserving a degree of economic autonomy from Paris. Efforts to

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[35]Berger, Peasants, 17.

[36]Personal observation, Rennes, Brittany, June, 1973.

[37]Markale, Histoire, 229. My translation.

[38]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 127.

preserve a measure of cultural autonomy followed, especially as the late nineteenth century professed a renewed sense of nationalism, and the French State subsequently consolidated its efforts to discourage regional expression.[39]

The growing alienation of Brittany from the rest of France was perhaps a necessary backdrop for the more forceful autonomist efforts of the early twentieth century. Successive anti-regionalist legislation at the turn of the century helped to consolidate Breton resistance. A decree of July 1, 1901, designed to consolidate central control in the Third Republic, prohibited all Breton associations from official existence. The newly reformed Association Bretonne was again forced underground.[40] On September 29, 1902, a law passed by the National Assembly prohibited the use of Breton at Mass in Breton churches. Said the Minister of the Interior, Emile Combes, in ratifying this law: "Bretons will be republicans only when they speak French."[41] Official separation of Church and State was solidified in France by a decree of December 12, 1905.[42] This law served only to recruit the Church in Brittany into the growing Breton movement, since many of the local curés spoke only broken French.

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[39] Ibid., 157.

[40] Bothorel, La Bretagne contre Paris (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1969), 87.

[41] Berger, Peasants, 72.

[42] Ibid., 49.

The Breton Church schools also represented a continued resistance to the state school system. In the fossilized Breton village of the early twentieth century, the first person to represent social progress was the school master. Often anti-clerical and left-wing politically, he tended to identify progress with all things French and regression with all that were Breton. Gone was the former romantic appreciation for the "Breton mystique." The Minister of Public Instruction expressed this growing hostility when he declared in 1910 that:

> Federalism and superstition speak Breton; fanaticism speaks Basque. We must shatter these instruments of damage and error. . . . It is not our obligation to preserve the barbaric jargon and grotesque idioms which only serve to spread reactionary fanatics.[43]

The parallel between the Basque and Breton separatists, though certainly the topic of a separate discussion, is a useful comparison. Both provinces are of a distinct stock of people who speak a distinct language, not just a dialect as is spoken in Provence or Alsace. Both regions were brought quite late into the French State. The Basques even found themselves at war with France after its annexation in the efforts of Louis IX and Pope Innocent III to purge the region of the Cathar heresy. Both provinces have periodically exerted autonomist activities well into the twentieth century. And both regions are predominantly rural. Even the contemporary protests speak to farm issues such as the milk wars in Brittany in 1972 and the wine boycott in the Basque country in 1975. The 1912 slogan: "Unir tous ceux que la terre

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[43]Markale, Histoire, 232. My translation.

fait vivre," or "Unite all those who live off the land," would serve as a timeless rallying call of opposition to Paris.[44]

Breton nationalism was further evidenced by the founding of the Parti Nationaliste Breton (PNB), in 1911.[45] This society formed in response to the previously mentioned statue of a supplicant Anne of Brittany, which was presented by the French government to the city of Rennes to commemorate the four hundred year anniversary of Brittany's annexation. The PNB regularly invoked the 1532 Treaty of Plessex and and published its own manifesto which cited a litany of transgressions which it claimed the central government had committed against Brittany's regional integrity. It was the first autonomist group to claim a majority of professionals, including lawyers and university professors, among its membership.[46]

A number of regionalist publications began circulating in the pre-war years. The PNB published Breiz Dishual (Breton for "Free Brittany"), the most radical in that all the text was written in Breton, not French, and so enlivened the debate over the significance of a Breton nationalist's ability to speak his ancestral tongue.[47] A faction which believed fluency in Breton was not essential to the Breton cause published, in

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[44] Ibid., 165.

[45] David H. Fortier, "Brittany: Breiz Atao," Nations Without A State, Charles R. Foster, ed. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1981), 144.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

French, Brittia, which stressed the Celtic heritage and proud history of the Breton race.[48] A third publication, Brug ("Heather"), was the first Breton review with an openly socialist political stance.[49] The circulation of all three periodicals was less than five hundred, and all ended abruptly with the outbreak of World War I.[50]

Brittany did rally for the nationalist effort to defend all of France in the First World War. Like the rest of the nation, she lost many of her brightest and best in the Great War, the "War to End All Wars." Though contested, Breton historians have claimed that the proportion of Breton soldiers killed in World War I was much higher than any other French population. Much like the claim that some American minorities made during the Vietnam War, Bretons claim that they were assigned the front lines at a disproportionate rate. Brittany did suffer a high mortality rate in the war: twelve percent of all Bretons mobilized.[51]

In 1919 a declaration presented by the Breton bishopric re-invoked the Treaty of 1532 which declared that Bretons were not obliged to serve in a military capacity outside their own borders.[52] The URB, still under the leadership of the Marquis d'Estourbeillon, sent an appeal to Woodrow Wilson in 1919, pleading for the then forming League of Nations

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[48]Markale, Histoire secrète, 116.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 187.

[52]Markale, Histoire secrète, 231.

to recognize Breton autonomy. The plea was politely acknowledged in a letter sent to Estourbeillon by Wilson, but no further reference to Brittany was every made by the international organization.[53]

The French government was not particularly receptive to such gestures toward its western extreme, when the country was just recovering from the atrocities of trench warfare that had afflicted its eastern border with Germany. The ominous world picture and ensuing economic depression encouraged centralized authority, and it came in the person of Georges Clemenceau. As Minister of the Interior during World War I, Clemenceau made use of the Prefectoral Corps to serve as implementors of his own policies. Departmental prefects intervened in many fields of social and economic life, including price-fixing, and often unscrupulous invasions of privacy.[54]

Immediately after the war, intellectual and political commitment to self-determination in Brittany was at an all-time high. Publication of a highly articulate and prophetic journal, the Breiz Atao ("Brittany Above All"), began in 1918. Read today, the early copies of Breiz Atao are prophetic in their anticipation of future political stands, professing the desirability of federal Europe with greater freedom for minorities under its aegis. For example, one issue warned of "the threat to the working class of ever enlarging industrial trusts acting

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[53]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 202.

[54]Michel Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les régions (Paris: Colmann-Levy, 1967), 22.

in collusion with a centralized nation-state."[55] The sponsoring organization of Breiz Atao was the Parti National Breton.

Originally calling itself the Groupe Regionaliste Breton (GRB), this group was founded in 1919 by two teenagers: Maurice Marchal, then aged eighteen, and Olivier Mordrel, then aged fourteen. A third member made up the original leadership of the GRB, Franche Debauvais, an avowed separatist who professed his admiration for the Irish independence movement, and who had witnessed the bloody protest in Dublin of Easter Week, 1916.[56] All three leaders, though passionately Breton nationalists, were predominantly French-speaking. This left open to debate, once again, what linguistic stance the Breton autonomy movement should uphold. A new vocabulary punctuated their regionalist discussions: Bretonnants, referring to Breton-speaking natives, and Gallos, francophones who nevertheless professed Breton autonomy.[57] Marchal, a Gallo, addressed the profound marginality felt by those French-speaking Bretons who lived in the eastern section of the province (closer to Paris), and who felt more threatened by Parisian encroachment, be it economic, cultural, or political, than did their fellow Bretons in the more remote department of Finistere.[58]

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[55]Olivier Mordrel, Briez Atao ou Histoire et actualite du nationalisme breton (Paris: Editions Atair Moreau, 1973), 22.

[56]A detailed account of the Dublin protest is William Irwin Thomas' The Imagination of an Insurrection (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[57]Reece, Bretons Against France, 92.

[58]Ibid., 93.

By 1921 there were five hundred regular subscribers to Breiz Atao.[59] The GRB was rapidly alienating the less politically radical regionalist groups. The Blen-Brug, whose founder was the much respected Abbé Perrot, a cleric who was to be martyred for his regionalist beliefs near the end of World War II, was regularly chided by the GRB leadership as being a "merchant of gallicization."[60] The rhetoric of Marchal, Mordrel, and Debauvais became progressively more radical, as they accused all Bretons not wholly committed to their cause as being "half French in blood, values, and conduct."[61] In 1925 an editorial in the Breiz Atao called for an immigration of true Celtic blood from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales to bolster the wavering Breton population.[62] In keeping with its historical emphasis, the GRB tended to stress the historical impetus for Celtic solidarity, whereas other organizations preferred to consolidate around the Breton language. A separate publication satisfied this second impulse, by issuing a quarterly journal, in Breton, called Gwalarn ("Northwesterner"). Devoted to Breton literature, this publication outlived Breiz Atao, lasting nearly twenty-five years, until its last issue in 1944.[63]

In 1928 Maurice Duhamel, a renowned French music critic, lent his name to the regionalist cause. He voiced his consternation over what

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[59] Ibid., 96.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 97.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 98.

he perceived as the French government's gross mishandling of the Alsace autonomy movement. Convinced that the budding separatist movement in Alsace would serve as a rallying point of solidarity for other such regional efforts, Duhamel, Mordrel, and Marchal made a symbolic show of support by attending the trial of the Alsacian separatist leaders.[64] In August of that year the group changed its name to the Parti Autonomiste Breton (PAB). And on August 17, the Alsacian leadership was found guilty of sedition and alleged acceptance of German subsidies.[65] By association, the Breton movement also came under the close scrutiny of the French Government. By 1929 the sale of Breiz Atao was prohibited in French train stations and army barracks.[66]

Ironically, the man who convinced the Breton leadership to align itself with the Alsacian crusade himself resigned the PAB a few months later. Accused of holding the cause of "international federalism" above that of Brittany, the Duhamel resignation sparked yet another debate within the Breton leadership: Was a federalist stance, which supported the regional integrity of a variety of ethnic groups, ineffective in its ability to champion the Breton cause?[67] The debate was cut short by the international financial crisis of 1929. Both Mordrel and Debauvais resigned from the PAB in April, 1930. The 1930's

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[64]Fortier, "Brittany: Breiz Atao," Nations Without A State, 145.

[65]Ibid., 146.

[66]Reece, Bretons Against France, 108.

[67]Markale, Histoire, 234.

would see a period of frustration and tumult which left some of the more radical elements of Breton activists open to flirtation with Nazi Germany. On the other hand, the French Communists never made more of a showing in Brittany than the limited industry within the province could support. Union membership was generally low in Brittany until after World War II, and there was not a highly visible Communist presence.[68]

In 1932 a radical element of the former PNB formed the Gwenn Ha Du, Breton for "Black and White," the colors of the Breton flag. It was the Gwenn Ha Du, that, under the leadership of the extremist Celestin Lainé, spearheaded some of the more colorful protest movements of the 1930's. Gwenn Ha Du claimed credit for the derailing of Parisian dignitaries on their way to Breton rallies. Youthful members of the Gwenn Ha Du had been responsible, a decade earlier, for toppling the statue of Anne of Brittany paying homage to Louis XII of France. But Celestin Lainé grew to be a bit too extreme for his own political survival. His campaign to bring a return to the ancient practices of the Druids, and, later, charges of collaboration with Nazi Germany, led to his exile to Ireland in 1943.[69]

A less menacing association, yet just as subversive in the eyes of Parisian officials, was the Emgleo Belein Breizh (1911-1958), a Breton support group whose spokespersons were the local Catholic priests.[70] A branch of the so-called progressive wing of the Church, the main

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[68]Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les regions, 92.

[69]Markale, Histoire secrète, 234.

[70]Bothorel, La Bretagne, 89.

cause célèbre of this overwhelmingly rural constituency was to allow, educate, and encourage the use of the Breton language in and throughout the region. The priests also championed the plight of the region's unemployed, as unemployment was at crisis levels.[71]

Economic depression and political instability contributed to a renewed activism in Brittany. Growing political activism was the legacy of economic instability in much of western Europe in the 1930's. The 1940's would see dramatic, though ill-conceived efforts toward Breton secession in the volatile turmoil of World War II. The 1950's would foster a positive, though not always successful, program of government-sponsored alternatives to the overly centralized Parisian administration.

The Breton cultural revival of the mid-nineteenth century was short-lived. It soon disappeared and revealed a hard core of abuse and exploitation by a zealous prefectoral corps that spanned the reign of Napoleon III, relieved somewhat during the Second Republic, but reasserted itself during World War I. A brief renaissance of the literature and folk legends of Brittany began in the mid-nineteenth century, reaching its peak with the writings of the Bretons Villemarqué and Chateaubriand. But the lore of Brittany became the target of scorn and repulsion to the Parisian vacationers by the end of the century.

The early twentieth century saw distinctly increased activism in Brittany. Movements to restore the Breton language to the schools and churches met with forceful opposition, however, by the French state.

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[71] Ibid.

World War I and the subsequent economic depression served to further consolidate Breton resistance efforts, making the 1920's and 1930's very significant decades in the history of Breton autonomy. A second World War was to thwart the focus of Breton concerns, however, ushering in the most controversial period of Breton autonomist efforts: Breton collaboration with Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER FOUR

Political Extremism and Economic Reform: 1932-1967

Braced by a dire economic situation, and bolstered by the renewed efforts of the Parti National Breton (PNB), and the Emglio Belein Breizh, Breton activism took a bold, and what history would later judge reckless, turn on the eve of World War II. Two extremists were at the head: Franche Debeauvais and Olivier Mordrel. The latter has already been cited in this treatment as the author of a comprehensive history of the Breiz Atao movement. He also wrote, in 1937, L'Essence de la Bretagne, or "The Essence of Brittany." This essay reveals the bitterness and defiance these Breton extremists felt about contributing to the French war effort.

Mordrel asserted that the history of Brittany was alive, and objected to the quaint depiction of the Breton story as told by the museum guides. He charged: "They've made Brittany a mannequin with no brain. They've killed her saints, and replaced them with ones no one recognizes, just as they had done in Scotland and Wales."[1]

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[1]Olivier Mordrel, L'Essence de la Bretagne (Finistere: Kelenn, 1977), 66.

Breiz Atao publications, many of them on file in the National Archives, reveal this same disenchantment with France. Even the earliest issues expressed a growing resentment of Parisian authority. The Paris government, one issue stated, "has not respected our soil, our language, and our traditions." The tone grew more hostile as a following issue charged that Bretons "were confronted by a moral struggle to the death between two races and two civilizations: Latins against Celts."[2] A 1938 publication charged that "Bretons were once free; now they are the slaves of France."[3] A publication a year later encouraged Breton youth to resist the draft, with lyrics to a song that asked what possible motivation could they have to supply hated France with soldiers?[4]

Mordrel and Debauvais saw, in the French-German conflict, a chance for Brittany to take advantage of a weakened French State. Breton historians are apologetic for the naivete of these aspirations toward Breton autonomy under Nazi-controlled France. And one Breton author even insists that he still hears frustration and regret expressed over the lost opportunity to be free of the French administrative stranglehold, and the belief that Brittany should have tried its luck under the Nazi regime.[5] Mordrel, Debauvais, and Celestin Laine all went into exile

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[2]Jack E. Reece, The Bretons Against France (Chapel Hill: University Press, 1977), 92.

[3]Breiz Atao, February 9, 1928, Archives Nationales de France, file F7 13244.

[4]Ibid., March 28, 1939.

[5]Jean Markale, Histoire secrete de la Bretagne (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1977), 233.

in Ireland and Wales in the middle of World War II, as the French Resistance gained in strength.[6]

A more dramatic, though less substantiated, accusation was the collaboration of the Breton Church with Nazi Germany during World War II. It became known as l'Affaire de l'abbé Perrot. Jean-Marie Perrot was one of the founders of the Bleun-Brug, a long-established Catholic cultural society in Brittany that had no affiliation whatsoever with the Nazi Party. The society was admittedly right-wing in its membership, as were most Breton organizations since 1789. Abbe Perrot was outspoken in his abhorrence of the war. His lack of enthusiasm for the French war effort was evidently interpreted by some as collaboration. As a consequence, he was shot and killed by a militant Communist member of the Resistance on December 12, 1943.[7]

Meanwhile, the 1930's was a particularly active period for Breton activists. The statue of the supplicant Anne of Brittany in front of the municipal building in Rennes was bombed for a second time on August 7, 1932. Debauvais and several other former PNB members were arrested. On November 20, the train of the visiting French Premier, Edouard Herriot, was derailed. The Gwenn Ha Du claimed responsibility. The Gwenn Ha Du marks the second time that the Breton autonomist movement can be linked directly to the Irish nationalists. Its director,

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[6]Yannick Guin, L'Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Francais Maspero, 1977), 221.

[7]Ibid., 219.

Celestin Lainé, modeled the organization on the Irish Senn Fein, whose secret society he had admired during his visits to Ireland.[8]

By 1933 the most extreme elements of the Breton nationalist movement were strikingly similar to the patterns of Nazi Germany. Breton youth clubs were created to foster a "nativist versus foreigner" dichotomy. Mordrel published an editorial in which he urged amnesty for the Germans in World War I, and a cancellation of all German reparation payments.[9]

On Easter of 1936, the Gwenn Ha Du claimed responsibility for the bombing of prefecture offices in Nantes, Rennes, Quimper, and Saint-Brieuc. While the PNB denounced these acts, others in the politically extremist factions of Breton nationalism, including Celestin Lainé, were growing more and more vocal in their support for a potential Nazi collaboration. Lainé organized a paramilitary patrol in Finistere which took the name of Services Spéciales, and even donned the symbol of the swastika. Lainé was cited for sedition and jailed in May of 1938, but released the following year.[10] Debauvais and Mordrel were also arrested, and subsequently fled to Belgium days before the Nazi-Soviet pact was revealed. Ironically, the freed extremist Celestin Lainé was again at the helm of the Breton PNB on the brink of World War II.[11]

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[8] Ibid., 210.

[9] Reece, The Bretons Against France, 135.

[10] Ibid., 145-47.

[11] Ibid., 147.

Paris prohibited any further meetings of the PNB and ruled on an indefinite suspension of the Breiz Atao publication. In February, 1940, Mordrel and Debauvais fled to Berlin and were sentenced, in absentia, to five years in prison on charges of insubordination in time of war. Meanwhile, most of Brittany was mobilizing for the war effort, sending more men to the Front than any other region. Once again, Brittany lost the largest proportion of men mobilized.[12]

Lainé was sentenced to five years in prison in February, 1940, but was released in 1943 and returned to his native Finistere. Incredibly, he continued to conduct paramilitary training for Breton youth. Already by 1942, however, there was a considerable scramble among the more moderate Breton activists to form alternative regional organizations which would not be linked to the Nazi effort as was Lainé's PNB. Most of these eleventh hour efforts did little good. By 1943 a number of the editors of even the purely literary quarterlies, if published in Breton, were killed by angry mobs of resisters. There were fifteen such deaths recorded in 1943.[13] At the end of that year, the Abbé Perrot, respected founder of the leading Catholic Breton society, was murdered by a young resistant. Lainé formed the Bezenn Perrot ("Perrot Society") in the dead priest's honor, and tightened his collaboration with Nazi Germany.[14]

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[12]Guin, L'histoire de la Bretagne, 246.

[13]David H. Fortier, "Brittany: 'Breiz Atao,'" Nations Without A State, Charles R. Foster, ed. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1980), 146.

[14]Ibid.

Meanwhile Debauvais, who had fled to Alsace in 1943, died there the following year. Mordrel, charged with treason by the French government after the Liberation, was sentenced to death. He went into exile in South America and remained there for twenty years. He returned to Brittany in the late 1960's, and wrote a revised edition of his 1937 L'Essence de la Bretagne, claiming very little had changed for the better in the past forty years in Brittany.[15] In the summer of 1944 at least thirty nationalists were tried and executed in Brittany. Hundreds of others fled to Germany, Ireland, and the United States, or joined Mordrel in South America.[16]

Though most of the membership of the Bezenn Perrot was granted amnesty after the war, some were killed by jubilant members of the Resistance during Liberation celebrations. Many fled to Ireland. Celestin Laine, now dying of tuberculosis, died in Alsace, en route to a sad reunion with fellow Nazi sympathizers.[17]

Very few Bretons were registered members of the Bezenn Perrot. The overwhelming majority had no collaborator leanings; indeed, most Bretons concerted their efforts to negate the province's reputation as a Nazi stronghold and contributed the highest per capita percentage of fighting men to the French war effort. One out of four Breton men

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[15]Mordrel, L'Essence de la Bretagne, 65.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., 238.

were lost in the war, as compared to the national average of one out of eight.[18]

Yet the image of Brittany as soft on Nazis has persisted. After the War, it was sufficient cause for arrest and investigation if one possessed any literature written in Breton. Even the present-day symbol of Brittany, a black and white circle with the insignia BZH, abbreviation for Breizh, the Breton word for Brittany, underwent scrutiny to determine that it was not a coded reference to seditious activities.[19]

The immediate post World War II years were, consequently, far more subdued in regard to regional reform. The few clubs that met in the late 1940's were not vehicles of autonomy, but rather, cultural clubs, bent on preserving the Breton dances and songs of their Celtic tradition. Such cercles celtiques were not new. The first Inter-Celtic Congress, a federation of devotees from Wales, Ireland, Brittany, and Scotland, had met in Saint-Brieuc, Brittany, in 1867. Though autonomy might have been discussed informally among the members, the expressed intention of the associations was to preserve and practice Celtic traditions within one's respective country.[20]

In terms of music and dance, such organizations were very successful. The Vichy government had complied with the more moderate efforts

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[18]Bothorel, La Bretagne Contre Paris (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1969), 121.

[19]Markale, Histoire secrete de la Bretagne, 235-36.

[20]Renaud Dulong, La question bretonne (Paris: Fondation Nationale des sciences politiques, 1975), 25.

toward regional preservation. It created, on October 12, 1942, a Comité Consultatif de Bretagne. Its list of moderate proposals included the teaching of Breton history in the Breton schools, and the lifting of the prohibition against instruction in the Breton language. Its president, Yann de Guebriant, was arrested after the war on charges of collaboration and went into exile.[21]

Historian Jack E. Reece claims that from 1944 to 1947, a concerted effort was made by the French government to purge Brittany once and for all of its nationalist sympathizers. The extent of this government effort will not be known until the documents of the period are made public.[22]

The prefectoral system was undermined by the turmoil and suspicion of authority which characterized the Vichy regime. Though the prefects had been given extraordinary powers, such as administering rations, orchestrating evacuation if necessary, and all powers necessary to maintain public order, their unquestioned authority came to an abrupt halt after the Liberation. All Vichy prefects were replaced, leaving an enormous administrative vacuum to contend with the post-war economic depression.[23]

Quietly and behind-the-scenes, a regional reform movement in Brittany did get underway. Begun in 1949, and still active today, the

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Jack E. Reece, The Bretons Against France, 171.

[23] Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 376.

Comité d'Étude et de Liaison des Interêts Bretons (CELIB), or "Committee to Study Breton Interests," was the first of its kind. Its founder was Joseph Martray, editor of a post World War II quarterly called Le Peuple Breton. Martray determined that Brittany's ills were primarily economic. Anticipating the tenets of the "periphery theory" of economic development, Martray organized a meeting of influential Breton businessmen and economic theorists.[24] Its tone was apolitical. The CELIB was actually a think tank, composed of professors of economics, geography, and political science. Its first president, René Plevon, an astute organizer who also served as the liaison to Paris, held office from 1949 to 1972. The intentions of the CELIB were to respond to the unaddressed, yet vital, needs of post-war Brittany.[25]

Though Brittany did not suffer the devastation of Alsace-Lorraine or of parts of her neighbor to the north, Normandy, both Nantes and Brest were bombed in the fighting. Overall, however, the trouble with Brittany after the war was a generalized low esteem, a stymied economy, and an increasing likelihood of being left out of State sponsored rejuvenation programs. The CELIB is to be credited for its early anticipation of such problems and its clearness of purpose in addressing them.

According to its own publication, a yearly review of its programs and perceived areas of concern, the CELIB supported the following measures in the 1950's:

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[24]The term was widely used after the publication of Sidney Tarrow's Between Center and Periphery: Grassroots Politicians in Italy and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[25]Ibid., 93.

1) a viable and stable economic base in the province
2) a growing political assertiveness on the part of Breton interest groups
3) the preservation of the Breton language and other manifestations of its culture
4) increased responsiveness on the part of the Parisian bureaucracy to these expressed needs[26]

Because other groups such as the cercles celtiques had championed the third cause listed, the following discussion of the CELIB will limit itself to the group's commitment to the three new areas of concern.

In 1952, the CELIB developed the First Breton Plan, a regional reform program which was the first of its kind in France. It devoted itself to a ten-year effort to restore a vibrant, more self-sustaining economy to post-war Brittany. Its primary goal was to decentralize industry in France in order to allow the provinces as a whole--and of course, Brittany in particular--to benefit from the job market and local investment that regional industry would provide. In a 1953 report entitled Rapport d'ensemble sur un plan d'amenagement de modernisation et d'équipement de la Bretagne, optimistic projections were made concerning Brittany's economic potential.[27]

France prospered in the 1950's. Regionalists initially found a source of encouragement in the coming to power of Charles De Gaulle in 1958.[28] He claimed, in his appeal to the grandeur and uniqueness of

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[26]Comité d'étude et de liaison des interêts bretons (Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 1971), 12.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Michel Phlipponneau, Le Problème breton et la programme d'action régionale (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1957), 22.

France, to be the protector of her diverse and endangered heritage. But it soon became apparent that there was little to back up his eloquence. Breton disillusionment with his campaign promises came to a head in 1961, with typical Breton flair for the public humiliating of Parisian envoys, in the town of Quimper, in the highly region-conscious department of Finistere. The conflict between De Gaulle and the regionalists became so impassioned that government security staff were ordered to stifle the microphones.[29]

Not content with the slow pace of advances made by the CELIB, several splinter groups formed in an effort to appeal to the less patient. The first was the Mouvement pour l'Organisation de la Bretagne, or (MOB). It was established in 1956 by Yann Fouere, an aging Breton activist and former PNB member who came out of a self-imposed exile to found the organization. Its key issue was a return of the right to speak Breton in the schools and churches, which in the 1950's was still prohibited by an early twentieth century law.[30]

The late 1950's and early 1960's were active years for Breton regional reform. A decree of December, 1958, sponsored by Pierre Mendes-France, Socialist opposition candidate to Charles De Gaulle and a politician with considerable national renown, provided for a return to the regional boundaries of the ancien provinces. This redefinition of the provincial map of France would consolidate the ninety-six départments to the sixteen original régions. The peninsula of Brittany would

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[29]Ibid.

[30]Markale, Histoire secrete, 231.

thus be simply la Bretagne, rather than the five départments into which Napoleon had sliced it in 1800. This piece of legislation, however, underwent many modifications. In January, 1959, the law was amended to retain the administrative unit of département, as previously established, but to acknowledge as well the political entity of the region. The law underwent further revisions, in June, 1960; in March, 1964; in July, 1972; and again in March, 1982. Such revisions were necessary as a means of updating French territorial losses, in Algeria, Catalonia, and elsewhere.[31]

The present count of French administrative units numbers, from the smallest to the largest, 3,530 cantons, 320 arrondissements, ninety-six départments, and twenty-two regions.[32] There is no precise equivalent in the United States system of government to this French pyramid of command. It has come to be known, spitefully, as la tutelle. La tutelle, meaning literally "harness," is a bureaucratic quagmire of decision-making, rendering precise actions in response to precise regional needs nearly impossible. The system has been termed a "maladjustment which is technical, financial, geographical, and administrative."[33]

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[31] Nations Without A State, Charles R. Foster, editor.

[32] Jacque Legroye and Vincent Wright, eds., Local Government in Britain and France: Problems and Prospects, text from a meeting of the Institut d'études politiques in Bordeaux in May, 1975 and in Paris, 1977.

[33] J. C. Thoenig, "Local Government Institutions and Contemporary Evolution of French Society," Local Government in Britain and France, 76.

The CELIB hastily set up a series of committees in the mid-1950's to contend with this frustrated chain of communication. The first was the Commission Regionale d'Expansion Economique (CREE), which, in 1954, began its initial inquiries into the realm of "economic geography." This committee still exists; its current president is Michel Phlipponneau. In its thirty-year history this organization has tackled a variety of fascinating, and, some might say, unrealistic proposals. Among these have been the support for a united European community, funded by a single European currency. An early subcommittee, therefore, had the heady title of Inspecteurs Generaux de l'Administration en mission Extraordinaire. By 1959, a series of land-use plans, only pertinent to Brittany, made CREE's program more realistic.[34]

On January 7, 1959 and on June 2, 1960, a Conscription d'Action Régionale (CAR) laid out specific land-use plans. The CAR was the first official attempt by Breton natives to determine to what use their land, cultivated or not, was subjected. One specific industry in the late 1950's and early 1960's will serve to illustrate the specific tasks to which the regional economic committees were committed. From 1959 to 1962, an overproduction of Breton artichokes glutted the market. This development caused prices to plummet, growers to suffer, and, subsequently, led producers to organize as a political constituency. Support came from a somewhat unexpected source: the intellectual elite of the university set in Paris, who helped promote an artichoke boycott among

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[34]Michel Phlipponneau, Décentralisation et régionalisation: la grande affair (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1981).

its like-minded, liberal, urban friends. The "artichoke affair" of the early 1960's was underway. In June of 1961 it came to a climax, when on June 7 of that year 10,000 farmers gathered in the tiny town of Morlaix, Brittany.[35] The organizers were mostly young farmers and factory workers. They set afire surplus piles of artichokes and potatoes, cut telephone wires, overturned vehicles and set up roadblocks. Their arrest by the French government sparked even more street violence in the rural communities.[36] The politics of radical economic protest had begun.

The French Poujade movement, named after Pierre Poujade, a right-wing tax protester from the small town of St. Cere, in the south of France, began in 1953. Though this party received no more proportional support in Brittany than it did in other rural regions of France, the Poujadistes issue of excessive government control and high taxation struck a responsive chord in Brittany. A growing cause célèbre became the "little man," the factory worker or farmer who felt the new prosperity of the 1950's was passing him by.

In August, 1961, the Second Breton Plan was proposed. Again, the CREE was at the helm. It continued to present its plans for economic diversification and other, somewhat idealistic visions of an economically cooperative Europe. Meanwhile, splinter groups formed to deal with the more immediate economic crisis. The most active group in the 1960's was the youth of Brittany. Two organizations sprang up in 1961 to

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[35] Thoenig, "Local Government Institutions," 77.

[36] Ibid.

address the growing concerns of young Breton farmers, the Centre National des Jeunes Agriculteurs ("National Center of Young Farmers") and the Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne ("Young Christian Farmers"). The parent organization, the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles, or "National Federation of Exploited Farmers," took a broader view on many farm-related issues of the so-called prosperous 1960's.[37]

Concrete reforms began as early as March, 1964, through the government-sponsored CAR. It created the post of regional prefect, to coordinate the administrative tasks of the departmental prefects under his jurisdiction, and to serve as a liaison between the region and the State. Economic planning was the main thrust of the regional reform in the mid-1960's though there was not always agreement on what form this should take. It was, however, a unanimously held contention that local decision making was far too dependent on the bureaucratic paper-shuffling in faraway Paris.[38]

Much has been written on the French propensity to defer to authority figures. Alain Peyrefitte, political analyst and cabinet member under President Giscard d'Estaing, first described the phenomenon as a sickness in Le Mal français, which was translated into English as The Trouble With France.[39] A nearly identical thesis is presented in

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[37] Ibid., 78.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Alain Peyrefitte, Le mal français (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1979).

Michael Crozier's La Sociétée bloquée, or The Clogged Society.[40] Both works address the ill-effects of overcentralization in French society. In the hierarchical structure which governs the administrative pyramid, the smallest of regional concerns needs to be investigated, analyzed, and ratified by a Parisian authority. The resulting delay in response, often accompanied by a glaring misinterpretation of the problem at hand, has lead to extreme frustration on the part of the local citizenry.

Of course, post-war France was in need of a certain degree of centralization. The rise to power of Charles De Gaulle resulted in a great consolidation of political authority. His discourse at Bayeux, Normandy, in 1946 stressed the essential requirement of a centralization of power in order for France to survive.[41] De Gaulle's return in 1958 to establish the Fifth Republic was amidst circumstances which similarly called for a consolidation of power. A regime brought in to forestall a military coup is hardly likely to disperse authority.

A brief breakdown of what constitutes a Rightist from a Leftist stance in French politics is perhaps in order. Following the conventional political presumptions, it would be expected that the Right would favor a restoration of power to the provinces. The implication would be that the localities would be freer of government control, unregulated in economic and social practices, and the powerful local elites could presumably pick up where they had left off under the Ancien Regime.

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[40]Michael Crozier, La Société bloquée (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1977).

[41]Dmitri-Georges Lavroff, Le Système politique français de la Ve République (Paris: Dalloz, 1982), 33.

The Left, it would follow, would champion centralization. In true Jacobin spirit, leftists should associate regionalism with a reactionary return to the exploitation of the peasantry by a local elite. Ironically, however, the major push for decentralization in the last generation has come from the Left. There seemed to be an awakened consciousness that "respect for the masses" also meant respecting their differences.

In 1961, René Plevon, still acting president of the CELIB wrote his L'Avenir de la Bretagne.[42] He postulated the need for Breton autonomy on a regional level, while, at the same time, there was a need for vast consolidation on the communal level. Such needs as local hospitalization and school districting were often undermined by the gargantuan amount of paper work required to propel a proposal from its place of origin to the decision-makers in Paris. Compounding the problem was the existence of 36,341 administrative units, whose proposals were treated as distinct and separate from one another. If a small community wanted to combine resources with a neighboring town to build an area hospital, the proposal had to be considered as two separate applications.[43] The consolidation of funding and services often got lost in the bureaucratic shuffle, making such attempts at combined projects prove both frustrating and futile.

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[42]René Plevon, L'Avenir de la Bretagne (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1961), 39.

[43]Ibid., 51.

Lawrence Wylie's A Village in the Vaucluse, though treating another rural area of France, describes very clearly the problematic political dynamic that besets Brittany as well.[44] A disdain for anything that smacks of political maneuvering basically characterized the post-war French attitude. An individual's ability to "get around" administrative requirements and defy bureaucratic channels, sometimes even when such detours were blatantly illegal, was rarely looked at askance and often commended by the community as a whole. It is fondly referred to as the "systeme 'D'," defined as the laudable effort on the part of every red-blooded Frenchman to bypass the system. Though such noncompliance may have well served the individual, it often presented an obstacle to community efforts, such as road improvement, school consolidation, and hospital extension services.[45]

In many ways Brittany is much like the rest of France: complacent until the crisis is at one's own front step. The United States had an expression to describe the shaky economic situation of the end of the Carter administration: "If your neighbor is out of work," so the maxim stated, "the country is in a recession. If you are out of work, the country is in a depression, a deep one, and one that should have been prevented." The French also have this "Sauve Qui Peut," or "Everyone for Himself" outlook, except in the case of blatant regional

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[44]Lawrence Wylie, A Village in the Vaucluse (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[45]Ibid., 208.

discrimination, in which case the cultural homogeneity of Brittany has served as an asset to concerted group action.[46]

Despite the cultural cohesiveness of the Breton people, Brittany as a whole has not, by any means, acted in political unison. The diverse interpretation voiced within the CELIB attests to the fact that there were vast differences in understanding what constituted a sound economic plan for Brittany. René Plevon, a technocrat and graduate of the prestigious ENARC school of technology and finance, championed the goal of economic modernization of Brittany. In his CELIB-sponsored Second Breton Plan, he supported the recruiting of new and varied industries to relocate in Brittany. Michel Phlipponneau, the University of Rennes professor who was co-chair of the CELIB into the mid-1960's, resigned his post in 1966 to protest what he considered the committee's blind courtship of big industry. His scope was wider, and perhaps unrealizable, encompassing a mutually supportive European economic community.[47] Unlike the Common Market, the economic pulse of this community would not merely be protective of national interests, but be responsive to regional needs of aspirations within the respective member nations.

The economic planning of the CELIB championed the cause of increased industrialization in Brittany. By the mid-1960's Brittany did succeed in attracting a few very large national companies to open

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Michel Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les Régions (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967).

branches in the province. The two largest were the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes, maker of the fuselage parts for the French and British Concorde, and the Citroen factory in Rennes. Though both industries brought immediate jobs and revenue to the area, the workforce was not completely enchanted by its treatment from Paris.[48]

Pay scales were routinely scaled down to reflect the lower cost of living in the provinces. Yet wages were not the issue when the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes was shut down by a workers' walk-out in the spring of 1968. The issue was not even workers' benefits, nor the much publicized, heated debates over lowering or raising the retirement age.

All French workers receive five weeks paid vacation. Factories literally close down for the month of August, making it possible for workers to vacation with their families, to visit their parents, or perhaps even rent a small villa on the coast. The August break also explains the clogged highways and overbooked resorts. Though the factory shutdowns in summer cause a substantial drop in national industrial output, and cause congestion and inconvenience in the countryside, France is a country steeped in tradition, and has consistently rejected government proposals to stagger vacation times throughout the year. Workers receive free health care, and women workers are granted extensive maternal leave. The retirement issue mentioned above was never a workers' issue _per se_, but something the workers argued among themselves, while sipping _pastis_ at a local cafe. Some workers

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[48] _Ibid._, 22.

supported the lowering of the retirement age from age sixty-five to age sixty. The French government supported this stance, since the earlier departing retirees would open up the job market for the swelling ranks of unemployed French youth. Others championed the right-to-work issue for senior citizens. In either case, the retirement issue was not the cause célèbre of worker revolts in France in the 1960's.[49]

The chief complaint at the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes was management/labor relations. Workers, and perhaps Breton workers more than French workers in general, have little patience for Parisian pomp and incompetence. An incident at the plant in 1966, as told by a worker to a journalist then covering the May of 1968 protest, may best exemplify this point. Given an exclusive tour of the fuselage factory, where Breton workers were making intricate parts for the Caravalle jet of the Super Sonic Transport, the Parisian supervisor amiably asked where the propeller on a jet was found.[50]

The term autogestion has come to describe the type of collegial labor/management rapport that was desired by the workers at the Nantes plant. Though "collegial" would not accurately describe the relationship in terms of wages or social class, it was hoped that workers and management could both serve in a decision-making capacity regarding factory improvements and concerns. Even the labor unions were to be bypassed in this effort toward self-determination and membership

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[49]Today's union demands have changed very little: a retirement age of sixty and six weeks (as opposed to the present five) of paid vacation.

[50]New York Times, 12 May 1968, 13.

consensus. Needless to say, the French unions scrambled to try to strengthen their ranks by championing this latest expression of worker discontent.[51]

A lack of rapport between union leaders and labor had long been felt among the blue collar workers of France. There are three main political bodies representing labor: the Communist-led Confédération Générale de Travail (CGT) or the General Confederation of Labor; the Catholic oriented Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC), or the French Confederation of Christian Workers; and the Socialist Force Ouvrière (FO), or Workers Force. Union dues were collected clandestinely for the most part in French factories. Union posters and announcements were subject to management censorship and union meetings had to be held outside the plant, and outside of workers' hours.[52]

French unions have had a history of public and ineffective action against management. A standard ploy of French management which was resented by Breton workers was management's use of "the bonus." Productivity bonuses, efficiency bonuses, and holiday bonuses were given out or held back at the whim of the management.[53] Strikers wanted these arbitrary and manipulative grants of "prize money" incorporated back into their wages as money earned, not awarded at the management's

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Edward Shorter and Carles Tilly, Strikes in France, 1830-1968 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 342.

discretion. This particular grievance is significant because it manifests the arrogant paternalism which so inhibited and frustrated the workers. Such a feeling of frustration over administrative obstacles brought worker agitation to a head.[54]

Worker dissent in france has not only had a repressive history, but a violent one. In 1908 municipal police opened fire on strikers in a Paris suburb, killing three.[55] Under the Fourth Republic, the Minister of the Interior brought out the French army, complete with tanks, to end a miners' strike in 1948. Political divisions entered as a consideration in the Fifth Republic, although there had been a three-way split in the labor movement since World War I. This lack of solidarity would later work against the workers, as union leaders proved ineffective at the negotiating table.[56]

As the prosperity of the early 1960's began to falter, the popularity of the Gaullist regime was shaken. A foundry in Morbihan closed in 1967, causing the loss of 1,500 jobs.[57] Iron workers in Finistere, longshoremen in Brest and Quiberon, and factory workers in Nantes, Rennes, and Saint-Brieuc were all beginning to voice discontent over lack of management response to their grievances. And the Breton constituency with the longest history of government resistance, the

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[54] Ibid., 343.

[55] New York Times, 16 June, 1968, 62.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Phlipponneau, La Gauche et les regions (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1967), ii.

farmer, was increasingly dissatisfied with the ill-effects of economic modernization.

De Gaulle's grandiose scheme concerning France's role in the Common Market is illustrative of the regime's preoccupation with France's foreign economic posturing, rather than her own economic ills. Price control was a major grievance in regard to Common Market trade policies. Low prices on both beef and dairy products were made obligatory in order for French farmers to effectively compete against other Common Market countries. Such price regulation adversely affected the small landholders who could not afford to lower prices to government-appointed levels. Twenty-five percent of Breton farmers owned less than thirteen acres of land. Nearly 50 percent owned less than fifty acres.[58] Very few of these family-owned operations owned the modern equipment necessary to meet the government's projected agricultural scheme. To remedy this situation, the De Gaulle regime increasingly advocated the merger of small landholdings into more sizable, more profit-making centers of production.[59]

This consolidation provoked deep and widespread resentment in Brittany. Paris's efforts to direct local development met with hostile response from Breton farmers who historically have clung tenaciously to their small plots of land. Government supervision of local development, with its manipulative mapping and allocation of funds led an

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[58] Ibid., vii.

[59] Ibid.

American journalist to declare that "the technocrats seem ready to sacrifice a whole region in the name of their conception of modern France."[60]

Politically, the volatile mood of the 1960's was being felt in Brittany. The youthful president of the Young Farmers' Organization professed the revolutionary fervor of the times when he charged: "We are the serfs, the slaves of the modern era!"[61] A splinter group from the Mouvement pour l'Organization de la Bretagne formed and called itself the Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB). The UDB, with socialist leanings, is the only one of the diverse autonomist organizations which still exists today.[62]

In the two and a half decades of Breton history treated in this chapter, Breton autonomist movements from both extremes of the political spectrum appeared. From the few but fervent Nazi collaborators during World War II, to the complacency of the 1950's, to the growing number of splinter political groups formed in the early 1960's, the history of recent Breton autonomy efforts presents a very distinct picture of a movement which had been championed by the Right and Left alike. By the mid-1960's, organized labor attempted to capitalize on Breton worker discontent, hoping to successfully champion the role of autogestion, or worker participation in the running of the factories. In many ways, autogestion provides an apt parallel to the Breton autonomist movement.

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[60] U.S. News and World Report, 27 May, 1968, 42.

[61] New York Times, 25 May, 1968, 14.

[62] Personal observation in Vannes, Brittany, May, 1985.

Both movements championed the right to an increased level of self-determination--be it economic, political, or cultural.

Breton autonomy took on some of its most radical tenor on the eve of World War II. Its most colorful leaders, Olivier Mordrel, Francez Debauvier, and Nazi sympathizer Celestin Lainé, led Breton activism down a bold and treacherous path in the 1930's and 1940's. The unfortunate affiliation of a small but highly visible group of Breton activists with Nazi Germany left Brittany the awkward legacy of collaboration with the enemy during World War II. Though this assessment is highly inaccurate when applied to the majority of Breton regionalists, the indictment of the top autonomist leaders of the post World War I generation served to stifle, to a large extent, regional extremism in the following decade.

The 1950's saw a concerted effort to procure government sanction for regional reform. The CELIB, a think-tank of prominent Breton professionals who served as liaisons with the government, sought to assess the economic needs of the region and to propose solutions to stave off potential economic disaster in Brittany.

In 1967 President De Gaulle delivered his most positive speech concerning regional reform efforts. He delivered this address in the small town of Bayeux, the same town in Normandy where he had delivered his call to centralization twenty years earlier. The theme this time was far more compatible to the idea of granting increased measures of regional autonomy. It is particularly ironic that, at what turned out to have been the eleventh hour for the De Gaulle regime, this moment of constructive dialogue between a powerful

French president and the struggling provinces was to be thwarted by the "angry days of May."[63]

[63]The "angry days of May" roughly date from an initial incident at the Sorbonne of the 11th of May, 1968, through the workers' strikes and general student protests, until De Gaulle's plebiscite in June.

CHAPTER FIVE

Activism Rekindled: Breton Activism from May, 1968 to The Present

The 1960's were turbulent years on both sides of the Atlantic. Student unrest rocked the cities of western Europe, while protests on the campuses of Berkeley, Columbia, and, later, Madison were making headlines in the United States. Though there is a temptation to fuse the countless expressions of campus unrest into one universal expression of dissatisfaction, the reality is that the issues in Europe were quite different from the anti-Vietnam War protests in the United States. To be sure, there were varying degrees of anti-Establishment dissension within the United States, yet, for many, the key impetus of American student unrest on a large scale can be traced to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Social issues, such as civil rights for blacks, poverty, and educational reform, certainly account for a large part of the early movement, and such concerns were the thrust of the Berkeley "free speech" movement which emerged in 1964.[1]

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[1]For further information on the United States situation, see Godfrey Hodgson, America In Our Time: From World War II to Nixon--What Happened and Why (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); and Allen J. Matusow, The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

Similarly, Europe in the 1960's was experiencing social unrest that was both philosophical and practical in nature. While university students championed the overthrow of bourgeois society, blue-collar workers simply wanted a larger share of the capitalist pie. Amidst these divergent impulses was a renewed sense of activism concerning regional autonomy. Brittany experienced the turmoil of the 1960's on all the above levels: student unrest, worker discontent, and a resurgence of regional activism. It might be wise at first, however, to examine the 1960's in France, as manifested by the 1968 uprising known as "the angry days of May."

The spark of the May uprising can be traced directly back to an industrial, working class suburb of Paris called Nanterre. On April 4, one thousand students converged on the administration of the four-year-old university to protest a variety of school policies. Student activity in 1968 was anything but a novelty. Uprisings and demonstrations had been a common event in France's turbulent history since World War II. And since that time, the student population had tripled in size.[2]

At the University of Nanterre, a two-hour student symposium was held in a faculty lecture hall on April 12, denouncing everything from the pedantic nature of a French education, to a sweeping political condemnation of what the students termed to be a "stifling bourgeois culture." The protest then defined its stance more broadly. The

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[2]U.S. News and World Report, 27 May, 1968, 42.

attack was soon launched as a defiance to the whole of established institutions, with the "facade of the university system" as the target.[3]

Undeniably, the student leaders had the wage-earning proletariat in mind when they spoke of their intentions toward a social revolution. Their self-appointed role in the struggle against imperialistic, capitalistic exploitation clearly rang of the Marxian rhetoric. Yet the initial impetus for student protest concerned issues limited to university life. Thomas Molnar, in a National Review article traced the student transition from academic, local grievants to a political status of revolutionary spokesmen:

> Before the students may become useful to the Revolution, they must apparently be made to rebel against something relevant to their academic life. Once mobilized for a secondary cause, students can be expected to support the radical minority in taking over.[4]

Political splintering characterized the French student uprisings. They were evidenced in numerous divergent forms at Nanterre. Factions of Trotskyists, Maoists, and Anarchists aired their respective ideologies and programs of action, but the French Communist Party was not among them. It, like other more conventional parties, dismissed the demonstrators as young trouble-makers.[5]

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[3]Theodore Zeldin, Conflicts in French Society (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1970), 11.

[4]Thomas Molnar, "D-Day at Brooklyn College," National Review, 97, 30 January, 1968, 87.

[5]Le Monde, 20 May, 1968, 2.

The student activity which is most cited as the germ which set the revolt on its irrevocable course was a student agitation movement which took place on March 11, about a month earlier than the headline-making demonstration at Nanterre in April. The "movement of March," as it was later cited, was regarded by its participants as the beginning of French student activism. It brought to the forefront a revolutionary folk hero named Daniel Cohn-Bendit.[6]

Cohn-Bendit, a native of Berlin, was described in newspaper accounts of the day as "a chubby, cherubic young man," an "engaging freckle-faced nihilist," and, most commonly, as "Danny the Red," both for his shade of hair, as well as his misidentification by the press as a card-carrying Communist.[7] As will be seen, the Communist Party only belatedly claimed responsibility for the worker-student activism of the Spring of 1968. Initial public sympathy came to the student cause as a result of the continued mistreatment of the protesters by overzealous police.[8]

When nearly 30,000 students were bludgeoned unmercifully by approximately 20,000 "hard-bitten, specially trained riot policemen brought in from the provinces" most observers sided with the students.[9] In scènes reminiscent of the 1848 Commune, with barricades erected on

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[6]Cohn-Bendit is featured in La révolte étudiante: Les animateurs parlent, Herve Bourges, ed. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968).

[7]New York Times, 13 May, 1968, 6.

[8]Le Monde, 25 May, 1968, 1.

[9]Newsweek, 27 May, 1968, 44.

century-old cobblestone streets, the students gained support from many sectors of the population. Numerous times, grandmotherly women were observed dropping flower pots from sixth-story windows onto the helmeted heads of riot policemen. Housewives and shopkeepers also provided buckets of water with which to douse needy students who were stricken with tear-gas.[10]

At a Sorbonne emergency aid center, riot police clubbed the doctors, nurses, and patients in the hallways and classrooms.[11] Banging their clubs in unison as they advanced, the police corps provoked even further the anger of the residents by randomly gassing sidewalk cafes along the route. It was these spectacles of Government misconduct, not the students' political ideologies, which secured public support for "the bloodied student veterans of the Latin Quarter."[12]

On May 12, French labor moved to support the students by calling a twenty-four hour nationwide strike to protest the brutal police tactics. France's three largest labor federations: the Socialist-led Workers' Force, the Catholic-oriented French Confederation of Labor, and the Communist-led General Confederation of Labor officially joined with the Teachers of the Federation of National Education and the countless ad hoc student associations in a massive anti-Government rally. The French Government had made last minute attempts at negotiation in order to appease the broad wave of sympathy which the students had

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[10] Ibid.

[11] New York Times, 25 May, 1968, 4.

[12] Newsweek, 27 May, 1968, 45.

evoked. Premier Georges Pompidou in a radio announcement suggested that charges against the arrested students might not be pressed. But this gesture was too little too late. What had begun as a minor revolt at Nanterre had flared into a major political controversy, unleashing sentiments of broad dissatisfaction with the Gaullist regime.[13]

De Gaulle's casual response to the May uprising, whose participants on occasion numbered 500,000 marching forty abreast down the avenues of Paris, was that its participants were "students who cannot keep up with their classes."[14] He confidently continued his tour of Eastern Europe, leaving Premier Pompidou to man the battle stations. The protest now had spread well beyond the Latin Quarter.[15]

Orly airport shut down on May 18 because of a 48-hour walk-out by ground technicians. Later that same evening labor unions announced that the strike had spread to the national railroads. International trains stopped whenever the strike order reached them, often in small towns, depositing hundreds of puzzled foreign passengers throughout the countryside. Barge traffic on all major rivers also came to a halt. A thousand barge and tugboat crewmen struck on May 19, completing the paralysis of Marseilles harbor, France's largest port and her gateway to Africa and the Far East. At the northwestern port of Le Havre, all vessels were moored to their dock; many of the masts featured red flags.

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[13]Anne C. Loring, "What Happened in France During 'the Angry Days of May,' 1968?" (Senior Thesis in History, William Woods College, March 30, 1976), 33.

[14]Life, 31 May, 1968, 6.

[15]Ibid.

Customs officials joined the striking dockers at most ports the following day.[16]

Vineyard owners and truck gardeners barricaded the highways in southern France, and farmers on tractors clattered through towns in Brittany and Provence. Workers in the steel mills in Lorraine received orders from their union to strike on May 22. Coal mines in Alsace shut down shortly thereafter. In Paris the farmers' open market of Les Halles in the heart of the city joined the strike, leaving mounds of abandoned fruits and vegetables. City subways had ground themselves to a steady halt on May 19. Parisian cab drivers, all fifteen hundred of them, struck on May 23.[17]

Though the May crisis is often described as a Parisian phenomenon, earlier signs of popular dissent were more visible in provincial France. Here, the grievances were not limited to the highly educated jargon of campus revolutionaries. A long-standing sentiment of dissatisfaction and alienation from government found expression in rural France long before the students went into action.

Anti-government sentiment in Brittany in the Spring of 1968 took on the violent nature that had formerly characterized the Breiz Atao activities in the 1930's. Not since that decade had a series of violent incidents, championed by various groups of Breton nationalists, brought such widespread attention to the Breton cause. In early Spring a

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[16]Jean Bothorel, La Bretagne Contre Paris (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1969), 41.

[17]New York Times, 25 May, 1968, 15.

government tax office was bombed in Lorient, Brittany. Seven days later a police garage was demolished in the small nearby village of Bannalec.[18] Though protests of this nature would continue in Brittany long after the "angry days of May," the renewed activism of the early 1970's traces its impetus to May of 1968.

The difficulty in analyzing the political implications of May of '68 for Brittany is that the atmosphere was extremely heady and the issues so diverse. Breton nationalist songs were given air-time for the first time ever on the state-controlled radio stations.[19] The Place Royale section of the city of Nantes hoisted Breton flags, and was renamed, again, briefly, la Place de la Liberation.[20] But the bold days of May probably served to undermine what would have been landmark legislation for regional autonomy. In June, De Gaulle responded to the May agitation with a sweeping proposal which included a number of concessions toward regional reform. This measure, however, rested on De Gaulle's sponsorship and continued popularity.[21] The latter did not survive May of 1968.

Though Paris can legitimately claim to be the birthplace of the student unrest, Nantes, Brittany, must be credited as the birthplace of the massive labor unrest during the May crisis. On May 11, the

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[18]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Librairie Francois Maspero, 1977), 295.

[19]New York Times, 21 May, 1968, 17.

[20]Personal interview with former student, March, 1977, Nantes, Brittany.

[21]Loring, "What Happened In France," 39.

Sud-Aviation plant, maker of parts for the French/British Concorde SST, was struck. Then, on May 13, the company president was locked into his office by the workers. Workers had taken over the plant at 9:30 a.m., and had imprisoned twenty other management personnel in their offices. When a reporter asked of the plant manager's comfort under such conditions a worker responded: "He has a suite of four offices, which is a lot bigger than my apartment. He's doing fine."[22]

The workers were in a somewhat festive mood after a few days of worker-occupation. They had welded the factory gates closed to outsiders. Workers' wives (though many of the striking workers were women) shuttled in and out with bread and wine, and they kept the management amply supplied with both as well. The strike involved 2,000 of the 2,800 workers. Those who did not join in the occupation found their front doors painted yellow when they returned home.[23]

According to the workers, the spirit of protest had been brewing for months in Nantes. This is important to note, since the newspaper coverage of the May crisis, almost without exception, cites the students as the real instigators. For example, one newspaper claimed that "in exuberant imitation of the student movement, the workers of France today voiced protest."[24] Such statements are both misleading and inaccurate. Once, in the midst of the crisis, a reporter visited the Nantes plant to speculate on the chronology of student-worker protest. One worker

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[22] New York Times, 21 May, 1968, 17.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 18.

responded to the newsman's suggestion that the students "showed the way," retorting:

> Sure, we know what they did. But we had been struggling for a month already. We don't need them. We've been fighting management for years, so we don't like to hear them lecture us about revolution.[25]

By May 13, when both student and worker activist groups flooded the streets of most major French cities, the French Government was alerted that a potentially very powerful partnership was underway. The workers garnered the muscle of the movement when the three largest labor unions consolidated in support of the student protest in Paris. It was the workers' decision to back the more vocal, more explosive student movement which gave substance and endurance to the uprising.

By May 22 the workers' movement carried such momentum and force that it had effectively paralyzed almost all private industry in a general strike involving seven million workers. That a seemingly localized protest of 2,000 could mushroom to involve half a nation's labor force in a three week span was an extraordinary development. The extent of the protest, however, came as a complete surprise to the workers at Nantes: "All that we wanted were a few economic demands," recalled M. Vincent, a Sud-Aviation employee. "But now, everything has changed. The country is in a revolutionary situation. Perhaps we can get a change in government too."[26]

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[25] Ibid., 9.

[26] New York Times, 21 May, 1968, 16.

Still, it is an oversimplification to suggest that the Breton farmer or blue-collar worker had much in common with the vanguard of university protesters. At the beginning of the labor strike, a grizzled old worker, deploring the violence in the Latin Quarter, had said of the students: "Why, they're even burning cars! It's madness!"[27] A car was what he wanted most, a long-awaited purchase he was planning for his two sons. Meanwhile, inside the lecture halls of the Sorbonne student orators held marathon all-night rallies on "the anasthesia of affluence," or on the condemnation of "bourgeois spectacles," and on "How to Share the Revolution with the Mass of French Workers."[28]

By contrast, the issues in the French labor strike were essentially economic. Workers requested an increase in the hourly wage from the equivalent of forty-five to sixty cents and a general wage increase in private industry of ten percent. Labor spokesmen demanded a reduction of the standard work week from forty-five to forty hours, and for earlier retirement eligibility. These basic bread-and-butter demands hardly seem compatible with the flamboyant political rhetoric of the student revolutionaries.[29]

An illustrative student-worker conversation reported in the New York Times Magazine cites a student activist as he lectured a striking worker: "You've got to think beyond a ten percent wage increase," said the student. "What good would it do you if we're still being exploited

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[27] New York Times, 30 May, 1968, 30.

[28] Time Magazine, 24 May, 1968, 34.

[29] New York Times, 30 May, 1968, 30.

by the capitalist system?" "First," responded the worker, "I'd like to see that wage increase. I've got three kids."[30]

For Brittany, the ironies of May, 1968, are numerous and profound. Though the general headiness of the day seemed invigorating, and may have compelled more than a few youthful Bretons to take on the mantle of "regionalist rights," or at least carry a placard to that effect in order to join in the spirit of the streets, the spirited protests did little to promote an understanding of regionalist issues. The re-formed Comite d'Etude et de Liaison des Interets de la Bretagne (CELIB), nearly succumbed to the cynical decisions that often malign French government-sponsored committees. Luckily, it received a stay of execution, and continues to be one of the most effective liaison organizations, often serving as a model for other regions of western Europe which are seeking to work within the framework of their own governments to achieve a higher degree of autonomy.[31]

The denouement of the May crisis was both anti-climactic and ironic. The French Government began coming to terms with the crisis on May 22. A motion of censure was filed the day before by Opposition leaders in the National Assembly. Key Socialist figures, including Francois Mitterrand, then a Deputy, Gaston Deferre, and former Premier Pierre Mendes-France, led the non-Communist appeal for a Popular Front to oppose the Gaullist regime. The motion of censure was directed

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[30] New York Times, 26 May, 1968, 3.

[31] Zeldin, Conflicts in French Society, 33.

against the French Parliament. De Gaulle had left for a state visit to Rumania as a diplomatic gesture toward Eastern Europe on May 11.[32]

The initial anti-Government action was diverted, through a constitutional provision, against the Government of Premier Georges Pompidou, in whose charge the government was delegated through De Gaulle's somewhat reckless absence. The Ministry of Education, as well as the Ministry of the Interior, under whose jurisdiction the Paris police force ruthlessly and later resentfully, followed government orders to disperse student gatherings at the Sorbonne, were charged with "gross mishandling" of the May student uprising.[33] Workers were without any indication of a forthcoming wage and benefit increase at that date (May 22), so their growing agitation was exerting pressure upon the voting members of the National Assembly as well.[34]

The motion of censure required an absolute majority of the four hundred Deputies. An opposition showing of that extent necessitated all the Centrist votes, and most of the unaffiliated votes to join with the Left. The Left also expected a number of Gaullists to defect to the Opposition. Defections among the Gaullist Right, however, failed to materialize. The future Gaullist president, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, counseled his party against further disrupting an already

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[32]Sacke de Gramant, "The French Workers Want to Join the Affluent Society, Not to Wreck It," New York Times Magazine, 16 June, 1968, 8.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 9.

volatile political situation by dissolving the Pompidou Government.[35] The vote of censure against the Government failed by eleven votes.

This narrow victory for the Gaullist incumbents was hardly reflective of popular confidence in the Gaullist regime. A major part of the frustration which continued into June was due to the seeming invincibility of De Gaulle himself. Only in the event of death or incapacitation could De Gaulle's seven year term be disrupted. In De Gaulle's self-tailored Constitution of 1958, the chronically volatile French Government was given a new stability through the Gaullist intention of making the President powerful and the Parliament weak. The President, once elected, stands immune from parliamentary removal. De Gaulle even had the authority to reappoint Pompidou as Premier in the event the vote of censure against him succeeded.[36]

This defiant course of action proved to be unnecessary. On May 25, De Gaulle himself, in a seven minute television address announced his intention of setting a referendum before the people in the form of a new general election. De Gaulle consented to the public demand for "greater participation by everyone in the conduct and results of the activity in which he is directly concerned."[37]

The ultimate irony for Brittany is most clearly seen in the spirit of this last statement of De Gaulle. Rocked by the tumult and plunging in popularity, De Gaulle continued, nonetheless, to translate into

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Zeldin, Conflicts in French Society, 122.

[37] Gramant, "The French Workers," 9.

concrete legislative proposals his promise to promote "greater participation" by the people in the areas of life which most affect them. Crystallized into three vivid areas as a result of the May uprising, these were education, the workplace, and local government. A new word was even coined, something the French are loathe to do, to describe this new deliberate attempt at increased popular participation in the decision-making process: autogestion.[38]

The term most accurately applies to increased employee participation in the running of the workplace, and it can be said that of the three facets of life cited, employee-employer relations improved most dramatically after May, 1968. The bungling, patronizing relationship between management and employee, between union leader and union member--indeed, the harsh hierarchical character of the workplace in general--probably has softened somewhat, lending a far more amicable atmosphere than ever before. Such a climate in the workplace, conducive to a collegial exchange of ideas, is dramatically different from the traditional stratified class system which continues to characterize much of French society. It can be argued, however, that it was not so much political activism which improved the workers' lot, but a bolstered economy, which most probably arrived on its cyclical cue, oblivious to the angry demands of May.[39]

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[38] Autogestion literally refers to self-direction within the workplace.

[39] Loring, "What Happened in France," 45.

The students at the University of Rennes, Brittany, did not fare nearly as well in accomplishing the tasks of their ambitious agenda. John S. Ambler, an American political scientist, wrote an article commemorating the uprising entitled "The Politics of University Reform: Ten Years After May."[40] He rightly points out that the influence of the May student riots was decidedly exaggerated in terms of tangible achievements. Far from being the vanguard of a new society, the only immediate gain for the students was the privilege, in state universities, of addressing their professors by the familiar "tu" rather than the formal "vous" in class.[41] Even this achievement was short-lived, perhaps somewhat akin to the "encounter sesions" which were at one time popular on U.S. campuses. Both practices have given way to a more formal approach to schooling on both continents.

Despite much publicized anti-American sentiment in France in the 1970's, student political activism has moderated. Environmental issues and anti-nuclear protests, especially those of the Greenpeace movement, have seemingly replaced campus-centered political activism. The only further evidence of "student activism" in recent years was the 1982 popular protest against President Mitterrand's proposal to deny government funding to the nation's parochial schools. The measure was overwhelmingly defeated. The most recent student protest of any magnitude was held in 1981 when a group of medical students marched

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[40]John S. Ambler, "The Politics of University Reform: Ten Years After May," Contemporary French Civilization, 33 (June, 1974), 21.

[41]Conversation with students at the Sorbonne, Paris, June, 1976.

on the Champs Elysees to protest the dearth of well-paying jobs which awaited them upon graduation.[42]

Yannick Guin, the Breton historian whose 1977 Histoire de la Bretagne has been amply cited in this treatment, entitles his assessment of the late 1960's as the "era of contradictions."[43] He describes the unlikely coalition which evolved (and which persisted, so he claims, ten years later), between urban and rural activists, between blue collar workers and the sons and daughters of the privileged classes. Punctuated with statistics tracing the demographic and economic make-up of Breton activists of the late 1960's and early 1970's, Guin asserts that the distinction between urban and rural, educated and blue-collar, had dissipated in favor of a renewed sense of solidarity against socio-economic injustice.[44] He cites the student participation in the "milk wars" of 1971 and 1972, in which university students, many from Paris, joined dairy farmers from Brittany and Normandy to protest the price supports which the governments of Common Market countries used to an unfair advantage over small French farm operations.[45]

Such expressions of resistance provoked animated response on the part of government officials. The protests were brutally squelched by the French government, and many of the more vocal leaders were arrested

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[42]Le Monde, 20 May, 1968, 2.

[43]Yannick Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne (Paris: Librairie Francois Maspero, 1977), 295-316.

[44]Ibid., 295-96.

[45]Ibid., 296.

and sentenced to unreasonably harsh prison terms.[46] The fickle price fluctuations of everything from turnips to tuna kept the Breton farm community politically active long after the May crisis.[47] In the mid-1970's, the economic concerns of Breton fishermen, to cite one example, aligned them with the environmentalist movement, then in its early stages in Europe, after a series of oil spills devastated the lobster and mussel harvest off the Breton coast.[48] In the cause of environmental integrity, as in other continued expressions of cultural sovereignty, the province of Brittany has more consistently manifested the spirit of May of '68 than any other region of France.

Though never passed, a specific piece of legislation, proposed by a weakened De Gaulle administration, was alluded to earlier and is worthy of mention. At times, in the history of a particular movement, the laws not passed are more significant than those that are. Such is the case with the referendum of April 27, 1969. Regional reform was the first item proposed. Voters were asked to vote yes or no to the notion of a redistribution of state-regional authority. The referendum was so vague as to be interpreted as both meaningless and, to some, menacing. The rightist weekly L'Aurore, normally supportive of De Gaulle, reacted: "To ask a nation like ours, an adult nation, to vote yes or no--and we don't know exactly on what--is a fine underdeveloped form of democracy.[49]

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[46] Ibid., 298.

[47] Ibid., 300-303.

[48] Ibid., 305.

[49] New York Times, 25 May, 1968, 1.

In addition, De Gaulle submitted his own, highly controversial reform which called for the abolition of the French Senate. If this second reform was to have served the interests of the first, most critics do not see how. In any case, all hopes for the passage of the relatively moderate proposals for regional reform were dashed by the unlikelihood that the local notables would approve of the abolition of the Senate.[50] Finally, De Gaulle put his own political future on the line by challenging the French public to pass the referendum or he would exit from the political stage. Therefore, does one read the resounding defeat of the 1969 referendum as anti-regionalist, or anti-Senate reform, or anti-De Gaulle?

In 1972 a watered-down regional reform bill, the Loi Frey, was passed. Although decentralists had hoped for directly elected regional assemblies, the downgrading of the prefect, and more funding of specific regional governments, the Loi Frey provides for indirectly elected regional assemblies, limited funding, and a vague weakening of the line of power from Paris. The chief governmental executive of the region was still the prefect. Critics charge that the Loi Frey has actually served simply to streamline administrative control of the provinces from Paris.[51]

Though the early 1970's were disappointing for Brittany in terms of regional reform legislation, the period was one of the most active

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[50]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 307.

[51]Peter A. Gourevitch, Paris and the Provinces (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 89.

in terms of cultural revival. The economic and legislative failures of the period were followed by a resurgence of Breton activism. After the Milk Wars of 1972, a coalition of the more radical elements of the growing Breton nationalist movement formed what could be called a "French populist support group." Their meetings attracted many frustrated farmers, who carried on the legacy of the milk protest by adapting the slogan: "Our milk, our fight!"[52] They were joined by striking workers from the Joint manufacturing plant in the town of Lorient, which was shut down by a walk-out in 1971 over the issue of absentee management, and the factory's policy of not hiring union members.[53]

In the Spring of 1972, the prefecture in the town of Saint-Brieuc was bombed, as was the sub-prefecture in Dinan. The customs office at Saint Malo also was damaged by a bomb blast. Claiming responsibility was a highly clandestine student-militant farmer organization called the Front de la Libération de la Bretagne (FLB). On June 22 the home of a lawyer who had helped to foreclose on a small farm in Fougere was vandalized. The offenders were teenage members of the FLB. Testifying at the trial on behalf of the young offenders were Joseph Martray and Michele Phlipponneau, both prominent citizens who had served as liaison spokesmen between the regionalists and the French government. When the youths were acquitted, Breton flags were hoisted in commemoration above Notre Dame in Paris by fellow activists.[54]

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[52]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 309.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., 310-11.

Continued unrest in the Spring of 1973 was manifested by a bizarre strike against a candy factory, and lead to a further consolidation of unlikely constituents. Sister Madeleine (in France family names of nuns are not normally used), a young nun, was working in the candy factory of Guemene-Penfao, in a tiny village in the department of Finistere.[55] She found the conditions for the workers, mostly adolescent daughters of farmers and fishermen, to be so deplorable that she organized a small protest. Union activists from other towns helped to champion her cause, to the consternation of many of the local families, including those of some of the workers, who desperately needed the small income their daughters earned. The objections of the residents were soothed, however, by the involvement of the Emgleo Belein Breizh, the rural Catholic organization which had served as a vehicle for preserving Breton culture, language, and tradition since the 1940's.[56] The strike was successful, conditions improved, and a new coalition proved viable: farmers, workers, and the Breton Catholic Church.

The missing element, the intellectual elite, was not dormant. Though the CELIB, the think-tank organization sponsored by the French government to oversee Breton concerns, had severely suffered in reputation and effectiveness as a result of the May crisis, a new generation of Breton activists had emerged. For this younger elite, May of '68 erupted during their impressionable youth. Happy to follow in step

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[55] Ibid., 314.

[56] Jean Markale, Histoire secrète de la Bretagne (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1977), 239.

under the leadership of the "veterans of May," the pre-'68 Mouvement pour l'Organisation de la Bretagne (MOB) and the Parti Nationalist Breton (PNB), did not adapt quickly enough to this new youthful radicalism, and consequently did not survive. The Union Democratique Bretonne (UDB), on the other hand, professed its goals in language more in keeping with the times: anti-imperialism, non-alignment, pro-Third World.[57]

Without a doubt, the most politically active of Breton organizations of the early 1970's, and perhaps the organization which felt itself to be the true descendant of the '68 vision, was the FLB. In its most active period, 1973 to 1978, the FLB was under the direction of Yann Goulet, a Breton nationalist then living outside of Dublin, Ireland, in the small town of Bray.[58] Extreme caution was taken in revealing his identity, or that of other FLB members, since farmers, workers, and local priests had all been under surveillance and, in some cases, imprisonment, during the previous few years.[59]

The FLB incorporated a wide smattering of interest groups, including elderly activists from the Breton nationalist movement of the 1930's, until a highly radical departure within the group led to the formation of the Armee de Liberation de la Bretagne (ALB).[60] This group caused

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[57]Bothorel, La Bretagne Contre Paris, 75.

[58]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 310.

[59]Personal observation, Summer of 1973, Rennes, Brittany; Summer of 1975, Dublin, Ireland; Winter of 1976-77, Nantes, Brittany.

[60]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 312.

much controversy in its purported affiliation with the Irish Republican Army, a connection, as will be shown, was based more on sentiment and political convenience than actual heartfelt brotherhood.

Several other regionalist activities reached their pitch in the mid-1970's, a parallel which in some ways encouraged, and in some ways undermined popular support for the Breton efforts. In December, 1973, the Spanish Prime Minister was assassinated by a Basque separatist. Demands for autonomy were heard in French-controlled Catelonia in 1975, and in Corsica in 1976. But the French government remained unresponsive. In contrast, a surprise gesture on the part of the British government arose when Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that his Labor Party would support modified home-rule for both Scotland and Wales.[61]

A channel away from a seemingly encouraging future for Celtic nationalists in Great Britain, frustrated outbursts in Brittany continued. Protests in Dinan were held in August of 1973, and in Quimper and Saint-Brieuc in November. Perhaps one of the more effective protests occurred on February 13, 1974, when the FLB claimed responsibility for the destruction of a television transmission tower at Roc-Tredudon. The explosion virtually cut television transmission for all of western Brittany. Yet, according to one source, the population was generally sympathetic to the perpetrators.[62] From this act of sabotage was born

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[61]Jack Brand, "The Rise and Fall of Scottish Nationalism," Nations Without A State, Charles R. Foster, editor (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1980), 56.

[62]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 332.

the extremist Strollad or Vro, which in Breton means "the Patriots." They also were responsible for bombing a part of a nuclear power plant in Finistere in August of 1975.[63]

The early to mid-1970's saw a brief, but dynamic partnership between the veterans of Breton activism of the 1930's and the new generation of activists from 1968. In the spirit of the times, these discussions often went beyond the concern of the Breton cause. The most well-known American participant was undoubtedly Jack Kerouac, whose On the Road became a handbook for a generation of American "counter-culturalists."[64] One of Kerouac's last works is titled Satori in Paris, in which he recounts his return, not so much to Paris as to his ancestral Breton roots. The novel, written in journal form, is peppered with references to his "Quebec via Brittany" stock. A critic describes the work as a "celebration of all the crazy, confused events of a writer's pilgrimage to his ancestral land, drunk in a wild extravaganza of life."[65]

By far the most dramatic incidents involving the Breton nationalist movement occurred from 1975 to 1978. Between July 1, 1976 and January 1, 1977, the FLB claimed responsibility for nineteen bombings.[66] One person was killed, a bystander outside the prefect's office in Saint-Brieuc. The stated rationale for this violence is made clear

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Jack Kerouac, On the Road (London: Quartet Books, 1966).

[65] Jack Kerouac, Satori in Paris (London: Quartet Books, 1973).

[66] Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 332.

in a lengthy text published by the FLB in October, 1976, which reads in part:

> Our violence is nothing more than a response to the daily violence inflicted by the State, whose army, police, and administrators have waged wars against our culture and our language.[67]

The text goes on to announce that this violence will continue, "in equal proportion to the abuse which the policies of the State continued to inflict its own violence against the Breton people."[68] Much of the Front's objection to this so-called "State violence" took on a revolutionary rhetoric, and promoted the agenda of movements other than Breton nationalism. Other concerns in the FLB publication included environmental pollution, nuclear power and weaponry, and the growth of multinational corporations.[69]

Using terms such as "commandos" and "revindication" frequently in their literature, the leaders of the FLB were taking a more radical tone than many of the other Breton autonomist movements were ready to support. In the Spring of 1977, they claimed responsibility for the bombing of a south wing of the castle of Versailles. The wing housed a collection of memorabilia from the Napoleonic period, and though very little was damaged, the reputation of the FLB took a dramatic turn. After the Versailles incident, public sympathy soured and many members resigned in protest of the organization's increasingly violent tactics.

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[67] Ibid., 315.

[68] Ibid., 316.

[69] Ibid.

The leaders were forced underground. Even formerly safe havens for FLB radicals in small Breton towns were no longer accommodating to this new notoriety. In the end, it was again a violent incident which marked the final days of the notorious Front de la Libération de la Bretagne, when its leader was arrested by state police for a domestic dispute outside a Nantes cafe in the Spring of 1978.[70]

The 1970's were important for the Breton cause in a cultural sense as well. From 1970 to 1975, a Breton nationalist, who is also a highly acclaimed folk singer and recording artist, gave several concerts in Ireland. A virtuoso on the Celtic harp, the Irish flute, and the dulcimer, Alan Stivell recorded mostly in Dublin, Ireland. Appreciative of his Celtic heritage, Stivell nevertheless champions the frustrated call of Brittany most specifically. The title song of his 1971 album, recorded in Dublin, is called "Deliverance." Its lyrics are as hauntingly effective as any campaign rallying call:

> The time of deliverance has come
> Yet all thoughts of revenge are far away from our minds
> We shall keep our friendship with the people of France
> But we shall break down those shameful barriers
> Which prevent us from looking across the sea
> Those boundaries which keep us away from our closest
> Brothers in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland
> And we, whose name is known by the birds of Brittany
> Which has been banished from all of the human languages
> From all the libraries and from all the maps of the world
> We, the peasants and fishermen shall open our hearts
> To all the peoples of the planet Earth.[71]

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[70]This information was told to me by the archivist at the Municipal Archives of Vannes, Brittany, on May 17, 1985.

[71]Alan Stivell, Deliverance, produced by Alan Stivell and Peter Rice for Keltic III Records, 1975.

The reference to the "banished name of Brittany" refers to an unwritten, though much practiced tendency on the part of state officials to refer to the region by its five departmental names: Finistere, Ile et Vilaine, Loire-Atlantique, Cotes du Nord, and Morbihan. Even meteorological forecasts were amended to "purge" the use of the term Brittany from official state language. Weather reports were given for the "peninsule de l'extrême ouest-atlantique,"--not Brittany.[72]

Though the dream of a unified Celtic homeland, be it in Wales, Brittany, Scotland or Ireland is admittedly unlikely, the haunting lyrics and melodies of Alan Stivell poetically express the compelling nature of this cultural identity. A review of his 1972 album, La Disque d'Or ("Gold Album"), praises his uncanny ability to "extract all the poignancy and pathos of Celtic memory."[73] Unfortunately for the movement, and for fans of the Celtic harp and other traditional instruments, Stivell has suffered from the excesses of drink and of boisterous behavior and has not produced an album since 1976.

In the fall of 1978, then President Valery Giscard d'Estaing made a trip to Brittany to support Breton cultural autonomy. In the town of Ploermel, Giscard asserted that there was no contradiction between being a Frenchman and a Breton at the same time. French unity, he said, should not serve to suffocate the tradition, culture, and customs of her various regions. Citing that the Gauls, the Romans, the Franks, the Celts, and the Vikings had all established themselves on French soil,

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[72]Personal observation, March, 1977, Nantes, Brittany.

[73]Deliverance, Keltic III Records, 1975.

Giscard maintained that modern-day France was a fusion of this diverse heritage. Heralding the Breton effort in both World Wars as proof of the region's pride in the glory of France, Giscard commended the Breton tenacity in retaining its own cultural traditions. It was this uniqueness which makes France a richer and more diversified nation.[74]

Giscard's appeal was both conciliatory and historic, marking the first time that a regional culture such as Brittany's, and, by extension, the unique cultures of the Basques, the Occitanians, and the Corsicans, was not viewed with consternation as a threat to French unity, but heralded as a boon to the cultural wealth of the nation. Proponents of regional autonomy, however, are leary of this conciliatory tone. Many Bretons continue to see a parallel connection between their region's plight and that of the American Indian. They relate to a Buffy Saint-Marie recording entitled "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying." One of the lyrics, charged with bitterness and emotion directly addresses the dominant culture and begins:

> Now that my life's to be known as your heritage
> Now that we're tamed, and safe behind laws
> Now that our own chosen way is a novelty
> Now that even the graves have been robbed
> We choke on your blue, white, and scarlet hypocrisy
> Hands on our hearts we salute you your victory[75]

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[74]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 339.

[75]Buffy Saint-Marie, Native North American Indian Child, Vanguard Records, 1974. Some Breton acquaintances cited this recording as significant during my visit to Rennes, Brittany in June, 1973.

The first three lines are the most applicable to both cultures, poignantly expressing a minority culture's fear that being incorporated into the national heritage is just one final spiritual rape. Blacks in the United States have voiced similar claims.

The Breton cause has been alternately championed by student revolutionaries, union activists, the French Communist Party, and even the Government. Political endorsement has swayed from Right to Left. Except for the brief and limited involvement of Breton activists in the Nazi efforts, the twentieth century has seen the Left as more receptive to regional reform. The term applied to these most recent efforts is decentralization, a trend currently in vogue in much of western Europe. The philosophy behind this trend, as well as some specific application to regional autonomy movements in countries other than France, is the topic of the concluding chapter.

Most of the radical elements have disappeared from Brittany. A visit to the province in the Spring of 1985 produced no new insight into a movement on the part of present university students, and a youthful aide at the municipal archives in the town of Vannes had never heard of the FLB.[76] The Leftist Union Democratique Bretonne is doing well in electing their candidates to regional assemblies, but the issues are generally more economic than they are specifically Breton in content.[77] The Communist Party lost much of its credibility due to its delayed

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[76]Personal interview with the archivist's assistant, Municipal Archives, Vannes, Brittany, 17 May, 1985.

[77]Ouest-France, 9 February, 1985, 3.

endorsement of the '68 uprising. Also, the Communist philosophy of a "world society," understandably, would have little appeal to the world's regionalists, whose goal is to maintain a separate and distinct identity. This is not to discount the inroads the Communists have made in the more economically destitute regions, where, at times even in Brittany, the appeal of a Communist economic theory has held a strong attraction.

The Socialist presidency of Francois Mitterrand illustrates yet another political irony: that a Socialist regime would champion the rights of individual liberties over those of the State. Of course Brittany is no stranger to Socialist proposals. Like the rest of France, Brittany was relatively supportive of the Socialist regime of Leon Blum during the Third Republic of the 1930's. The difference between the Socialist regimes of Leon Blum and Francois Mitterrand is that the former professed the more traditional party line of a strong central government (much like the paternalist style of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the United States during the crisis of the Great Depression), whereas Mitterrand had the relative luxury of loosening the tether held by the State over the outlying areas.

The most recent example of the decentralization policy of the Mitterrand administration is the Deferre Law, named for the former Secretary of the Interior, Socialist Gaston Deferre. Passed in 1982, this law is a re-enforcement of the Loi Frey, strengthening the state's commitment to unravel the bureaucratic entanglements which have plagued the French system, thereby granting more local control over issues which directly affect the individual regions. The irony is that a Socialist

government, historically supportive of a strong, protective central government, has put the legislative teeth into the concept of individual, regional privilege. In his comments on the passage of the Deferre Law, Mitterrand remarked as had Giscard before him, that the well-being of the people of France included the right to be unique, and that much of this uniqueness stems from her diverse regional identities.[78] Further political irony is highlighted when it is realized that the regional reforms brought about under a Socialist government were actually those policies originally suggested by De Gaulle's 1969 referendum, those sabotaged by the zeal of the 1968 activists.

The politics of reform and the resulting legislation have been slow in coming to Brittany. Advances have been made, such as lessening the authority of the state prefect, simplifying the regulations for government allotments of funds for regional projects, and increasing local decision-making power. The parallels to the aspirations of many "May of '68" slogans are apparent, as the goal of autogestion in the workplace and in the government have begun to take hold.[79] Still, laws alone do not guarantee the preservation of a culture.

The Breton way of life, traditionally that of a peasant farmer or fisherman of a subsistence level, has collided with the twentieth century economy. The strange coalitions discussed in this chapter: students and farmers, factory workers and the rural Catholic Church, are the legacy of the 1968 uprising. They have had both a positive and

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[78] Le Monde, 7 March, 1983.

[79] Loring, "What Happened in France," postscript, 13.

potentially detrimental effect on the Breton community. In terms of political expediency, such consolidation has been effective. The strike at the factory in Lorient would never have been as successful for the unions had the Breton Church not lent its encouragement.

The farmers' Milk War in 1972 would never have received as much press had not the university students championed the cause. Yet political expediency can exact a price. A certain diluting of the historical distinctions between peasant farmer and the university-educated is perhaps a good thing, yet it seems naive to presume that, in the exchange, the assimilation will be of equal proportions. Much of the loss of traditional culture in the twentieth century is probably inevitable. Witness this exchange between two Breton farmers, who found it impossible to discuss modern everyday farmer tasks in their native Breton. The highlighted words are in modern French, the rest in traditional Breton:

> "Eur tri ag tracteur a ked zul?"
> "An hini cultivation eur zo condensceur."[80]

A Breton visitor this past summer (July, 1985) was a native of a small coastal town on the outskirts of Nantes. She told of her disappointment over a new rural practice called renombrement. This was a new government policy of land consolidation, which required that small land owners remove the ancient stone walls which delineated their tiny fields. It was the government's hope that these more open fields would lend themselves to more efficient cultivation. According to our house-

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[80]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 339.

guest, the change in topography caused such erosion along the rain-soaked fields that the government withdrew the project after a few years. - In the interim, however, much of the original charm of the stone-enclosed fields in many areas was destroyed.[81]

A Breton writer composed the following poem in 1971, warning the Breton farmer of the danger of too close an acceptance of the twentieth century, including the modern-day factory worker:

> Et qui te jettera la pierre
> Si tu te sépares de ta terre
> N'as-tu pas peur de la misère
> Veux-tu rester celibataire
> Les ouvriers des arsenaux
> N'ont pas ces soucis sur le dos
> Et ils ont du pain sur la planche
> A faire des armes pour la France
> Tu deviendras bétail toi-même
> A l'étable des hommes.[82]

Paraphrased, it states:

> And if you were separated from your land
> Wouldn't you fear upon whose hand
> You would depend?
> Or would you be like the worker in the factory
> Whose profit depends on France's armory?
> Is it better to supply a stranger's arsenal
> Than to live off the beasts in the farmer's stall?[83]

The singer later stopped performing the song, upon requests by union spokesmen that it was unnecessarily antagonistic toward blue-collar workers.[84]

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[81]Personal interview with Marie-Anne Gravouil, Omaha, 15 July, 1985.

[82]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 337.

[83]My translation.

[84]Guin, Histoire de la Bretagne, 337.

Granted, the adaptability question of a proud peasant existence in the twentieth century is certainly not unique to Brittany, France. In many ways the raising of social consciousness, including that of the various new constituencies just discussed, has come only as a result of rapid economic change and social upheaval. The past twenty years have produced tremendous change, much of it positive, to the everyday economic concerns of the average Breton. But has it come at too great a psychological, or spiritual, cost? The philosophical and sociological concerns of maintaining a viable minority culture in the late twentieth century hold a significance well beyond the Breton movement. The dangers, lessons, and opportunities of autonomist efforts in other regions of western Europe will be the theme of the final, concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION

In 1975, American sociologist Michael Hechter published his Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development from 1536-1966. Though Brittany is barely mentioned, the work is significant to this discussion for two reasons: The term "internal colonialism" has entered the vocabulary of the present-day discussion of ethnic activists, and, the author has applied it to twentieth century democracies. These final pages of this study will attempt to assess in what capacity Brittany fits into the "Celtic fringe" of northwestern France, and what, if anything, can be done to improve her situation.

Two departures from the historical approach taken thus far will help in this assessment. First is a discussion of the Breton plight from a sociological perspective, citing recent works by French, British, and American sociologists and political scientists. Second, nationalist resurgence in other regions of Europe will be discussed in the hope that such parallel movements will provide added insight into the plight of the modern-day ethnic minorities. It is hoped that a more general analysis of the problems of minority cultures, coupled with a comparison of Breton autonomist efforts to others currently active, will clarify in what ways Brittany is unique, and in what ways Brittany can serve as a case study for many twentieth century cultures caught in the periphery of the modern-day state.

A definition of terms must precede this discussion. Hechter perceived the "periphery" as any region in a present-day nation-state which is administered by a "dogmatically asserted racial, ethnic, or cultural superiority."[1] The periphery becomes a colony when this "superior culture" imposes its will upon an indigenous, and often economically subordinate people. Historically, the creation of a "periphery" in France could only occur once the modern-day state was created.

Political scientist Sidney Tarrow, in his comparative treatment of French and Italian governments, rightly cites Napoleon as the architect of western European state administrations.[2] The extent of the centralization was a radical idea, which championed the national will, as embodied in the state, as transcending the particular interests of the provinces. Tarrow distinguishes between the Italian and French administrative styles (though both are based on the Napoleonic code), as a clientaliste approach in Rome, and a dirigiste approach in Paris.[3] But the claim that the Italian government operates on a more cooperative level, perhaps suggesting that there is a collegial basis of communication between Rome and the outlying regions of Italy, is contested. Revolts in the German-speaking South Tyrol section of northern Italy in in the late 1960's and in Sicily attest to the fact that regional

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[1]Michael Hechter, Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development From 1536-1966 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 30.

[2]Sidney Tarrow, Between Center and Periphery (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 252.

[3]Ibid., 51.

assimilation in Italy has not gone as smoothly as Tarrow suggests.[4] Yet, the French propensity to direct from above has made Paris much more often the target of regional resistance efforts in recent years.

In French Corsica, Corsican nationalists have claimed responsibility for 298 explosions, including an attack on an Air France 707 in 1976.[5] Though no one was killed in that incident, three deaths resulted from separate bombings in 1977, and three more in 1980. The trial of those held responsible, leaders of the clandestine Front de la Liberation Nationaliste de Corsica, was widely publicized. Due to increasing economic unrest in France and in Corsica, the defendants received the support of the major French unions, the Confederation Generale de Travail and the Force Ouvriere.[6] Once sentenced, the convicted prisoners began a hunger strike which, as was the case with Bobby Sands in Ireland, stirred widespread public concern. In both cases, the Catholic Church attempted to intervene as a humane intermediary. Unlike Bobby Sands, however, the Corsican defendants were force-fed and remain in a Parisian prison.[7]

Sociologists and political scientists find parallels in several characteristics which isolate the French from the Italian and

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[4]Flavia Pristinger, "Ethnic Conflict and Modernization in the South Tyrol," Nations Without A State, Charles R. Foster, ed. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1980), 153-188.

[5]Peter Savigear, "Corsica and the French State," Nations Without A State, 130.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

English administrations. Unlike the French system of uniformity and overriding adherence to hierarchical command from Paris, the British government tolerates a somewhat larger measure of regional autonomy in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Each region operates under a separate constitution, though bound by allegiance to the British throne. In many ways, the lack of an overt directive from London has allowed residents of the British periphery to develop their own, and in many ways, more genuine, loyalty to the State.[8]

The phrase "British Empire" was first coined as an accolade of admiration and pride, by a Welshman in 1536.[9] England and Wales defined their interests as one and the same, linked by ties of married nobility, for centuries. Modern-day Wales, however, is best described as the scarred creation of the industrial revolution. The transformation of the Welsh countryside from 1870 to 1900 was a consequence of the sudden need for massive amounts of both coal and iron ore to supply the steel foundries of northwest Europe. The resulting urbanization and cheap labor influx gave Wales a higher mass immigration rate than even the United States experienced during that time.[10] Hechter cites Wales as the supreme example of a periphery's systematic exploitation to meet the needs of the colonizing force. With many of the mines now abandoned and a mounting unemployment rate, present-day Wales is, in many ways, an

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[8]Hechter, Internal Colonialism, 80. Hechter acknowledges, of course, that Northern Ireland is ruled by the United Kingdom.

[9]John Osmond, "Wales in the 1980's," Nations Without A State, 45.

[10]Hechter, Internal Colonialism, 286.

orphaned industrial wasteland. Though there are occasional expressions of Welsh nationalism, such as the bombing of an English television tower in 1978, Welsh autonomy has never maintained the pitch that many other regional efforts have enjoyed.[11] Its sluggish, industrial economy has firmly tied Wales into the British political system; Welsh voters have consistently hoped to improve their lot by supporting the British Labour Party, not by expressions of autonomy.[12]

The rise and fall of Scottish nationalism unfolded in the 1960's and 1970's. Scotland was separate from England, complete with its own parliament, though sharing a King, until 1707. It had its own legal system, championed the Presbyterian Church over the Anglican, and boasted a rich literary tradition including Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott. Many students of regional nationalism find the literary tradition of the native culture to be a tremendous source of pride which often serves as an impetus for nationalist resurgence. Yeats is cited as serving this purpose in Ireland. Though the native Gaelic dialect is no longer spoken in Scotland, a distinct language is not a prerequisite for a nationalist feeling. As a scholar of Scottish history reminds, sharing the English language with the Mother Country did not reduce the resentment of the American colonists, nor did it prevent the American War of Independence. In the late 1960's, the Scottish National Party proposed further degrees of autonomy from Great Britain. But the

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[11] Osmond, "Wales in the 1980's," Nations Without A State, 45.

[12] Ibid.

measure was soundly defeated, even in the Scottish districts, in 1979.[13] Political autonomy, once again, was not the expressed desire of the periphery population.

A comparison of the Breton autonomy movement with that in Ireland is in order. Such a parallel would seem likely, since both regions are the homeland of a native, indigenous Celtic race who finds itself on the outside, looking in at the "foreigners" who are now in power. Both regions have suffered economic hardships, some of which are attributable to their respective state policies concerning trade regulations and price-fixing of regionally produced commodities. Autonomist activities in both Brittany and Ireland increased dramatically at the turn of the century, reaching a height of activity in the World War I era, and resumed a high level of visibility in both regions in the 1930's. Though the leadership of the Breiz Atao ("Brittany Above All") and the Irish Sinn Fein ("Ourselves Alone") did not know one another, their movements paralleled one another in both pitch and tone throughout much of the twentieth century.

Breiz Atao leader Olivier Mordrel attributed his inspiration to spearhead the Breton autonomist movement of the 1920's to the example of Ireland during the Easter uprising in Dublin of 1916. Though the political activism of both regions has an uncanny parallel rhythm, from Celestin Laine's exile to Ireland in the late 1940's to the Front de la Liberation de la Bretagne's tacit support of the Irish Republican

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[13] Jack Brand, "The Rise and Fall of Scottish Nationalism," Nations Without A State, 42.

Army in the early 1970's, the link seems to be more coincidental than evidence of a concerted partnership. The "troubles" in Ireland, as the natives put it, are far more charged with religious rivalries and deeply rooted social prejudices than the Bretons have experienced. It is extremely disconcerting to read this account of a Cambridge University history professor, visiting Ireland in the late nineteenth century:

> I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.[14]

Distinctions of color are not a prerequisite for racism. An ethnic pecking order has been part of the internal dynamic of the majority of cultures from time immemorial. As a scholar of Celtic history observed, by the seventeenth century, "an Englishman who did not look down on a Scotsman would have been only half an Englishman; a Scotsman who did not hate an Englishman would not have been a Scotsman at all."[15]

Ethnic chauvinism within the minority culture also plays a role. Community rivalries often prevented the possibility of regional unity in Brittany. Oddly, it is sometimes the more subtle distinctions, such as different dialects of a shared minority language, which foster some of the most vehement ethnic chauvinism. A Breton historian allowed that he is more at ease visiting transplanted Bretons in Paris who are originally from his own commune than he is traveling the few kilometers to

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[14]Hechter, Internal Colonialism, xvi.

[15]Ibid., 32.

a different section of Brittany. How one defines a member of the ethnic minority in question can become a delicate task. One recent scholarly study went so far as to request blood tests to determine the genetic make-up of the people under scrutiny.[16]

Ironically, some of the most divergent of ethnic groups have learned to co-exist. An example of such an unlikely alliance is the Jura province in Switzerland. Upper Jura is mostly German-speaking and Protestant. Lower Jura is French-speaking and Roman Catholic. Since language and religion have historically been the root of the most pronounced ethnic rivalries, it is significant to note that the residents of the Jura have voiced only minor disputes, most of them channelled through diplomatic means in the Council of Europe sessions held in Brussels and Strasbourg in 1972 and 1973.[17]

Final mention must be made of the Basques, since their activism, much like the Irish Catholics of Northern Ireland and the nationalists of Corsica, has in many ways paralleled that of the Bretons. The Basques, like the Bretons, have a unique language. And though the Basque population has resided for centuries in the Pyrenees mountains, the modern-day nation-state has cut this mountain range in two: the northern slope belongs to France, the southern slope to Spain. Only about ten percent of the Basque community live on the French side.[18]

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[16]Robert P. Clark, "Euzkadi: Basque Nationalism in Spain Since the Civil War," Nations Without A State, 77.

[17]Kurt Mayer, "The Jura Conflict: Ethnic Tensions in Switzerland," Nations Without A State, 201.

[18]Clark, "Euzkadi: Basque Nationalism in Spain," Nations Without A State, 76.

The Basques are a fascinating study, nonetheless, and despite, or perhaps thanks to widely publicized violent acts, they have become a well-known case study of modern-day ethnic autonomy. According to cave paintings and other archaeological evidence, the Basques have resided in this same region of Europe since 5,000 B.C., and some anthropologists estimate their arrival to have been as early as 20,000 B.C. They are the undisputed indigenous race of western Europe, followed by the Celts, who were their first, though unsuccessful, invaders.[19]

Twentieth century resistance to Spanish rule perhaps received its most symbolic impetus after the bombing of the village of Guernica in April, 1937. A clandestine agreement between Spanish nationalist leader Francisco Franco and Adolf Hitler allowed German war planes to test their effectiveness on this Basque civilian population. Pablo Picasso created a mammoth memorial to the victims in his abstract painting, Guernica, on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art on condition that it not be returned to Spain until Franco's death. Franco died in 1978, and the painting is now in Madrid.[20]

The native language of the Basques, Euskera, was forbidden by the Spanish State until 1950. Even the teaching of it as a second language was illegal, and all Basque proper names were erased from public documents and replaced by Spanish ones. Once Vatican II permitted the use of the vernacular in Mass, Euskera was commonly used for religious

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[19] Ibid., 79.

[20] The painting has come to symbolize the atrocities of war upon an innocent, civilian population.

ceremonies, though its use outside of Church was still discouraged by Spanish authorities.[21]

The 1960's uprising fueled the activism of Basque youth. In that year, a Basque student who refused to stop for a police roadblock was shot and killed. In retaliation, the local Spanish police chief was killed. The violence accelerated rapidly, as thirty-six fatalities were blamed on Basque nationalist activities in 1974-75, sixty in 1978, and over one hundred in 1979. The most famous casualty was that of Spanish Premier Luis Carrero Blanco who was killed by a car bomb in 1973.[22]

It seems a quirk of history that the more violent and reckless a movement, often the more world attention it gains. A 1977 statute granted the Basques a "pre-autonomy status" from the Spanish government. It provides for an independent Basque president, parliament, legal, and judicial system. Rumblings of Basque dissatisfaction continue, however. The Irish in 1921 and the Quebecois in 1978 were admittedly more successful in procuring such autonomist measures from their respective governments.[23]

Brittany has enjoyed a mixed bag of success. Though Mitterrand has championed the cause of decentralization, heralding a curious mix of autogestion in the workplace, while nationalizing major French

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[21]Clark, "Euzkadi: Basque Nationalism in Spain," Nations Without A State, 82.

[22]Ibid., 93.

[23]Ibid., 98.

industries to form a highly centralized economy, the Breton situation may be more complex than the Deferre Law or any other recent legislation can set aright. There is a danger in becoming too dependent on legislative solutions for what are oftentimes complex and delicate problems. In France, in particular, the legislative experts often serve only to perpetuate an administrative system already saturated with bureaucratic expertise.

French sociologist Michel Crozier describes governmental operations by committee in his native country when he laments that "everybody takes care of everything, but nobody listens to anybody else."[24] His translator, William Beer, called the French administrative system a "technocratic caste," immune and insensitive to the initiative and needs of the periphery. Many of the regional committees discussed thus far, which have been granted governmental sanction, such as the Comite d'etude et de liaison des interets bretons (CELIB) have functioned primarily as economic planning task forces, and have not voiced regional concerns beyond that. President Giscard d'Estaing was blamed for reducing the scope of these regionalist think-tanks from De Gaulle's far more comprehensive goal of promoting "regional expression" throughout France.[25]

Many sociologists who have written on this topic, paint a dismal portrait of the potential for an economically viable regional culture

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[24]Michael Crozier, Strategies for Change: The Future of French Society (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1982), 79.

[25]Eugene Weber, Peasants Into Frenchmen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 33.

which operates independently of the modern-day state. Max Weber claimed in his Economy and Society that the "modern economic system requires a public order which functions promptly and predictably," and went on to say that the most successful economic enterprise will be a monopoly of the state.[26] French scholar and former editor of L'Express magazine Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber wrote a best-selling book which lamented the helplessness of the French regions in his Le Pouvoir regional in 1971. Many French publications written by authors with a socialist bent, have been outspoken proponents of regionalism, including Jean-Pierre Richierlot's La France en miettes (1976) and Jean Francois Deniau's L'Europe Interdite (1979).[27]

American sociologist Mark Kesselman credits much of France's tendency to overcentralize to a national personality that has a propensity to yield to authority. A French citizen commonly shirks most civic responsibility and is rarely chastised for so doing, since the French definition of democracy means a citizen is free to do, or not do, whatever he likes. Most French citizens are perfectly willing to concede their voice in civic matters to the person of mayor, who, in turn, curries the favor of the departmental prefect, the Parisian-appointed link to the State. Thus the mayor, the governmental figure most directly linked to the people, has a

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[26]Max Weber, Economy and Society, quoted in Hechter, 313.

[27]Robert Ramsay, The Corsican Time Bomb (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1983), 225.

professional stake in the present system, and actively cultivates his affiliation with the Parisian elite.[28]

Proposed solutions include prohibiting the holding of a plurality of French elective offices, a long practiced tradition which further entrenches elected notables in a perpetually sustained network of political maneuvering. Plural office-holding is especially common among the more ambitious mayors, who may be elected to Deputy seats in the middle of their mayoral terms, and who often devote more energy to their more prestigious Parisian posts than they do to their local offices.[29] Not always is the intent so self-aggrandizing, however. Oftentimes the most effective means to guarantee a favorable response for a regional project is to first make one's way up the political ladder, and all political ladders in France lean toward Paris.

A Breton writer, Pierre-Jakez Hélias, published his autobiography in 1978. It serves as a delightful account of a traditional Breton upbringing.[30] He champions no specific Breton autonomist group; indeed, no regionalist groups are even mentioned by name. Yet many of his thoughts are worth conveying, as he, perhaps more than any sociologist, political scientist, or historian, best conveys what Brittany was, is, and is becoming. Surprisingly, the author is generally optimistic.

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[28]Mark Kesselman, The Ambiguous Consensus: A Study of Local Government in France (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

[29]Ibid., 95-6.

[30]Pierre-Jakez Helias, The Horse of Pride (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

His foremost concern is the loss of the Breton language. Breton was forbidden in all schools until 1961. Any student caught speaking it was called a vache ("cow"), and this derogatory remark was often accompanied by a necklace with a cow trinket which the student was forced to wear around his neck. He could rid himself of the necklace only by catching a fellow student speaking Breton, thus instilling in childhood a policing mentality toward his own heritage.[31]

One of the most poignant examples of the crippling effect that the prohibition of Breton had was that the old people, before Vatican II, were forced to "pray in blunders" in their broken French.[32] Old women were heard voicing the concern that God would not be able to distinguish the Bretons' prayers, who were now made to speak in a language whose words were no more than "half-empty boxes" to the Breton faithful. The Breton priests were often just as uncomfortable with their own mastery of French. The singing rang hollow. The elderly remained silent. Mass was an embarrassment, not a joy.[33]

Brittany had once been a veritable outdoor museum of religious relics, not only Catholic shrines to Mary (many of which were formerly statues of the Duchesse Anne), but also mysterious Druid ruins along the southern and western coasts. Many are now delapidated

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[31] Ibid., xii.

[32] Ibid., 339.

[33] Ibid.

and defaced, and some remaining have made their way into the curios of the world of the tourist trade.[34]

Tourism has taken its toll on the picturesque corners of the world, and Brittany is no exception. Even before the strong dollar and the ensuing influx of Americans, along with many other travelers from other prosperous nations around the world, Brittany had been a long-time favorite of the vacationing French. This tradition has increased ever since the French state initiated the congé, or five weeks paid vacation, four weeks of which are invariably taken by nearly every French family in the month of August. The "August birds" are especially annoying to the Breton farmer and fisherman, who often do not understand how whole families are able to take a full month off work, when they themselves are at their busiest in the fields and on the fishing boats. The bad feelings accelerate as the Parisian "kodakers" take pictures of the fishermen at work, while the cityfolk themselves often bedeck themselves in so-called Breton garb, looking more like misplaced sailors from a nineteenth century operetta than authentic Breton fishermen. English tourists took on the name of les homards, "the lobsters," since they often burned themselves to a bright red crisp once they planted themselves on the Breton beaches off the English Channel.[35]

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[34]While visiting the Foret of Paimpont last Spring, a misty, moss-covered forest in central Brittany where Merlin the wizard is said to still be living, the mystical nature of the area looked remarkably intact. Innkeepers warned that by mid-summer, on the other hand, the area would be flooded with the littering school children from the cities.

[35]Personal observation, Saint Malo, Brittany, Summer, 1973.

Helias has not much better to say of the social scientists, mostly Americans, who have come to study the plight of present-day Brittany. He wonders if their arrival is "a portent of our imminent demise." In uncharacteristic cynicism, this Breton racconteur welcomes the visitors of the "new social sciences" as a mandate to "put our affairs in order before leaving room for the new tenants."[36] In a tongue-in-cheek futuristic scenario, he refers to Brittany as "QX 29, an outlying suburb of the European section F 75, formerly called Gaul."[37]

The Breton horse-drawn plows have been replaced by tractors, and life's rhythm in Brittany, as in many parts of the world, has had to keep time. Much of the local color has remained, however, as the local cuisine can attest. Breton cuisine has one notable export: the crêpe. While it is the dessert crepe that has made its way to the fancy restaurants of Paris and beyond, it is a much hardier version which is enjoyed in Brittany. More accurately called a gallette, this whole wheat crepe is speckled with browned butter, laden with ham, cheese, fresh vegetables, or fresh seafood, rolled, and eaten as the main course. It should be complemented by a wine-sized bottle of local cider, which is a fermented ale, rather than the sweet apple cider consumed in the United States. Calvados, an apple-based brandy, is occasionally sipped, but it originates from next-door Normandy. The Bretons have their own after-dinner creation, a honey-based liqueur called Chuchenne. It is

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[36] Ibid., 345.

[37] Ibid., 344.

as smooth as the cider is thirst-quenching--and both are guaranteed to liven up a dinner conversation.

Other Breton exports include lobsters and oysters. The Bretons keep for themselves the shellfish they most prefer, mussels. Mussels are steamed in a garlic and parsley broth, then eaten with the fingers, using the smooth black shell of each mussel as a spoon. Butter cookies under the trade names Les Gavottes, or Bisquits Nantais are packaged in colorful tins and shipped round the world. The authentic bread of the provinces is a heavy black peasant bread. This is often spread with lard or a turnip pâté.[38]

Perhaps such details seem inappropriate to historical research. Yet the smell of garlic poultices, the food, drink, music, and legends of a region often have a far longer life than the name of this or that regional organization. It is said that, of all the human senses, the sense of smell is the most lingering. Brittany's briny sea air, the smoking butter of the crèperies, and the mossy mist of her moist forest floors will endure, even if the autonomist efforts do not.

But what lessons do some two hundred years of resurgent regionalism in Brittany hold? What has made the other Celtic regions of Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Wales develop differently, and, to varying degrees, achieve success or suffer failure? And why has regional frustration reached such a fevered pitch in recent decades that bombings in Corsica and casualties in the pays Basque are the highest in years? Could there be clues in the study of Breton autonomist efforts which

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[38]My own observation, June, 1973.

might seem to resolve potential trouble-spots in other parts of the world? There is a temptation to hope this noble a solution might come from these efforts, but each minority culture is unique, and each is operating in a twentieth century state which poses its own constraints. The needs, frustrations, and goals of one ethnic minority may be directly opposed to the needs and goals of another minority culture somewhere else in the world.

Such a discussion can become extremely complex. Assimilation is a term that was introduced by sociologists. It was generally held that ethnic minorities must be welcomed into the majority mainstream. Such an assimilation would be proof positive that ethnic prejudices were overcome, and that the melting pot, at least so went the terminology in the United States, could melt down all differences and fashion a new identity, that of the everyday, all-American citizen. True cultural assimilation is a rarity, and the theory, since it seldom is realized in practice, tends to become a cover for the dominant race to fool itself into thinking it is prejudice-free, while the minority races are asked to deny themselves their distinctive characteristics, or risk appearing un-American. But once again, application of the above discussion to actual trouble spots in the world confuses the issue still further. Black activists, for example, directly challenged the assimilation solution to the ethnic minority issue by championing the unique contents simmering at the bottom of the melting pot with the "Black is Beautiful" campaign.

Perhaps the best known assimilation tragedy is the case of the American Indian. As mentioned earlier, Breton activists have voiced

what they feel to be a parallel between American Indian history and their own. Both are indigenous populations, both have been periodically forbidden their languages, and both have suffered the many, sometimes subtle indignations of becoming assimilated into the collective heritage of the dominant race. For the American Indian, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, though backed by many liberal reform groups and other self-proclaimed "Friends of the Indian," secured for the Indian a new phenomenon: individual ownership of land. The result was that the tribal lands were fragmented, the tribes dispersed, and, most significantly, the way Indians traditionally saw themselves in relationship to the land, as stewards rather than owners, was forever altered.

Though it might be tempting to accuse all white civilizations of being inept perpetrators of inappropriate cultural norms, it would be just as unfair to portray the minority cultures as voicing a united expression of resistance. Part of the price of increased awareness of the world's differences, is that one risks oversimplification in order to respond with what one might hope to be a "timely solution." The Dawes Act was such an oversimplification. The value system projected was not shared by the target culture. The target culture, in fact, consisted of many sub-cultures; individual tribes who were often historical enemies, were now lumped together by the dominant culture in an attempt to deal more efficiently with the "Indian Problem."[39]

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[39]Robert V. Hine, The American West: An Interpretive History (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1984), 218.

Though the parallel is inexact, the on-going struggle of the American Indian Movement to maintain a sense of cultural integrity, while securing economic survival, echoes the Breton struggle as well. Both cultures are unique, and both are full of contradictions. Since the first Breton migration from Cornwall in 600 A.D. to the present-day, efforts to maintain Celtic distinctiveness in France have persisted. It has only been since the French Revolution, however, that these efforts resulted in formal organizations promoting cultural autonomy.

In the late eighteenth century, the Club Breton membership was the elite of Breton nobility, whose advanced education allowed it the luxury of entertaining the enlightened ideals of the Jacobins. Once the Revolution was underway, however, many of these same Breton nobles were targeted as enemies of the Revolution, and, strengthened by the forceful presence of the Catholic Church in the province, staged Counter-Revolutionary revolts throughout the region. Thus, in the closing years of the eighteenth century, Brittany was seen as championing first Jacobinism, and then the landed conservatism of the Right and the Church.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Breton cause was championed by the Right, though, once again, a precise profile of Breton regional organizations is difficult to compile. The only regional organization to thrive in the nineteenth century, the Association Bretonne, served mainly as a cultural society interested in preserving the Breton lore and language. But political activism was an outgrowth of that organization, as the prohibition of this cherished language, and the eventual prohibition of the organization itself, drove the participants underground.

The twentieth century Breton autonomists drew on these unresolved issues of language and cultural heritage, and drew support, as their ancestors had two centuries earlier, from both the Right and the Left. The resurgent activism of the Breiz Atao, its leadership tempted into collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II, condemned Brittany to a reputation of Right-Wing fanaticism. Two decades later, the leadership profile of Breton autonomy is that of highly educated professionals, most of them Left-of-Center politically, who formed the CELIB. The late 1960's ushered in a new, if unlikely coalition between Breton farmers and Parisian university students. In the 1980's, President Francois Mitterrand championed efforts of decentralization, though the political orientation of his Socialist Party, in true Jacobin tradition, has been highly centralized. The evolution of Breton autonomy provides no clear profile of political orientation, social class, education, or profession.

One thing is certain. Minority cultures cannot be expected to fit into the assimilationists' scheme of an undifferentiated world. When a government denies minority cultures their identity, members of such cultures often are driven underground in order to keep alive such basic parts of their heritage as language and religion. When no legitimate sanction is granted by the outside world for the minority's participation in these practices, such participation itself becomes a political act of defiance. An indigenous lifestyle thus becomes an act of sedition.

In a simpler world scheme, the lessons seem clear. The white Afrikaaners should leave South Africa, the Palestinians should be given

a homeland, and the American Indian would again be seen roaming the Plains. But history cannot be undone. The solutions must look to the future, not the past. Comparable minority movements do have their parallels, and it would be a fine thing if some future terrorist act, born of the frustration and defiance of some yet unknown minority culture, could be prevented if dominant cultures recognized the legitimacy of the sub-cultures over whom they have administrative control. But the focus of this study has been Brittany, France. And, in many ways, the historical inconsistencies and lack of written material have made this study reveal more enigmas than it has solved.

Assessing the role of the French government has been an easier task. It has become quite fashionable in recent years to publish critical assessments of French administrative bureaucracy. Decentralization in industry and government has become the uncontested theme of politicians and political scientists. Economic planning committees and regional think tanks, now with government sanction, convene to assure that their region will remain a viable part of France, while keeping a measure of self-direction. The "trouble with France," as has been alluded, is that Frenchmen often are distrustful of political solutions to their problems. This or that committee is often seen as one more cog in the slowly moving bureaucratic wheel.

In Brittany, land of rugged coasts and misty sea air, such committee sessions often seem a world away. Surprisingly, many Bretons are not particularly saddened by the passing of the old ways. The elderly especially, who now must speak a staccatoed Breton, peppered with words in modern French where there are no equivalents in their native tongue

for many twentieth century phenomena, seem content to live in an imperfect world. It seems to be the younger generation of Breton activists, many now struggling to learn Breton at the university, who are angry at the changes and impurities that modern society has brought. They will be the frustrated committee members of the future.

An old Breton paid the women of the world a compliment when he said that men only bear witness to the surface of things; it is the women who are the custodians of profundity. He went on to warn that such a study as is found within these pages would only be a disappointment. He related an old Breton adage that said it takes seven years, seven weeks, and seven days to know with whom you are dealing.[40] The unlikelihood that an outsider could truly grasp "the essential element of things" was further magnified by distances in geography, language, age, and culture. That the essential human element would remain elusive to all students of the periphery was somehow comforting. It echoed Saint-Exupery's "L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux," or "The essential is invisible to the eye."[41] In a province filled with silent Druid ruins and legends of sunken civilizations, the warning rang true.

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[40]Personal observation, Ploermel, Brittany, May, 1984.

[41]Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Le Petit Prince (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1946), 47.

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