



Mayor of Carhaix - Les Bonnets Rouges

Voice-over, Rawdon O'connor

- Rob Brittany has been in the national spotlight in recent months because of demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience carried out by a group known as Les Bonnets Rouges. I'm here in Carhaix-Plouguer, talking to the group's leader, the Maire of Carhaix, Christian Troadec. M. Troadec, can you tell us about the origin of the name, Les Bonnets Rouges?
- M. Troadec It's about the return to a movement, with similar ideas, form and meaning, which happened 300 years ago, in 1675. I was a populist revolt, of peasants, workers, the lower classes, against the power of the king, and against the new tax that Louis 14th wanted to impose. This was a stamp duty, an additional tax on all paper transactions. And it refers back to this 17th century revolt which took place here in Central Brittany. And we've taken their symbol, the red bonnet, because, once again, Brittany is to be subject to a new tax, the Eco-tax. This tax will bring additional hardships to the economy and agriculture in Brittany, which is already in a poor state, with a lot of unemployment, a lot of redundancies. So it's a symbol of a revolt from long ago, which we've taken up once again, a symbol which is easy identifiable and recognised by most of the population.
- Rob What exactly is the group protesting about?
- M. Troadec The first thing is the Eco-tax. You must bear in mind that Brittany is a peninsula, and we are being asked to transport Breton produce by rail. The state has always managed to prevent the rail network functioning properly, and there's no political will whatsoever to develop Brittany's rail system. Besides, we don't have a high-speed rail line either. So when we want to send our goods to the rest of France and Europe, well, it's expensive. And in our peninsular (it's, practically-speaking, an island), all transportation ends up costing us more than elsewhere in France. So we've asked that the Eco-tax be withdrawn completely in Brittany, and not suspended as it is right now. This tax was a little like the final straw, and has brought up other grievances, such as the practice of price-dumping. There are many countries, like Germany, where the wages are much lower, for meat-processors in particular, which means strong competition. We are asking that the minimum wage be paid in Germany. We're also asking for less bureaucratic

constraints, and that more decisions be made locally, to give Bretons more power and Paris less, as has been the case in Britain, with devolution to Wales and Scotland. We're also asking for real devolution, real decentralisation, so that Bretons can decide political matters for themselves. These are the main claims made by Les Bonnets Rouges at present.

Rob And do you think Les Bonnets Rouges have been successful?

M. Troadec It's been a great success, obviously, as there have been large numbers of demonstrators. The first demo took place at Quimper on the 2nd of November last, where there were more than 30,000 people. And at Carhaix, a few days later, on the 30th of November, there were more than 40,000. Now we're organising, on the 8th of March in Morlaix, a States General for Brittany, when all Bretons will be able to come and say what their grievances are, and at the same time, to propose solutions for Brittany. From now on, we want to be heard by the powers that be, in Paris.

Rob Can we talk about another matter now, which will also be of interest to local residents: the deal that has been struck with the Chinese. Can you tell us a little about that?

M. Troadec Where we're talking now, in fact, I'm about to have a meeting with a Chinese delegation. It's true that we in Brittany want to work more and more with the people of Asia, and China in particular. It's a country which won't be able to feed all its population of 1.3 billion (only 7% of their land is farmed), and they are on the look-out for basic foodstuffs. We in Brittany have those basics; we are rich in agricultural produce, particularly milk. The Chinese want to transform the milk into powder for their youngsters, and, thanks to the quality of our milk, and our knowledge of the product, a large group, Synutra, has shown an interest in building a factory here in Carhaix. This will have an impact on jobs, 100 million euros in investment and 250 jobs. It's a great opportunity for us, firstly to have an important outlet for our farmers, and secondly, to have this investment, and new jobs in the area.

Rob What will be of most interest to residents is the price of milk.

M. Troadec The price will be negotiated by the cooperative that will supply the milk, Sodiaal, but you must also bear in mind that the current price of milk world-wide is rising, because demand is very high in Asia. So I think the effect will be very beneficial to the milk farmers.

Rob On a personal note, you were one of the founders of the biggest music festival in France, Les Vieilles Charrues, here in Carhaix. What do you think this festival has brought to the town?

M. Troadec The festival was started over 20 years ago, in the small commune of Landelau, near Carhaix. It came to Carhaix in 1995, has grown every year, and now brings over 200 thousand people here every

July. It's not only the pleasure we receive in welcoming great artists (this year we're getting Elton John, Stromae, and other world class musicians). We've had big stars, Bob Dylan, Clapton, and others. But it's also the economic effect that the festival has on the town. At the moment, there are 20 full-timers employed all year; for the festival, there are 200 other salaried workers taken on. And there are 5000 volunteers working during the festival. There's also a lot of media interest; TV channels from all over the world come to report on the music here. The direct economic impact is important too, with all the festival-goers spending money in the town. But there is something even more important than the economic impact; it's the local pride generated in the town and the area. It's because it's been a success that other projects are attempted, and succeed in their turn. They say that pride in one's achievements is the driving force to success.

Rob And apparently there's soon going to be a museum based on Les Vieilles Charrues.

M. Troadec It's not really a museum, but an interpretation centre for music. At the moment, there isn't anywhere in Brittany dedicated specifically to music, so we in Carhaix want to set up the first place dedicated exclusively to music of all kinds. Breton music of course, Celtic music, but also music of all genres, jazz, rock, hip-hop, all thanks to Les Vieilles Charrues. So we'll have here in Carhaix the place where it will be possible to access all types of music.

Rob That'll be great! Thank you, Mr Troadec, for your time. I know you're very busy, so I appreciate this time spent talking to us.

