

EDUCATION AND THE SANS-CULOTTES IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

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This paper deals with educational views of the sans-culottes (common urban dwellers), especially, with those expressed during the years 1793 and 1794--a period in which there were strong manifestations of popular sentiment. It begins with a general survey of educational conditions during the ancien régime and then shifts to a brief discussion of the principal programs offered during the early stages of the Revolution when bourgeois spokesmen were in control. From a sketch of the instructional system as it existed until June 1793--the point at which men who enjoyed popular support gained control of the government--the emphasis of this study moves to a discussion of the educational characteristics and goals of the Parisian populace. Finally, a considerable portion of this essay is devoted to a review of the plans that were proposed in the Convention.

An important segment of this thesis deals with the state of the schools on the eve of the Revolution. It reveals that the program was marked by many severe limitations and that

it did not meet the fundamental needs of the urban dwellers. A review of the schools as they existed in 1789 indicates that they offered little hope to the common people for improvement in their social conditions or in their economic state.

Reflecting the great changes that began to occur in the political system in 1789, this study focuses its attention on the transfer of the authority over the schools from the hands of ecclesiastical leaders to those of the state. It summarizes important moves in the shift in power and, in addition, reviews, from the viewpoint of the urban masses, three noteworthy instructional plans suggested by spokesmen of the bourgeoisie.

An examination of the general educational goals of the sans-culottes forms the basis for another part of this paper. Along with describing their objectives and characteristics, it examines two plans which, to a marked degree, reflect the sentiments of the common people. The projects of Lepeletier, a martyred hero of the urbanites, and Bouquier, a delegate to the Convention from Dordogne, whose work was enacted into law, are presented as examples of the educational needs and desires of the poorer urban population.

In July 1794, control of the government by representatives of the little people came to an end; however, their period in power was long enough for an observer to formulate several generalizations concerning their views on education. In examining their accomplishments and aspirations, it becomes clear that they were keenly interested in in-

struction and that they jealously guarded their right to control their schools. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that, although the common people were confident in the value of manual training, they did not intentionally seek to ruin the arts and sciences nor to destroy intellectuals per se.

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¹Albert Soboul, The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, trans. by Dwyne Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 5.

²The French Revolution: Conflicting Interpretations, ed. by Frank A. Karker and James M. Lutz (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 280.

³Ibid.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many modern historians of the French Revolution insist that the popular classes in the towns, and especially those in Paris, played a significant role in the great upheaval.¹ Until recently, however, scholars have viewed the activities of urban dwellers "from above;" that is to say, they formed their conclusions on the basis of laws passed by the national legislature or from the actions of widely known leaders. The consensus of opinion from the work of these historians would seem to indicate that the urban lower classes usually acted in complete accord with the bourgeoisie.²

A new school of thought, however, began to emerge at the turn of the century with the writings of Jaurès, Mathiez, and Lefebvre. Their interest lay outside of legal codes or decisions made in legislative chambers; they focused their attention on activities in the sections (wards), communes, and popular societies. In short, these historians viewed the Revolution "from below."³

¹Albert Soboul, The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, trans. by Gwynne Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 5.

²The French Revolution: Conflicting Interpretations, ed. by Frank A. Kafker and James M. Laux (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 280.

³Ibid.

The work of the above three was continued by two Englishmen, George Rudé and R. C. Cobb, and by the Norwegian Kare Tønneson.⁴ The most noted work emerging from this method of observing the Revolution, however, was Albert Soboul's Les Sans-Culottes parisiens en l'An II. Published in 1958, this definitive study of more than a thousand pages carefully examined the activities and reactions of the common people of Paris through an exhaustive review of the records of the various sections of the city. His findings indicated that the urbanites had a distinct individuality and, that far from being aimless mobs as they are so often portrayed, they developed definite goals and objectives embodying their aspirations and concerns.

In examining the educational views of the petits-gens (little people), the writer was struck by the differences manifested between their point of view and that of the bourgeoisie. This paper, therefore, attempts to review the general characteristics of their thoughts on the subject and to discuss instructional plans proposed by their spokesmen. The emphasis in this study has been deliberately placed on the years 1793 and 1794 because it was during this period that their political strength was at its peak. Naturally, their political power lent authority to their educational views.

In dealing with the above problem, the writer often refers to the term, sans-culottes. Unfortunately, there is no

⁴Ibid., p. 282.

exact English equivalent for this historic French term. One can state, however, that it refers to urban dwellers below a certain level of income and social standing. The sans-culottes were common workingmen; the rank and file were small-shop men, tradesmen, and journeymen. Active in the popular societies were also many employés (petty officials), men of some capacity and considerable self-esteem who were poorly paid and often wretched. In general, these simple men of the people had an egalitarian conception of social relationships which, as one might expect, was reflected in their theories on public instruction.

In examining the educational thoughts of the Parisian populace, the author perused documents and papers recording their speeches, resolutions, and petitions. Many of these are reproduced in the Archives Parlementaire, a standard collection of political and constitutional debates in the French legislative bodies; the Procès-verbaux du Comité d'Instruction publique, records and debates of the committee of the National Convention dealing with public instruction; and the Moniteur, the official government journal.

The Youngstown State University Library is fortunate to have among its holdings the extensive Maclure Collection of French Revolutionary Materials. Included among its more than 25,000 items are numerous materials dealing with French education.

Finally, secondary sources were used largely to examine the educational system of the ancien régime. In addition,

these materials laid the basis for the rapid changes caused by the Revolution.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOOLS DURING THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

In order to understand popular views on education during the years 1793 and 1794--years in which there were strong manifestations of democratic sentiment--one must first examine the educational system as it existed during the ancien régime. It is important to learn the characteristics of the system that for centuries shaped the education of the youth of France. Who were the educators and what did they teach? How was the program financed? Was it successful?

A significant feature of the educational organization of the eighteenth century was the role that the Roman Catholic Church played in the administration of the schools. The church unquestionably dominated almost every facet of the educational structure. It directed the schools, approved the teaching staffs, determined what was to be taught, and provided a substantial portion of the finances.⁵ In short, on the eve of the Revolution the church was the fundamental power in matters dealing with instruction in France.⁶

⁵Élix Pontell, Histoire de l'Enseignement en France (Paris: Sirey, 1966), p. 9.

⁶Maurice Gontard, L'Enseignement primaire en France (Paris: Société d'Édition Belles Lettres, 1959), p. 15.

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⁶Maurice Gontard, L'Enseignement primaire en France (Paris: Société d'Édition Belles Lettres, 1959), p. 15.

A second important characteristic of the academic program in the eighteenth century was the state's lack of supervision over the church's administration of the schools. Although at the beginning of the century the state won the right to treat questions dealing with boundaries between school districts, the levying of special taxes for education, and agreements between employers and employees,⁷ these measures were advisory in nature rather than regulatory; they did not represent a basic change in the state's policy. Even the crown's issuance of compulsory attendance proclamations in 1694, 1698, and 1724 cannot be interpreted as moves to increase its influence in educational matters; these decrees were simply political weapons aimed at parents who were suspected of being Protestants.⁸ Penalties against those who violated the rulings were left entirely to the discretion of local authorities. The state simply instructed them to take the necessary steps to solve the problem.⁹

The philosophy of the church relating to the purpose of education was the principal reason for the state's reluctance to interfere in educational matters. The views of the church were in close harmony with those of the monarchy. Believing that one of its fundamental missions was to provide the king's

⁷ H. C. Barnard, Education and the French Revolution (Cambridge: The University Press, 1969), p. 3.

⁸ F. De la Fontainerie, French Liberalism and Education in the XVIII Century (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1932), p. 6.

⁹ Gontard, p. 14.

subjects with a Christian education--an education emphasizing the omnipotent power of God and the absolute authority of His vice-regent on earth--the church sought to form literate, Christian youths. It hoped that its teachings would produce a citizenry that would be loyal and obedient to God and His representatives.¹⁰

The church attempted to achieve its goal by way of an extensive system of institutions. The basic organization of the instructional system consisted of three levels: petites or primary schools, collèges or secondary institutions, and universities. By eighteenth century standards, the number and variety of schools was great.¹¹ On the eve of the Revolution there were thousands of primary schools in France. Paris alone had 334 such facilities. The vastness of the program is further demonstrated by the fact that 562 collèges existed in the nation in 1789 with an enrollment of more than 75,000 students.¹² The final level of the educational scale was composed of more than twenty universities. Added to the basic structure of primary school, collège, and university, there were more than seventy-five special places of learning which the church operated.¹³ These institutions were devoted to such fields of study as engineering, naval science, language, and various technical sub-

¹⁰ Robert Vignery, The French Revolution and the Schools (Madison: The State Historical Society, 1965), p. 10.

¹¹ Jacques Ellul, Histoire des Institutions (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1962), p. 428.

¹² Barnard, p. 7.

¹³ Vignery, p. 9.

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jects.¹⁴

The curriculum in the schools consisted of a pattern that varied only slightly among the various institutions. In primary classes the daily routine centered around the study of Christian beliefs and the mastery of the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. In poorer facilities where less qualified teachers often taught, the routine was frequently reduced to a pattern of endless repetition of simple prayers alternating with the recitation of the alphabet.¹⁵

In the collèges the curriculum generally embraced a program lasting six years. Its primary emphasis was on the mastery of Christian doctrine along with the study of Greek and Latin.¹⁶ After 1750, however, some secondary schools began to deviate from the traditional curriculum and introduced significant changes in their courses of study. These innovations included the use and study of the French language and the teaching of modern history, mathematics, and science. For example, the thirty-six Oratorian collèges stressed the study of advanced mathematics and the teachings of Descartes. Furthermore, their treatment of the classics was not so traditional as that of the more ultramontane Jesuits. The significance of the Oratorian reforms grew

¹⁴Jacques Godechot, Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1951), p. 388.

¹⁵Alfred Rambaud, Histoire de la Civilisation française, Vol. II (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1932) p. 203.

¹⁶Vignery, p. 10.

even greater following the expulsion of the Jesuits from France in 1762.¹⁷

At the top of the educational ladder of the ancien régime in the universities, changes were far less common. On the eve of the Revolution, the study of theology still occupied the most prestigious position in the university's curriculum. In spite of public interest in such areas as science, history, and mathematics, the university stubbornly refused to reform its medieval-oriented curriculum. The church insisted that the study of logic and philosophy should still form the basis of a good university education. In 1789, theoretical exercises rather than practical training served as the basic preparation for doctors, theologians, and lawyers.¹⁸

In addition to dealing with the problems of curriculum, the church had the responsibility of staffing the schools. The bishops, of course, preferred to fill teaching positions with members of teaching orders or other ecclesiastics. Where this proved to be impossible, they were forced to employ lay personnel. Lay candidates usually contested for vacant posts before a jury composed of local religious leaders or the local notables. In more remote areas, however, often the sole judge of the candidates was simply the local curé--an individual whose own education was often questionable. In most cases a bishop would

¹⁷Barnard, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 12-13.

automatically approve those recommended by the local authority. Frequently he had little choice, for it was difficult to attract qualified personnel to rural areas. Thus, candidates who were far from competent were frequently employed.¹⁹

Although the requirements demanded of teachers varied greatly throughout the country, there was one common requisite that prospective teachers had to fulfill; all had to obtain a teaching license from the proper ecclesiastical authority. The bishops, or heads of certain teaching orders, had the exclusive power to grant or reject requests for permission to teach. Since there were no normal schools or standardized programs for teacher preparation, the bishops commonly based their decisions on arbitrary whims. Needless to say, this method of selecting instructors did not make for effective schooling.²⁰

It is interesting to note that ecclesiastical authorities jealously guarded their privilege to choose the nation's teachers, for they considered it to be a powerful weapon against those who would challenge the role of the Catholic Church in France's educational program. They looked upon their right to control the selection of instructors as the most effective means of preventing Jews and Protestants from forming their own schools.²¹

¹⁹Ponteil, pp. 16-17.

²⁰Barnard, p. 4.

²¹Gontard, pp. 9-10.

²²Vignery, p. 8.

²³Ponteil, p. 10.

Although the educational program in France on the eve of the Revolution was quite extensive, the system was marked by a high degree of diversity in the quality of the schools as well as in their distribution throughout the country. Despite the Catholic Church's discipline and hierarchical organization, it did not coordinate and centralize its operation of the schools. As indicated above, in most cases each bishop was the final authority in all educational questions that arose in his diocese. The absence of a central administrator with jurisdiction over the entire state contributed significantly to a lack of uniformity in the program.²²

Another factor accounting for the diversity that existed in the schools was the manner in which the church financed its educational operation. Along with church subsidies and tuition fees, almost all institutions were dependent on private endowments and special local taxes. Support of education was basically a local responsibility; therefore, certain areas were able to provide excellent facilities while others lacked sufficient funds to provide any kind of organized instruction. Wealthy areas of the nation such as Normandy, Lorraine, Alsace, Champagne, Franche-Comté, and Burgandy enjoyed excellent facilities while poorer areas such as the extreme west, the Massif Central, and the extreme south were able to support far fewer institutions.²³

The idea of supporting education on a local basis even caused a disparity to exist among schools located in the same

²²Vignery, p. 8.

²³Ponteil, p. 10.

general area. In the same diocese, educational institutions in cities were generally more numerous and staffed with more qualified personnel than those in rural areas. The lack of uniformity also existed within the larger towns; wealthier sections of the community, naturally, were able to provide better learning opportunities for their children.²⁴

It is difficult to measure the results of the above educational system. Did it produce a literate population? How much of the instructional program actually reached and benefited the common people? In short, was it successful?

Studies have been made in the area of percentage of the population schooled enough to be able to write their names. Although, of course, it can be questioned how far ability to sign one's name is a real test for literacy, the results of such investigations reveal that the northern and eastern parts of France had the greatest success with their educational programs. In Lorraine, for example, marriage records indicate that 89 percent of the males and 65 percent of the females applying for permission to marry were able to write their signatures. On the other hand, in Brittany, an area noted for its scarcity of schools, only 23 percent of the men and 9.48 percent of the women were sufficiently schooled on the eve of the Revolution to sign the marriage register.²⁵ Studies covering the entire nation for the years 1786 to 1790 show that only 47.45 percent of the bride-

²⁴Gontard, pp. 17-19.

²⁵Ponteil, p. 13.

grooms and 26.28 percent of the brides were able to perform the simple task of signing their names.²⁶

The above figures clearly indicate the generally inferior educational opportunities offered to females. One of the reasons for this situation was the official policy of the church that forbade coeducation;²⁷ this, naturally, limited the general effectiveness of the program. Poorer areas experienced great difficulty in providing funds for one school; a second one for girls was totally out of the question.²⁸

It appears, however, that in some parts of France the rule on segregation by sex was not rigidly enforced; the local bishops obviously realized that strict application of this regulation would have prohibited girls from receiving an education. For example, in Le Bigorre, a district in southern France, members of both sexes attended classes in 42 percent of its schools.²⁹

No figures exist that indicate the number of children who were deprived of an education for financial reasons. It is impossible to ascertain the percentage of school attendance among the poorer elements of society, but it can be assumed that economic necessity must have prevented many from attending school.

The church attempted to meet this problem through the use of various teaching orders dedicated to the instruction of

²⁶Barnard, p. 8.

²⁷Ponteil, p. 13.

²⁸Gontard, p. 24.

²⁹Ponteil, p. 13.

the impoverished. The Ursuline Sisters, for example, operated more than 300 primary schools for poor children,³⁰ and the Congregation of Christian Brothers offered free instruction to over 30,000 needy boys in 1789.³¹ In addition, it is estimated that in the same year more than 40,000 pupils received without charge a secondary school education.³²

Although the church attempted to provide educational opportunities for the indigent, it did not really strike at the basic problem. For the destitute, the obstacle that frequently prevented their children from attending classes was the need of their labor to supplement the family income. This was especially true among the poor urban dwellers where often the few sous that the children earned represented an essential part of the family's earnings. A similar situation existed in rural areas where the children's services were vitally needed.³³ In brief, needy children generally did not have the time to go to school, and the fact that the church offered free education did not solve their problem.

Although the foregoing indicates that the church did not effectively meet the needs of the poor, can other aspects of its program be judged more favorably? Did Frenchmen of 1789 consider their schools to be effective and efficient?

³⁰Barnard, pp. 5-6.

³¹Ponteil, p. 11.

³²Rambaud, p. 264.

³³Gontard, p. 35.

The general cahiers of 1789 indicate that wide dissatisfaction was prevalent in regard to the entire educational system. No less than 137 out of a total of 522 general cahiers dealt with the schools.³⁴ Most of them called for improvements in the curriculum or for reforms in the general organization of the instructional program.³⁵ The local cahiers, however, were more precise in their demands and expressed specific complaints against every level of the academic structure. For example, a cahier from Dax, a region in the southern part of France, complained that students who were totally unqualified were frequently granted degrees from their university; little concern was given by the authorities for academic standards.³⁶

A cahier from Sens, a community near Paris, reflected that area's dissatisfaction with another level of the educational system--the collèges. It charged that its school was nothing more than a rich monastery where the students learned little of value. In addition, it claimed that the teachers were poorly qualified and that the authorities were lax in their supervision of instructors.³⁷

³⁴Edme. Champion, La France d'après les Cahiers de 1789 (Paris: A. Colin et Cie., 1897), p. 197.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 197-112.

³⁶M. J. Mavidal and M. E. Laurent (eds.), Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860 (hereafter A.P.), (82 vols.; 1st. ser.; Paris, 1789-1913), III, 88.

³⁷Ibid., V, 756.

³⁹Champion, p. 217.

The strongest attack on the educational program was directed at the primary schools--the level of instruction with which most people were familiar. From Rodez came the plea for the necessary means to improve the quality of its teachers. The cahier commented that low salaries made it difficult to attract trained personnel to that city; thus, its schools were staffed with instructors who were not qualified. As another means to improve their educational institutions, the people of Rodez indicated that they wanted all prospective teachers to pass a rigorous examination.³⁸

A strong indictment of the schools is reflected in the "notebook of grievances" from Clermont-Ferrand. The special significance of this cahier is that twenty-one of those elected to draw up the document were not able to sign it. A similar situation existed to a lesser degree in seven other baillages (districts) from where the cahiers all contained declarations stating that some of those who helped to formulate their document were unable to sign it.³⁹ If one assumes that the electorate chose the better educated leaders in their communities to formulate their cahiers, the general state of education in these areas must have been extremely poor.

Thus, the cahiers reflect the limits and defects of the academic program as it existed in the ancien régime. It is clear, however, that by 1789 Frenchmen were beginning to

³⁸A.P., V. 554.

³⁹Champion, p. 217.

examine carefully the fundamental characteristics of their educational system.

CHAPTER III

BOURGEOIS CONTROL OVER THE SCHOOLS

With the convocation of the States-General in May 1789, measures were soon passed that markedly affected the schools. Through a series of actions taken between 1789 and 1792, the bourgeois-dominated National Constituent Assembly destroyed the power of the church in education, and control of the schools passed into the hands of the state.⁴⁰

One of the earliest measures that influenced the schools came in August 1789, when the Assembly abolished the ancient feudal system. The loss of income derived from seigniorial dues delivered a disastrous financial blow to institutions dependent on feudal taxes. For example, the suppression of only one tax, the gîte, resulted in a 38,000 livres reduction in the anticipated annual income of the Collège Louis-le-Grand.⁴¹ Others felt the loss through decreases in donations and gifts. Patrons who previously derived great wealth from feudal dues were now either unwilling or unable to support educational facilities.⁴²

⁴⁰ Codechoi, pp. 383-384.

⁴¹ Pontell, p. 5.

⁴² Gontard, p. 92.

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⁴⁰Godechot, pp. 383-384.

⁴¹Ponteil, p. 5.

⁴²Gontard, p. 92.

Another serious blow to institutions of learning resulted from the decision of the Assembly in November 1789, to nationalize most church properties. Although some educational establishments were still able to operate on revenues from holdings exempt from the decree, their deathblow came in October 1790, as a consequence of the state's decision to secularize all remaining ecclesiastical properties.⁴³

Along with undermining the church's financial control over the schools, the state systematically destroyed the power of religious leaders in administrative matters. In November 1789, the Assembly took an important step in this direction by prohibiting the admission of new members into religious orders;⁴⁴ this action threatened future supplies of instructors loyal to the church. Other important moves toward state control over education soon followed. In April 1790, the Assembly voted to assume all financial responsibilities for the church which, of course, also meant responsibility for the schools.⁴⁵ In July 1790, the government issued the important Church Establishment act which transformed the church into a state department. The legislative body expanded the act in March 1791; the new ruling required all teachers, lay or ecclesiastical, to take an oath of allegiance to the new constitution. The destruction of any remaining fragments of church authority over the schools came

⁴³Ponteil, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁴Barnard, p. 60.

⁴⁵Vignery, p. 20.

to an end in August 1792, with a decree that forbade religious congregations to operate institutions of learning.⁴⁶

During the years in which the state won the right to direct the nation's educational program, many individuals focused their attention on the question of schools. Debates in the Assembly as well as numerous articles in the press and pamphlets reflect the significance that Frenchmen obviously attached to the problem. For the little people, however, the bourgeois plans proposed for legislative consideration in the Assembly did not offer effective solutions for their immediate needs. From various Parisian sections (wards) came appeals for practical instruction rather than for academic training.⁴⁷ The sans-culottes frequently expressed their desire for a type of education that would enable the individual to acquire a productive and useful métier (trade).⁴⁸ The bourgeois-controlled legislatures in the years between 1789 and June 1793, however, largely ignored popular pleas; members of the legislative body repeatedly suggested and considered plans that were oriented towards middle-class values. In addition to the teaching of reading, mathematics, and writing, their programs generally included provisions for higher learning, the study of foreign languages, the formation of extensive libraries, and the de-

⁴⁶Godechot, pp. 384-385.

⁴⁷A.P., LXVIII, 249, 380.

⁴⁸Ibid., 255.

velopment of the sciences. Such a course of study obviously had little appeal to the common people.⁴⁹

The work of the Comte de Mirabeau is an example of an instructional plan in which one senses a strong bourgeois interpretation of the education question; he desired reforms, but not a complete break with the past. In short, rather than calling for far-reaching, democratic proposals, Mirabeau merely recommended adjustments in the old system. For instance, the curriculum that he proposed was essentially a combination of traditional disciplines stressed during the ancien régime--religion, Latin, and language skills--with the more modern subjects of French, science, and modern history.⁵⁰

Mirabeau's reluctance to carry the ideals of a democratic revolution too far is also revealed in other aspects of his proposal. Reflecting a view held by many members of the bourgeoisie--the belief that it was impractical as well as dangerous to provide free education for all--Mirabeau suggested the charging of tuition at all stages of his multileveled program.⁵¹ This was obviously aimed at making education available only to an elite few. In addition, according to his plan, the old custom that offered superior educational opportunities to males was to be maintained; schooling for females was considered to be neither

⁴⁹Soboul, Parisian Sans-Culottes, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁰Ponteil, pp. 53-54.

⁵¹Vignery, p. 21.

practical nor wise.⁵²

The most striking feature of Mirabeau's project concerned an innovation at the top of the educational scale which, of course, would not have directly benefited many of the populace. He encouraged the establishment of a great national lycée (institute) in Paris. This facility was to serve the most gifted scholars in the nation as a center for research and training.⁵³

Although the great orator's plan was widely discussed, his project was never officially laid before the Constituent Assembly. The first plan offered as a formal proposal for legislative consideration was Talleyrand's Report on Public Education.⁵⁴

In many ways, Talleyrand's proposal was similar to Mirabeau's. Talleyrand, too, assumed a basically academic approach to the question of education. Although he proposed a curriculum that incorporated a wide range of subject matter, it contained little to satisfy the needs of the poor urban population. For example, he called for the extensive teaching of mathematics and the placing of great emphasis on the correct use of the French language. In addition, training was to be offered in modern languages, composition, practical sciences, history, geography, physical education, and civic and moral instruction.⁵⁵

⁵²Barnard, p. 66.

⁵³Ponteil, p. 53.

⁵⁴Vignery, p. 22.

⁵⁵Barnard, pp. 71-75.

Once again, it was clearly evident that this member of the bourgeoisie did not understand the aspirations of the sans-culottes.

Supplementing the above formal educational program, great public festivals were proposed as a means to teach and dramatize the ideals of the new state.⁵⁶ In addition, Talleyrand believed that the general public should be exposed to learning through libraries. One public library was to be established in every department; they were to be organized with books that had formerly belonged to the church. According to his estimate, there were more than four million volumes in France that could be used for this purpose.⁵⁷

The above suggestions again reflect Talleyrand's lack of understanding of the needs and desires of the popular classes. Although the establishment of libraries was a laudable gesture, it probably meant little to the simple people. In such facilities they saw little means for the improvement of their condition.

Presented in the closing weeks of the Assembly in 1791, Talleyrand's plan was too complex for the representatives to discuss thoroughly.⁵⁸ Thus, the legislative body did not act on his ideas, and the nation was still without an official educational program.

In 1791, however, two important steps were taken toward the establishment of an instructional system. First,

⁵⁶A.P., XXX, 526-531.

⁵⁷Ibid., 469.

⁵⁸Vignery, p. 24.

the preamble to the Constitution of 1791 provided for the creation of public schools open to the children of all French citizens.⁵⁹ Second, in October 1791, the legislative Assembly created a Committee of Public Instruction to investigate the problem of formulating an educational program. The Assembly appointed the Marquis de Condorcet, a philosophe and admirer of Rousseau and Turgot, to head the committee.⁶⁰

In a plan that took six months to prepare, Condorcet reported his ideas to the Assembly on April 21 and 22, 1792. Throughout the famous report Condorcet reflected his basic philosophy that popular education was the basis for human progress. Therefore, a good educational program, in his view, would improve both man and society.⁶¹ Society, for its own good as well as for the welfare of the individual, was obliged to provide gratuitous education at the primary level for all.⁶²

Clearly revealing the principle of equality--a principle common to the thinking of most eighteenth-century philosophes--Condorcet reminded the legislators that they must not be guilty of extending political equality to all men without equally providing them with the means to learn about and to comprehend their liberties. A man who had no means to become acquainted with his rights was at a serious disadvantage with

⁵⁹John Hall Stewart, A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 232.

⁶⁰Ponteil, p. 60.

⁶¹Stewart, p. 346.

⁶²Gontard, p. 87.

those who did; and this, he stated, was simply another form of slavery.⁶³

Condorcet's passion for equality in education even extended to women. Unlike Mirabeau and Talleyrand who rejected this idea, he argued that men and women were politically and intellectually equal; thus, both deserved the right of equal access to learning opportunities. Furthermore, his reasoning included the modern concept that family relationships were far stronger and more meaningful when both partners had a comparable degree of education.⁶⁴

Although Condorcet's thoughts on equality of education were different from those expressed in earlier plans, in many other areas his ideas varied only slightly from previous bourgeois-oriented projects. It appears that he was either unwilling or unable to recognize that the solution to the pressing educational needs of the urban dwellers did not lie in academic training. Similar to the thinking of Mirabeau and Talleyrand, Condorcet, too, suggested a complex system of schools with a curriculum that included classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, civic morality, science, foreign languages, social studies, and the study of commerce.⁶⁵ This course of study clearly appealed to the middle-class or those with commercial interests, not to the common people.

⁶³Marquis de Condorcet, Rapport sur l'Organisation générale de l'Instruction publique (Paris: Jules Moureau et fils, 1883), p. 5.

⁶⁴Gontard, p. 88.

⁶⁵Ponteil, pp. 61-62.

Another feature in Condorcet's proposal that undoubtedly met with the disapproval of the urban population was his attempt to shield the educational system from outside influences. Reflecting a spirit of political and religious freedom that was characteristic of the Enlightenment, he rejected the idea that public education must be a combination of indoctrination and intellectual training.⁶⁶ Condorcet envisioned the classroom as a laboratory where the concepts of equality and freedom of thought ought to be demonstrated and practiced.⁶⁷ The teacher's role in the learning process was to instruct students in facts, not to inculcate religious or political dogma.⁶⁸ The instructor was not to be concerned with opinions and beliefs; this was solely the responsibility of the child's family or church.⁶⁹ In his view, neither the state nor the church had any right to interfere with the privilege of the student to criticize the political, social, or religious institutions of his country; the proper role of the state was to create and guide the educational system, but it was never to act as its master.⁷⁰

For the sans-culottes, the above view must have been bewildering and confusing. Believing that their newly won freedoms were in constant jeopardy from those eager to destroy the Revolution, the urbanites deemed it sheer lunacy to refrain

⁶⁶Vignery, p. 26.

⁶⁷Gontard, p. 88.

⁶⁸Condorcet, pp. 63-68.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 4-6.

from including their political and moral values in their children's education. They saw in such teachings a powerful weapon that would insure the permanence of the Republic. Without such training, their cause would have been defenseless against those who hoped to turn the calendar back to the era before 1789. For these people, the destiny of the Revolution lay in their children, and it seemed absolutely essential to instill its ideals into the impressionable minds of the nation's youth.⁷¹ Thus, according to the view of many, this aspect of Condorcet's proposal was unrealistic, impractical, and extremely dangerous.

Like its predecessors, the Condorcet Plan was not enacted into law. Presented on the same day that war was declared against Austria, it received little attention. The legislators were far too occupied with the problems of the impending conflict to devote much attention to the plan; thus, the question of education was postponed for future consideration.⁷² The nation, therefore, was still without an organized instructional program, and schools that were able to remain open did so on a haphazard, unorganized basis.

As shown above, the educational plans that were presented by bourgeois spokesmen in the Assembly did not essentially meet the fundamental demands of the urban masses; they did not reflect their feelings nor their needs. One must now turn to popular views on education to determine what the objectives of the sans-culottes were and what types of programs they envisioned.

⁷¹A.P., LXVIII, 255.

⁷²La Fontainerie, p. 315.

CHAPTER IV

POPULAR VIEWS ON FEATURES AND AIMS OF EDUCATION

General Characteristics

From June 1793 to July 1794, the sans-culottes played a vital role in the political affairs of the new revolutionary government. The urban dwellers, however, did not lose sight of their interest in social matters and, in particular, the problem of education. In fact, after June 1793, their concern in this area grew even keener, for they realized that schools were a valuable means by which they could reinforce their political gains and, at the same time, obtain their social objectives.⁷³

Although the little people expressed varying opinions on problems dealing with education, one can, nevertheless distinguish several basic themes that appear to be common in their thoughts. Certain characteristics were clearly fundamental to their cause and constant in their pleas.

One common feature in their demands concerned the need for the immediate establishment of a public educational program; their appeals were characterized by a sense of desperate urgency. They were simply appalled that after a lapse of nearly four years the state was still without an official policy on instruction. From the various Parisian sections (wards) came urgent requests

⁷³Albert Soboul, Les Sans-Culottes parisiens en l'An II (Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1958), p. 497.

for the new democratically-controlled Convention to take prompt action toward the implementation of a program. An example of such sentiment can be found in the testimony of a citizen from the Section Faubourg-Montmartre. According to his observation, the common people in his part of the city wanted a quick solution to the problem of public instruction.⁷⁴ A similar appeal to the Convention came from a citizen of the Section Poissonnière. There, he reported, children, mothers, and fathers were anxiously awaiting the immediate organization of an educational program.⁷⁵ One finds the same plea from the Section Droits de l'Homme as well as from the Section les Amis de la Patrie.⁷⁶ Joseph Fouché, a Jacobin member of the Convention, clearly reflected the above feeling through his statement: "If our schools are quickly organized, we shall have consummated the greatest of revolutions."⁷⁷

Another common thought among the Parisians was the belief that something totally new was needed; a system of institutions of made over church schools was unacceptable.⁷⁸ The programs that emerged from the thoughts of the little people were characterized by bold and innovative approaches; all demanded a complete break with the past.

⁷⁴A.P., LXVIII, 255.

⁷⁵Ibid., 316.

⁷⁶Ibid., 285, 711.

⁷⁷The Maclure Collection of French Revolutionary Materials (hereafter Maclure Collection), 1114:18. J. Fouché, Réflexions sur l'Education publique (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, n.d.), p. 2.

⁷⁸Ibid., 1115:1. Pétition présentée à la Convention par la Commune, les Sections, les Districts ruraux et les Sociétés populaires et réunies (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, n.d.), pp. 1-6.

Albert Soboul, the great historian of the sans-culottes, emphasized an additional common feature found in their views; this was the demand for free instruction.⁷⁹ There are numerous examples of statements made by the little people that substantiate Soboul's view. The Jacobin lawyer Joseph Lequinio, for instance, envisioned a graduated tax based on wealth as a means to operate the schools; under no circumstances was the lack of money to be a hindrance to those seeking instruction. Stressing that it was the duty of the wealthy to provide the state with the bulk of the needed funds, he argued that, even though the wealthy may have worked hard to earn their riches, they, nevertheless, took their money at some point from society. Thus, it was their duty to return at least a portion of their material gains to their fellow citizens, and support of public education would be a fitting manner for them to meet this obligation.⁸⁰

Examination of the educational views of the urbanites also reveals the theme that great personal sacrifice and courage were essential to the success of their program. They believed that history would judge their deeds and that it was vital for them to succeed. Leaders made it clear that republican education would not always be easy to accept; they warned their followers that children would often be involved in manual labor. In addition, parents could expect to be separated from their sons

⁷⁹Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, p. 496.

⁸⁰Maclure Collection, 1039:2. J. Lequinio, Discours sur l'Education commune (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), pp. 5-7.

and daughters for extended periods of time.⁸¹

Although they believed their task to be a difficult one, the urban population expressed a feeling of optimism and great pride in attempting to meet the challenge of establishing an egalitarian educational system. They were certain that future generations would applaud their courageous actions and would admire their efforts.⁸² Deputy Lequinio reminded the sans-culottes that France was not the first nation to experience liberty. Others had previously known the joys of freedom, but they had been unable to maintain their gains because they had neither the will nor the power to establish the necessary educational institutions. This, he warned, must never be allowed to happen in France; the common people must have the courage to introduce and maintain an instructional system that would sustain the popular movement.⁸³

A distinguishing feature of the sans-culotterie was its passion for simplicity. This characterized its dress, speech, and mode of living; and, as one might expect, this trait also appeared in its thoughts on education. The suggestions that the petits-gens offered on the subject were consistently marked with the demand for simplicity. Typical of such feelings were those of Citizen Isambert from the Section Faubourg du Nord

⁸¹Maclure Collection, 1115:2. J. Le Clerc, Discours sur l'Instruction publique (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), pp. 4-12.

⁸²Ibid., 1115:24. J. Lequinio, Discours sur l'Education commune (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), p. 6.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 1-2.

who commented that an educational program acceptable to the populace had to be uncomplicated because the only language it knew was simple.⁸⁴ In short, for the urbanites, simple laws were the wisest and most effective, and this was particularly applicable to education.

General Objectives

The thoughts of the sans-culottes on what was to be taught reflected to a substantial degree their passion for simplicity and utility. Drawing much of their inspiration from Rousseau's Emile, the common people formulated ideas that were basically uncomplicated and designed to accomplish immediate and definite goals.⁸⁵

For the urban dwellers, the objectives of the instructional program could be broken down into three general categories. First, they believed that schools should provide the individual with utilitarian training; an educated person should be familiar with physical work. In addition, civic education belonged in the curriculum; it was impossible to be a good citizen without understanding one's rights and obligations. Finally, moral training was assigned a significant role in the total program. No education could be considered complete without effective instruction in rules and standards of conduct.⁸⁶

⁸⁴A.P., LXVIII, 380.

⁸⁵Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, p. 498.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 1.

Although the little people did not originate the idea of moral training, they considered it to be an integral part of their program. Such instruction, in their view, simply referred to the teaching of simple acts of kindness and virtuous behavior. The objective in moral training was the realization of a society where living with one's fellow man would be more meaningful and enjoyable.⁸⁷

An example of what the urban masses desired from moral education can be found in the thoughts of the Montagnard Nicholas Hentz. In a report presented to the Convention, he proposed a program stressing such qualities as truthfulness, kindness, gratitude, obedience, respect, loyalty, and responsibility to the nation.⁸⁸ According to his thoughts, the teaching and implementing of the above traits would lead to a vast improvement of man and society. Hentz summed up his ideas with the idealistic view that the new republican regime should establish an instructional system that would try to make men better than the laws.⁸⁹

Deputy Jean-Bon St. André was another who treated the question of moral instruction. His idea of such training involved the instruction of simple rules of behavior. He commented that the son of Mary did not prescribe an elaborate code to His followers; Christ was content to recommend justice, good deeds, and prayers. St. André advised Frenchmen to follow this wise

⁸⁷ Maclure Collection, 1114:11. F. Daunau, Essai sur l'Instruction publique (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), pp. 17-18.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1114:19. N. Hentz, Sur l'Instruction publique (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), pp. 16-18.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

example.⁹⁰

In addition to being valuable to the individual, the common people looked upon the development of moral qualities as being extremely vital to the interests of the new state. Those imbued with republican feelings saw in such training the fundamental ingredient for the growth and preservation of their egalitarian spirit. Without moral instruction, the foundations of the Republic would be seriously weakened, and the nation would unquestionably perish.⁹¹

The sans-culottes of the Section de la Place des Fédérés were in complete accord concerning the importance of moral training in the instructional program. Their simple reasoning led them to the following conclusion: without moral training there could be no virtue; and, without virtue, there could be no mutual understanding and respect--the cornerstones of a republican system.⁹² They obviously could not envision an educational system for their egalitarian state that did not incorporate moral instruction.

Deputy Hentz was another strong supporter of such training as a part of the total learning process. He warned against the dangers of self-interest and selfishness. Insisting that the children of the nation must be taught at all costs to curb

⁹⁰Ibid., 1115:8. J. St. André, Sur l'Education nationale (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, s.d.), p. 9

⁹¹Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, pp. 496-498.

⁹²Ibid., p. 498.

these vices, Hentz commented that egoism was the greatest enemy of the Republic because it fostered inequalities and made the establishment of an egalitarian society impossible.⁹³ Jean Leclerc, an enragé (a name given to a group of extremists who demanded a series of social and economic reforms favorable to the poor), expressed a similar opinion. He, too, saw in moral training which stressed equality among men, the means to prevent aristocrats from perpetuating their haughtiness and superior tendencies--traits that he viewed as being inconsistent with republican ideals.⁹⁴

From the Section des Droits de l'Homme came the same sentiments. In an address to the Convention on the fourth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, leaders from this part of Paris made it clear that they wanted an instructional program emphasizing the teaching of duty and virtue. Give us such instruction, they pleaded, and you will create invincible defenders of the Republic.⁹⁵

Along with demanding moral training, the urban masses requested civic instruction; numerous groups and individuals expressed this request to the Convention. Typical of such petitions was that of Citoyenne (female citizen) Bayard from the Section Bon Conseil. On July 7, 1793, she asked for an educational program leading to the development of Spartan-like vir-

⁹³ Maclure Collection, 1114:19. Hentz, Sur l'Instruction publique, pp. 19-20.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1115:2, Le Clerc, Discours sur l'Instruction publique, pp. 5-10.

⁹⁵ A.P., LXVIII, 711.

tues in youth and the promotion of patriotic feelings.⁹⁶ Others echoed this thought and added that educational programs must teach the concepts of liberty and equality along with the explanations of natural and civil law. In a similar vein, the Société patriotique du Luxembourg saw a need for instruction on comparative governments. Confident of the superiority of their republican system, these sans-culottes saw in this form of civic education a means to reveal the evils that flowed from tyrannical regimes and the good that resulted from republican rule.⁹⁷

For many of the urban dwellers, the idea of civic training also extended to the treatment of questions dealing with religion. The little people evidently saw in the Catholic Church a great danger to their republican regime, and they loudly expressed this fear to their representatives in the Convention. For example, Section Panthéon-Français urged an all-out campaign to expose the horrors of the church. It demanded the creation of écoles de liberté (freedom schools) in every canton of the Republic. Suggesting that the function of these schools would be to counter the propaganda that the bigots continued to spread in France, it proposed the operation of these republican institutions on Sundays and on all holy days.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., LXVIII, 381.

⁹⁷ Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, p. 497.

⁹⁸ A.P., LXXIV, 265.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, p. 498.

The petition from the Section Panthéon-Français expanded its thoughts and warned that the Republic needed a complete educational program that would counter the scourge of their egalitarian state--the church. According to the signers of the document, destruction of the "menace" could most effectively be achieved through emphasizing the rights and duties of all citizens. Stating that the threat posed by the church was based on the general lack of education among the poor urban masses, the petitioners appealed to the Convention to help them gain their liberties by promoting civic instruction that would defeat the influence of the church. Their petition pointed out that only superstition and ignorance were keeping the Republic from replacing the papal tiara with the red cap of the Revolution.⁹⁹

In addition to moral and civic instruction, common people were unanimous in their requests for practical training. They demanded useful education that would assure their children a secure future.¹⁰⁰ Again, the various Parisian sections expressed their feelings on this aspect of education. Three sections from St. Antoine, a part of Paris inhabited mainly by the working class, and one from Faubourg-Montmartre, demanded that professional training should be a part of any plan deemed appropriate for the Republic. In addition to pointing out the obvious result of manual training--the preparation of the individual to earn a living--they were sufficiently sophisticated in their reasoning to incorporate sociological

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Soboul, Sans-Culottes An II, p. 498.

arguments in their pleas. In their view, vocational training for all was the key to the creation of a more contented society; social harmony and happiness could never be achieved without the development of the individual's ability to live off his own labors. It was impossible for a harmonious society to exist when some elements thrived on the labor of others.¹⁰¹

Jean-Henri Hassenfratz, a spokesman of the Section Faubourg-Montmartre, saw another important reason why practical instruction was needed. In a speech delivered to the Jacobin Club, he warned that enemies of the Revolution of May 31 (the movement that expelled the Girondins from the Convention), would attempt to undermine the strength of the nation by weakening the schools; they would call for educational programs providing no means for practical training. Hassenfratz charged that their enemies did not want the Republic to have competent, energetic young people; they wanted the nation's schools to be capable of producing nothing more dangerous than dancers and singers.¹⁰² In such a view, Hassenfratz expressed a feeling that was held by many of the democratically-oriented urban groups--the fear that the nation would soon become enslaved to neighboring states if it did not provide an educational system that encouraged the development of manual skills in which the child learned to work with his hands and

¹⁰¹A.P., LXVIII, 256.

¹⁰²Ibid., 210.

to use his muscles.

To the sans-culotterie, graduated schools stressing academic subjects were not only unnecessary, they were harmful. A hierarchical system inevitably produced cupidity and egoism--elements that, as cited above, many viewed as being extremely dangerous to a republic. St. André, a frequent spokesman for the views of the little people, was extremely critical of any program including graded schools in its makeup. In his view, they produced nothing more than a multitude of mediocre scholars who were simply added burdens on the poor workers.¹⁰³

In addition, the petitions of the urban dwellers reflect another danger that they imagined in the establishment of intellectual training. Again, it was St. André who effectively summarized their ideas. In this type of education, he warned, there was always the inherent danger of producing a priesthood of intellectuals with its objective being the suppression of the rights and liberties of the poor.¹⁰⁴

Thus, from the above, one can conclude that the objective of education, according to the sans-culottes, was the preparation of virtuous, productive, and loyal citizens. Through moral, civic, and practical training rather than by intellectual education, the common people hoped to improve political, social, and economic conditions for themselves and,

¹⁰³Maclure Collection, 1115:8. St. André, Sur l'Education nationale, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 8-9.

more important, for future generations. It now remains to be seen how these general objectives were translated into concrete educational programs. What did their leaders propose?

THE LEPELETIER PROJECT

With the imprisonment of the king in August 1792, the course of the Revolution assumed a new direction. Of prime significance in the changes that occurred was the election of a new and more democratic legislative organization, the National Convention. It was with this body that the hopes of the renouveau lay for an educational program that would be more representative of their needs and demands.

Although the common people presented various suggestions to the newly elected legislature, more pressing demands prevented the Convention from acting on their proposals. By the fall of 1792, the delegates had to contend with such vital problems as external war, civil strife, and the trial and execution of the king.¹⁰⁵

With the death of Louis XVI in January 1793, members of the Convention began to turn their attention to the question of public instruction.¹⁰⁶ The importance of the problem can be seen in the delegates' decision to place education permanently on the legislative agenda. Only two other matters, war and finance, were accorded such preferential treatment.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Barnard, p. 101.

¹⁰⁶ Vignery, p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE LEPELETIER PROJECT

In February 1793, the Convention passed another ruling that reflected its deep concern. It approved a resolution by deputy Gilbert Romme to devote every Thursday to the discussion of education. The official government journal, *Le Moniteur*, reported that his suggestion was received with an enthusiastic response on the part of the Convention's members. The delegates on the convention hall, however, were not the only ones who were concerned with education. In the months following the fall of 1792, that they were being heard, more pressing demands prevented the Convention from acting on their proposals. By the fall of 1792, the delegates had to contend with such vital problems as external war, civil strife, and the trial and execution of the king.¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰⁷Ibid.

In February 1793, the Convention passed another ruling that reflected its deep concern. It approved a resolution by deputy Gilbert Romme to devote every Thursday to the discussion of education until a solution was found. Le Moniteur, the official government journal, reported that his suggestion was received with an enthusiastic reception by both the delegates and the spectators in the convention hall.¹⁰⁸

Even though extensive time was devoted to the question of public instruction, little positive legislation was enacted. For the little people, it was not until the expulsion of the Girondists from the Convention in June 1793, that they began to see indications that their appeals were being heard.

The Montagnard-controlled Convention moved swiftly to confront the issue. On July 3, it appointed a commission of six with instructions to formulate a workable plan and to have it ready within ten days.¹⁰⁹ On July 13, Robespierre, a member of the commission, presented a plan written by the martyred Michel Lepeletier, and, for the first time, an educational project embracing the views of many sans-culottes was placed before the national legislative body.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur depuis la Réunion des Etats-Généraux, jusqu'au Consulat (hereafter Moniteur), (32 vols; Paris: 1840-1845), XV, no. 38, February 7, 1793.

¹⁰⁹J. Guillaume (ed.), Procès-verbaux du Comité d'Instruction publique de la Convention national (hereafter P.V.), (6 vols.; Paris, 1891-1907), II, 88.

¹¹⁰Moniteur, XVII, no. 194, July 13, 1793.

The author of the scheme, Lepeletier, was, prior to 1789, a member of the noblesse de robe and held a seat in the powerful parlement of Paris. Early in the course of the Revolution his sentiments had shifted to those of the popular cause, and he had eventually become closely identified with republican ideals. On January 20, 1793, the day after he voted for the execution of Louis XVI, a fanatic royalist assassinated Lepeletier, and, almost immediately, he became a great hero to those who espoused the republican cause.¹¹¹

Although Lepeletier's bourgeois background probably influenced his thinking to some degree, his plan, nevertheless, enjoyed great popularity among many influential leaders of the city's population. If the sentiments of such leaders as Robespierre, Bourdon, and Lequinio were representative of the feelings of the rank and file, many aspects of the project were evidently in close harmony with the prevailing mood of the urban dwellers.

At the heart of Lepeletier's plan was a theme that the populace unquestionably approved--common and equal education for all. To accomplish this, he proposed the establishment of approximately 25,000 communal boarding schools with compulsory attendance for all boys between the ages of five and twelve and for all girls between five and eleven. To insure the cooperation of all parents, harsh penalties, such as increased taxes and revocation of civic rights,

¹¹¹A. Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris: Librairie F. Rieder, 1917), p. 400.

were proposed.¹¹²

One of the features of the plan that was most attractive to the common people concerned the proposed routine in the above institutions. Clothing and food were to be plain, and the general existence of the student was to be a Spartan-like experience. Although the bourgeois passion for economy and efficiency may have led Lepeletier to suggest such an arrangement, it was, nevertheless, in perfect harmony with the views of the idealistic sans-culottes. For them, such a program echoed their sentiments that self-control and sacrifice were important character-building influences.

The proposed curriculum in the communal boarding schools was also in accord with the feelings of the urban population. Boys and girls were required to spend most of the school day in ateliers or factories. In addition, males were to learn the rudiments of measuring and surveying while girls became familiar with needlework and laundry chores. Every child, of course, was also expected to master the elementary principles of reading, writing, and ciphering.¹¹³ Although one can speculate that bourgeois observers saw in such training the assurance that the nation would be guaranteed a skilled labor force, at the same time, the curriculum clearly appealed to those who followed the teachings of Rousseau. Through this type of instruction, everyone was pro-

¹¹²A.P., LXVIII, 663, 665.

¹¹³Ibid., 673.

vided with an opportunity to learn a productive métier (trade).

Another area of Lepeletier's plan that attracted the attention of the republican-minded urban groups concerned the provision for civic and moral training. The project suggested the learning of national songs and important events in the history of the Republic. In addition, all students were to study the constitution, economy, and fundamental principles of morality.¹¹⁴

An interesting feature of the plan concerned Lepeletier's ideas on the administration of the schools. Each school was to be in the hands of an elected council made up of fifty-two local fathers. Along with serving in the elected body, each father had the added responsibility of serving one week per year as the directeur (principal) of the institution.¹¹⁵ Although Lepeletier stated that he selected this method of administering the schools because it would enable fathers to have some control over the upbringing of their children, one can speculate that the bourgeois virtue of thrift might have influenced him in his choice. It is interesting to note that Lepeletier completely avoided the subject of payment for the services that the fathers rendered.

In the view of many sans-culottes, the above system of operating the schools was perfectly satisfactory. Imbued with a spirit of direct democracy, local control over their

¹¹⁴Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 670.

schools seemed to be an excellent method to observe at close hand and to supervise those who instructed their children.

Another aspect of the proposal that strongly attracted the attention of the little people took the form of a corollary to the project. Lepeletier realized that implementation of compulsory education would be ruinous to poor parents who needed the services of their children to supplement the family income. Therefore, reimbursements for parents of school-aged children were suggested; the amounts ranged from 100 livres to 300 livres, with the larger amounts going to parents with more than eight children in school. The smaller sum was to be given to those with less than four offsprings in the boarding institutions. The payment of all such monies was contingent on proof that the mother had nursed and cared for the child herself. In addition, the Republic was not to permit any eligible parent to refuse the recompense; wealthy parents with haughty attitudes would not be allowed to reject the offering.¹¹⁶

Although Lepeletier's scheme included many ideas that were favorable to the urban masses--free education, moral training, manual instruction, local control, reimbursements for parents--one suggestion was evidently contrary to the thinking of the majority of the common people. Lepeletier deemed it practical and wise to provide approximately two percent of the student population with some form of higher education in a system of graded schools.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 673.

¹¹⁷ Barnard, p. 122.

For nearly a month, leaders of the sans-culottes discussed heatedly in the Convention as well as in the press and in pamphlets the feasibility of establishing a publicly supported program of higher learning. In the view of many, this type of educational structure was far too reminiscent of that which existed during the ancien régime and should be removed from the plan.

Reflecting his egalitarian feelings, deputy Nicholas Hentz loudly objected to any project that included a graded system of schools. It was unjust, he stated, to force the poor to pay for a program that maintained disciplines that were of no value to the security of the Republic. He reminded his fellow deputies that while the sans-culottes were overthrowing the old regime, the intellectuals did nothing more strenuous than exercise their vocal chords and their writing hands. Higher education on a mass basis was not needed, and, furthermore, it was dangerous to the security of the Republic.¹¹⁸

Another aspect of the proposal, the communal boarding schools, also raised considerable controversy. The followers of the teaching of Rousseau could not reconcile the formation of such institutions with the thoughts of the great philosophe. A Montagnard, Clair Thibadeau, cited the maisons d'égalité (communal boarding schools) as obvious deviations from the way nature intended man to learn. The disciples of Emile made it clear that, in their mind, the mother was the child's natural nurse

¹¹⁸ A.P., LXIX, 675.

and the father was his natural teacher.¹¹⁹

At the same time, strong voices in the Convention countered the above objections. For those who believed it was vital to instill in children good work habits and patriotic virtues at an early age, the plan appeared to be the ideal solution.

Their counter argument centered around the theme that, without self-sacrifice, the cause of the Revolution would be doomed; a truly republican and egalitarian society could not be established so long as selfish aristocratic parents continued to teach their children ideas of inequality. Thus, although it might be painful on a personal level, for the good of the nation, it was essential to remove young republicans from the evil influences that they might encounter at home. Robespierre and Lequinio denounced the opposition as being weak and urged them to show their courage.¹²⁰

Leaders of urban groups who favored Lepeletier's project saw in the compulsory institutions no serious deviation from the ideas of Rousseau. They pointed out that the first five years of the child's life were to be spent with his parents. Furthermore, in the communal schools, the child would still be under the direct influence and guidance of the fa-

¹¹⁹ Maclure Collection, 1039:3. C. Thibadeau, Discours sur l'Education (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), p.7.

¹²⁰ Moniteur, XVII, no. 237, August 15, 1793.

thers serving as directors.¹²¹

Perhaps the strongest supporter of the plan was Robespierre. For the Incorruptible, the proposal undoubtedly represented a possible means of achieving one of his fondest goals--the establishment of a moral and republican society. The Lepeletier project represented an opportunity to create a new people and to regenerate the human race completely.¹²²

The deadlock in the struggle to approve the plan was broken on August 13. Danton entered the debate with an amendment to the project which virtually destroyed the principal feature of the scheme--communal education. He praised the idea but, for the present, believed that it would be more practical to establish an educational system based on two kinds of schools--the proposed communal institutions and day schools. Parents were to have the right to choose the kind of formal education they desired for their children.¹²³

In addition to the above, his suggestion carried a recommendation to set aside various other sections of the proposal for future consideration. Shortly after Danton presented his ideas, the Convention passed a decree embodying his suggestions.¹²⁴ The approved project with Danton's amendments, however, was never executed.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., no. 198, July 17, 1793.

¹²³ Ibid., no. 237, August 15, 1793.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Although Lepeletier's plan was essentially rejected, its importance in the study of the educational views of the sans-culottes cannot be minimized. To a considerable degree, it reflected their basic thoughts on public instruction. It is interesting to note that only two areas of the extensive project created any real controversy; these, as cited above, were the suggestions for compulsory boarding schools and higher education. Furthermore, those who opposed the compulsory institutions did so on the basis of sociological arguments; they did not question the educational aspects of such schools. They were perfectly satisfied with the suggested curriculum, daily routine, organization, method of operation, and control over the teachers; their only objection was the concept of separating a child from his parents.

Another significance of the project and the debate that surrounded it lies in the publicity it gave to the belief held by the urban dwellers that education was vital to the state as well as to the individual. By emphasizing the theme that primary schools with compulsory attendance would serve as a means to solidify and unite the Republic, the Montagnard-dominated Convention helped to imprint on the entire nation the new concept that public instruction was an essential goal of the Revolution.¹²⁵

¹²⁵Vignery, p. 97.

CHAPTER VI

POPULAR PRESSURE FOR EDUCATION

With the passage of Danton's vague amendment to Lepeletier's project on August 13, 1793, it was evident that spokesmen for the sans-culottes in the Convention were still unable to agree on a workable, republican educational program. The nation was still without an instructional system, and parents were left, as they had been for the preceding four years, to provide instruction for their children by any means possible.

During the weeks immediately following the rejection of the Robespierre-Lepeletier idea, the common people loudly voiced their displeasure over the legislative body's lack of progress. Recognizing that public instruction was the key to the preservation of their republican nation as well as to the improvement of their living conditions, the urban masses clamored for immediate action. Between August 20 and 24, no less than ten Parisian sections presented petitions to the Convention; all demanded prompt legislation implementing public schools.¹²⁶

The leader of the above movement to deluge the Convention with petitions was a young enragé, Théophile Leclerc. Writing in his publication, L'Ami du Peuple, a title borrowed

¹²⁶P.V., II, 126.

from Marat's famous newspaper, he expressed the view that public instruction, on a free and mass basis, was the sole means of creating men worthy of liberty, and, that without this type of education, it would be impossible to regenerate the human race.¹²⁷ Imbued with the above idea, he urged the people to express their demands to the Convention and went among the various sections of Paris coordinating the campaign for a public education program. In addition, he advised the little people on how to draft and present their petitions.¹²⁸

The contents of the petitions were concise and harmonious in thought; all simply called for a system where instruction would be forcé et commun (compulsory and equal).¹²⁹ Revealing that the urban population evidently did not accept Lepeletier's idea of compulsory boarding schools, their petitions contained no mention whatsoever of this aspect of his plan.

At the same time that the sections were making their feelings heard, individuals, too, raised their voices in support of the formulation of an educational program. On August 27, a lad identified as a jeune républicain (young republican) complained about the lack of teachers with republican ideals in his part of Paris. The only available instructors, according to the young man, were priests who taught ideas that were

¹²⁷ L'Ami du Peuple, no. 8, August 7, 1793, p. 6.

¹²⁸ P.V., II, 401-402.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 402.

irrelevant or untrue. The youngster implored the Convention to replace all such teachers with republican instructors who would teach their students to love the Republic and to show affection for all fellow citizens.¹³⁰

Although members of the popular class made their demands known to their lawmakers, the legislative body still failed to act. With an external and internal crisis facing the nation, the delegates were unwilling to become involved in a lengthy discussion over vague suggestions. Most felt that discussions on public education should be postponed until a detailed project was placed before the Convention.¹³¹

The urban dwellers, however, were not willing to accept such an attitude, and they continued to make strong demands on the legislature for an instructional program. The situation reached a climax on September 15. At 10:00 A.M., a group of petitioners representing various sections, popular societies, the Paris Commune, and the Department of Paris, convened at the Jacobin Club in Paris. There, they selected spokesmen and then marched to the Convention.¹³²

Unlike earlier groups that presented vague demands to the Convention, the crowd that marched on September 15 was armed with a detailed project that reflected a remarkable degree of thought and organization. Although it cannot be

¹³⁰A.P., LXXVIII, 9.

¹³¹Vignery, p. 97.

¹³²P.V., II, 408.

determined precisely who was responsible for the document, three prominent Montagnards--Hassenfratz, Fourcroy, and Monge--were considered to be deeply involved in the project.¹³³

Throughout the petition the common people emphasized their right to a publicly supported educational system. They reminded the Convention that, without popular societies, neither freedom nor the Convention would continue to survive in the nation. The theme was constantly echoed that it was the sans-culottes who kept the coals of the patriotic fire burning. In return, a much desired instructional system was expected.¹³⁴ Expressing to a marked degree the thoughts of Robespierre and Leclerc, signers of the document demanded the means to ameliorate the conditions of the human race.¹³⁵

Indicating a great dissatisfaction with traditional institutions of learning that still continued to operate, the petitioners demanded the closing of all such schools within forty-five days; none was to be left open after November 1. To fill the gap, they suggested an instructional system based on elementary schools and three levels of higher institutions.¹³⁶

As one might expect, the petition heavily stressed the instruction of manual work, and the suggested program called for a curriculum closely resembling that proposed by Lepeletier. Students were to learn the dignity of labor through ob-

¹³³ Ibid., 407-408.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 408.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

servation and participation in workshops and fields. In addition, a part of every day was to be spent in learning the rights and duties of citizens together with instruction in reading, writing, geography, gymnastics, and the Revolution.¹³⁷

The most innovative feature of the September 15 petition, however, did not involve the elementary level; instead, it affected an area of education that one does not normally associate with the sans-culottes--higher instruction. Like Condorcet's and Lepeletier's projects, the plan brought before the Convention on September 15 also suggested a gratuitous, optional system of advanced schools; however, there was a substantial difference in this plan. In place of emphasizing traditional academic studies, it stressed advanced instruction in manual training and on other subjects with practical application.

In the schools of the first level of higher instruction, a two-year curriculum was proposed that concentrated on work with wood and stone. Students were expected to learn to professionalize their skills, and, in short, to acquire the fine details of their trade. In addition to the above routine, one day per week was to be devoted to the study of basic physics and another to practical experience with machines.¹³⁸

Although the populace would have undoubtedly preferred everyone to perfect a trade, they were realistic enough to realize that all were not capable of doing so. Therefore, they

¹³⁷ Ibid., 408-409.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 409.

devised another level of higher instruction available to anyone who had completed his elementary schooling. Following closely the precepts of Rousseau, the framers of the petition prepared a curriculum that was designed to prepare the student to meet the practical problems of life. Along with the teaching of French, modern history, and political ideas, the course of study emphasized such practical subjects as food, shelter, clothing, self-defense, and hygiene.¹³⁹

Finally, a third type of higher education was proposed; it was intended for those with unusual skills or talents--attributes that were to be cultivated for the good of the state as well as for the individual. Although this level of instruction was more academic in nature than the other two, one can, nevertheless, sense the strong influence of Emile in its proposed program of study. Following Rousseau's advice on the importance of the study of cosmography,¹⁴⁰ the authors of the plan encouraged the study of geology, geography, and, in particular, astronomy. In addition, gifted students were expected to study morals and to master advanced mathematics, physics, and mechanics.¹⁴¹

Immediately after the presentation of the project, deputy St. André moved that the Convention adopt the proposal

¹³⁹ P.V., II, 415.

¹⁴⁰ Vie et Oeuvres de Rousseau, ed. by Albert Schinz (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1921), pp. 250-254.

¹⁴¹ P.V., II, 415-417.

at once.¹⁴² Other deputies, however, expressed concern over the higher levels of instruction recommended in the petition. Reflecting his lack of confidence in such institutions, deputy Cambon, the financial expert of the Convention, pointed out that the best place to learn the art of shoemaking was still in a shoemaker's shop, not in an academy.¹⁴³

In opposition to Cambon, Barère, a member of the powerful Committee of Public Safety, defended the petition. Believing that the plan would fulfill perfectly the educational needs of the Republic, he demanded its immediate adoption. According to his view, this was truly a program that would be beneficial to the general population.¹⁴⁴

After a lengthy and heated debate in which various aspects of the petition were discussed, the Convention passed a motion that would delay final action on the plan for three days; this would enable the deputies to study the proposal more fully.¹⁴⁵ Following the lapse of three days, however, none of the deputies called for a reopening of debate, and the entire matter was referred to the Committee of Education for further investigation.¹⁴⁶

For nearly two months, the committee made repeated suggestions for educational programs, but its ideas were al-

¹⁴² Moniteur, XVII, no. 262, September 19, 1793.

¹⁴³ Ibid., no. 261, September 18, 1793.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., no. 262, September 19, 1793.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 261, September 18, 1793.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

ways rejected. Although members of the Convention were in total agreement over the question of elementary instruction, they were hopelessly split over the question of higher education.¹⁴⁷ A compromise simply could not be found that would resolve the conflict between those delegates who saw no value in higher education--indeed, they saw a danger in it--and those with more moderate views. Spokesmen for higher instruction, such as deputies Romme and Guyton, were always met with the argument that institutions offering advanced instruction would eventually produce an intellectual aristocracy. Reflecting the views of those opposed to the idea of graded schools, delegates Coupé de l'Oise, Pierre Duhem, and Michel Petit refused to tolerate any publicly supported educational system that incorporated schools above the elementary level.¹⁴⁸

Upset by the committee's failure and aware that the urban dwellers were clamoring for some form of educational system, on November 15, the Committee of Public Safety appointed a new Committee of Education. The urgent nature of the educational question is clearly revealed by the fact that such influential men as Danton and Robespierre were chosen to serve on the newly formed committee. The work of this group was more successful than that of its predecessor, and, on December 12, the Convention was able to agree on a project--the Bouquier program¹⁴⁹ (to

¹⁴⁷Vignery, p. 101.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 100-105.

¹⁴⁹P.V., 827.

be discussed in the next chapter).

During the period between the presentation of the September 15 petition and the acceptance of the Bouquier proposal, a multitude of groups and individuals expressed their displeasure over the state of education. Their dissatisfaction was conveyed in the form of pamphlets, newspapers, letters, and speeches to the Convention. One can assume that this pressure undoubtedly played a significant role in the decision of the Convention to accept the Bouquier project.

A strongly worded petition from the central committee of popular societies is an example of the pressure exerted on the legislative body. Delivered on November 11, it condemned the lax attitude of the Convention toward those who continued to teach religion. The committee stressed that it was time to renounce those who taught lies and superstition. These so-called teachers, according to the petitioners, were nothing more than perfidious drones and should be driven out of the nation and replaced with republican teachers.¹⁵⁰

A little later, the Société des Cordeliers sent word to the Convention demanding the incorporation of Marat's ideas into the educational program. Believing that his writings would offer republican inspiration for young minds, it urged the placement of copies of the "martyr's" works in every classroom of the Republic.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., III, 28-29.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 372-373.

On November 17, Citizen Daguey demanded the right to speak before the Convention. In his remarks, he reminded the Convention to furnish every school room with a plaque bearing the Declaration of the Rights of Man. This, in his opinion, would serve to keep the spirit of the Revolution before the children's eyes.¹⁵²

In a letter to the Convention, Citizen Bellocq poignantly expressed his bewilderment over the Convention's lack of progress toward the finding of a solution for the educational question. He commented that the whole reason for the Revolution was the hope of ameliorating the conditions of the destitute, and this could be most effectively accomplished through education. Bellocq could not understand why the Convention still permitted the common people of France to live in a shameful state of ignorance.¹⁵³

Through the above types of expressions to the Convention, the sans-culottes made their demand felt for an educational program that would reflect their needs. The result of their efforts was the Convention's acceptance of the Bouquier Plan.

¹⁵² Ibid., 315.

¹⁵³ A.P., LXXV, 64.

CHAPTER VII

THE BOUQUIER PLAN

Although on November 15, 1793, a new Committee of Public Instruction was organized and included among its members Robespierre and Danton, the new body, like its predecessor, was still unable to formulate an acceptable educational project. Active leadership in the committee was sorely needed; but, at this time, Robespierre and Danton were engaged in a full-fledged campaign to crush the Hébertists and other religious skeptics and, thus, had little time to supply the necessary guidance and advice. Moreover, dominated by the presence of these two influential men on the committee, other members were hesitant to act independently; thus, the committee accomplished virtually nothing.¹⁵⁴

With no new plan forthcoming from the Committee of Public Instruction, the only proposal available for consideration was a revised edition of one of Gilbert Romme's earlier projects.¹⁵⁵ The deputy from the Department of Puy de Dôme once again attempted the difficult task of striking

¹⁵⁴Vignery, pp. 109-111.

¹⁵⁵The mathematician Gilbert Romme was one of the delegates most interested in public education. During the history of the Convention, he suggested numerous projects; however, none was accepted. His insistence that some form of higher instruction should be available for those qualified to undertake it was, evidently, one of the prime reasons for the repeated rejection of his ideas.

a compromise between the Montagnards who favored a graded system of schools and those who were unalterably opposed to any program that involved institutions of higher learning. Since the possibility of such an agreement seemed slight, it appeared unlikely that the Convention would be able to provide the nation with an instructional program in the immediate future.¹⁵⁶

On December 1, however, prospects appeared brighter that the stalemate might be broken; a new and revolutionary plan was introduced that quickly gained the attention of members of the popular classes as well as their representatives in the Convention. The author of the project was the inconspicuous Gabriel Bouquier, a Montagnard from Dordogne. Before the Revolution, Bouquier was a mediocre painter who eventually traded his less than brilliant artistic career for a minor position in the French Colonial Administration. In 1792, he was elected to the Convention where, until he presented his educational scheme, he contributed nothing more significant than a play celebrating the events of August 10 and a poetic eulogy of Marat.¹⁵⁷

Bouquier's approach to the question of education was totally different from that taken by others who presented projects to the Convention. He refused to agree that traditional forms of schooling were the answer to the needs of

¹⁵⁶Vignery, p. 110.

¹⁵⁷Kuscinski, pp. 76-77.

the new republic. Transcending the issue of the desirability of higher institutions, he questioned the effectiveness of any educational establishment--either elementary or advanced. In his view, the most effective and most republican education was best achieved by simply working with and observing the common people; this was the most efficient means to expose a child to his necessary moral, civic, and physical training.¹⁵⁸

Of particular importance in his educational scheme was the role of public meetings. As a part of every child's schooling, regular attendance was required at sessions of the departments, the districts, the tribunals, and, above all, the popular societies. It would be ludicrous, he reasoned, to attempt to teach children their responsibilities and privileges as citizens in the artificial atmosphere of a classroom when there existed perfect models for them to observe--popular societies. This was where a child could meaningfully learn the concepts of laws, morals, and human rights and truly sense the meaning of republican ideals.¹⁵⁹

As a supplement to local meetings, great public festivals were proposed as sources of moral and political training. Such ceremonies were seen as character-building devices and as vehicles to regenerate the republican spirit.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ A.P., LXXXI, 136.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

In addition to the above, Bouquier's proposal called on various branches of the government to contribute to the child's overall education. For example, every child was expected to have some experience with the National Guard. By participating in military training, young republicans would gain an understanding of heroic actions as well as valuable physical training. At the same time, the army was assigned the duty of training those interested in such activities as mining, surveying, or engineering.¹⁶¹

Along with the employment of the various institutions of the nation, individuals per se were to enjoy the privilege of participating in the instructional program. In every port, for instance, those familiar with maritime procedures had the obligation to instruct those students seeking knowledge in the naval sciences. For those who sought medical training, public health officials were expected to teach all the necessary techniques.¹⁶²

A feature of the program that undoubtedly appealed to the common people was the emphasis the plan placed on manual instruction. Believing that it was dangerous for a free nation to produce a caste of aristocratic speculators, Bouquier contended that the objective of an educational system in a republican state should be to create only vigorous, robust workers. Every child, therefore, was to learn a trade or art that was useful to society. If the child refused to do so by the

¹⁶¹Ibid., 136-138.

¹⁶²Ibid., 56-57.

time he reached the age of twenty, he was to lose all his rights as a citizen.¹⁶³

Although working with and observing sans-culottes was to form the basis for the major part of the child's education, Bouquier did not totally exclude the use of the classroom in his project. Children living in a civilized society, he reasoned, obviously needed to learn the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and the learning process for these disciplines was most successfully executed in school rooms.¹⁶⁴

Since the above schools, however, were to play only a supplementary role in the total educational program, the author of the project reasoned that it was not necessary for the state to assume the responsibility of operating these institutions. The operation of all such schools was to be in the hands of private individuals; the only function of the state was to pay the teachers an annual salary based on the number of children under their supervision. Recognizing the possible danger that enemies of the Republic might exercise too great an influence in such an arrangement, Bouquier gave local citizens the power to approve and supervise all teachers. All prospective instructors had to possess a certificat de civisme et de bonnes moeurs (a document certifying that the holder was a citizen in good standing). In addition, each was required to meet the approval of one-half the membership of the general council of the section in which he lived. Fi-

¹⁶³ Ibid., 138.

¹⁶⁴ P.V. III, 56-57.

nally, the aspiring teacher had to meet the approval of at least two members of the Committee of Surveillance of the area in which he maintained his residence. Bouquier was a firm believer in the principle that it would be better for the nation as well as for the child to employ poor teachers with strong republican views than well trained instructors with dangerous thoughts; therefore, he required no intellectual tests or special academic qualifications for those who wished to teach.¹⁶⁵

Debate on Bouquier's project started on December 9, 1793, and lasted only ten days. As expected, the opponents of higher education were numbered among the most enthusiastic supporters of the plan. Deputy Thibadeau, a leading Jacobin spokesman, called the plan an admirable application of republican principles; and Michel Petit, a staunch backer of the petition of September 15, believed the suggested program was a definite step in the right direction toward the achievement of republican goals.¹⁶⁶

The principal objection to the project came from deputy Romme who argued that it would give an educational advantage to the wealthy. In addition, moral and civic training through observation and participation in meetings of popular societies left too much to chance.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵A.P., LXXXI, 137-139.

¹⁶⁶P.V., III, 110-113.

¹⁶⁷Moniteur, XVIII, no. 83, December 13, 1793.

Deputy Jay de Sainte-Foy sharply attacked Romme's criticism of the plan. Calling his lack of faith in the ability of popular societies to teach their children an outrage to the sans-culottes, he accused Romme of attempting to reinstate the system that existed during the ancien régime. Jay de Sainte-foy warned that acceptance of Romme's thoughts would lead to the establishment of 40,000 little Bastilles for the children of the Republic.¹⁶⁸

Following the short debate, on December 19, the National Convention enacted the Bouquier proposal into law. According to the Moniteur, the measure was passed by a large majority.¹⁶⁹ Thus, after eighteen months of debate and scores of suggestions, the Montagnard-dominated legislative body was able to agree on an educational program--the Bouquier Law.

There are varying interpretations as to why the project was so warmly accepted; however, most observers contend that its swift passage can be directly attributed to the plan's encouragement of private initiative in education. Both Robespierre and the Hébertists (a group of militant left-wing republicans whose strength was not to be ignored)¹⁷⁰ saw in this aspect of the proposal an opportunity to extend their power over the church; both factions evidently believed that their influence among the urban masses was strong enough to assure

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Leo Gershoy, The French Revolution and Napoleon (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 260.

the selection of teachers with views favorable to their ideas.

Writing in his L'Instruction et la Révolution, Albert Duruy, an authority on the schools in France during the Revolution, argued that free initiative in education was especially appealing to members of the Robespierre-Danton group and undoubtedly was the primary reason for their overwhelming support of the plan. Such a law enabled them to cooperate openly with a formidable source of power--former priests--to crush the rapidly growing atheistic movement and the Hébertists. By inviting trustworthy assermentés (priests who took the loyalty oath in 1790), followers of the cult of Reason would be prevented from spreading their atheistic views.¹⁷¹

Jean Guillaume, considered by many to be the most noted authority on the educational aspects of the Revolution, concurs with the above thought. Danton's and Robespierre's acceptance of the liberal idea of free enterprise in education during the height of the Terror was, according to Guillaume, nothing more than a manoeuvre to form an alliance with the still powerful Catholic Church. Their combined goal was clearly the crushing of the growing anti-religious movement.¹⁷²

A speech that Robespierre delivered to the Jacobin Club on December 19, the very day the proposal was enacted into law, lends added credence to the belief that he was attempting to cultivate a closer relationship with the church.

¹⁷¹Albert Duruy, L'Instruction publique et la Révolution (Paris: Hachette, 1882), p. 105.

¹⁷²P.V., III, 39.

The "Incorruptible" emphasized that all former priests must not be considered enemies of the Revolution. Many, especially among those who held lower positions in the hierarchical structure that existed during the ancien régime, were strongly attached to the Republic and its goals.¹⁷³

On the other hand, the Hébertists also realized that free enterprise in education could very well work to their advantage. Hébert displayed great interest in the Bouquier Plan; and, in a speech to the Jacobin Club on December 11, he applauded that feature of the plan which enabled the individual to operate a school without stringent state controls or regulations. A strong supporter of the Hébertists, Anacharsis Cloots, voiced a similar view. Stating that education was simply another form of merchandise, he insisted that the state had absolutely no right to interfere with its free circulation.¹⁷⁴

Whether the sentiments of the common people were primarily with the Robespierrists or the Hébertists is difficult to ascertain; however, the significant point is that everywhere the sans-culottes warmly welcomed the passage of the Bouquier project. On December 20, the day after the plan was officially accepted, a large group of workers in Paris abandoned their jobs in order to dedicate themselves solely to

¹⁷³Moniteur, XVIII, no. 89, December 19, 1793.

¹⁷⁴F. A. Aulard (ed.), La Société des Jacobins, Recueil de Documents pour l'Histoire du Club de Paris (6 vols.; Paris: Librairie Léopold Cerf et Librairie Noblet, 1889-1897), V, 557.

the teaching of young republicans.¹⁷⁵ In every town, individuals appeared before their local assemblies with the hope of gaining the necessary permission to open schools or to offer their services for other forms of instruction.¹⁷⁶

Although it is impossible to determine how effectively the program operated and how faithfully the children participated, it is interesting to note the surprisingly large number of educational operations that were established in a relatively short period of time. A report submitted to the Convention on May 1, 1794, indicated that nearly 7,000 private schools working in association with the popular classes were already functioning by that date. As one might expect, the findings revealed that the program enjoyed its greatest success in larger towns and cities where there was a greater number of instructors as well as a stronger faith in the value of training in the activities of the sans-culottes.¹⁷⁷

A typical day for the young student involved in the Bouquier system of education was a varied affair. His daily routine generally began in a school building, quite often a former church, where he learned the recitation of republican prayers and the singing of the Marseillaise. Following this, his attention was then directed to the learning of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Since textbooks were not in ample sup-

¹⁷⁵Gontard, p. 124.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁷⁷P.V., IV, 40-41.

ply, his learning materials were often simply the Constitution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and, where acceptable, Hébert's Père Duchêne. At some point in the day, the entire class would be escorted to a meeting of the local section where the youngsters would have the opportunity to observe direct democracy in operation. In addition, a part of the child's time was devoted to manual instruction; workmen who volunteered their services provided this phase of the learning program. The young republican's long day ended back in the classroom with the singing of patriotic hymns.¹⁷⁸

The above type of instructional routine with its strong orientation toward the values of the populace was the last and major educational action of the Montagnard-dominated Convention. Although the law experienced some minor reforms, it remained basically unchanged and in effect until 9 Thermidor (July 27, 1794).

After Thermidor, the new leadership of the Convention moved quickly to strike down the Bouquier Law. Reflecting the new regime's objective of creating a bourgeois republic, it instituted a program that was primarily aimed at pleasing the property-owning class. Enacted into law in early October, 1794, the new instructional system was composed of elementary schools that the state controlled and supported and secondary schools where attendance was based on the child's intellectual skills and his ability to pay the tuition. The curriculum, too, clearly reflected the interests of the bourgeoisie. In addition to the

¹⁷⁸Gontard, p. 124-125.

teaching of basic language skills, the course of study included such subjects as commerce, agriculture, science, engineering, and foreign languages.¹⁷⁹ Known as the Law of 3 Brumaire, this essentially bourgeois-oriented program remained in effect until the Napoleonic reforms.¹⁸⁰

Thus, with the fall of Robespierre, the Thermidorians quickly seized the opportunity to destroy the work of the sans-culottes in the field of education. For the little people, it was clear that their hope for an instructional program based on manual training, republican indoctrination, and the learning of simple academic tools was crushed.

¹⁷⁹P.V., V, 143-149.

¹⁸⁰Vignery, p. 130.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

After more than a year of Montagnard control of the Convention, on 9 Thermidor, leadership of the Revolution slipped into the hands of men who did not look with favor upon popular views. During the fourteen months in which the sans-culottes dominated the course of the Revolution, however, their proposed educational reforms point to several general conclusions.

First, examination of the sentiments of the common people clearly indicates that they were profoundly interested in education; individuals and groups constantly attended sessions of the Convention devoted to education and made their feelings known to their representatives. Traditional impressions that Parisian crowds were nothing more than disorderly mobs who rioted and carried out wholesale massacres while caring little about social problems is clearly not reflected in their history, and certainly not in their concern for education. In this area, the simple men of the Revolution not only made general proposals on what they thought to be the most effective types of schooling, but, as indicated in preceding chapters, their spokesmen formulated detailed plans reflecting the needs and wishes of the urban masses. It is interesting to note that the sans-culottes--a segment of the French population generally lacking in education--were

perceptive enough to realize that public instruction offered a highly effective means to solidify their political gains and to improve the well-being of the individual.

Although their ideas were sometimes naive and impractical, there are many examples where they were acute. One can recall numerous times where a remarkable degree of insight was demonstrated, and many of their proposals contained concepts commonly found in modern techniques of schooling. For example, free schooling; preparation for a trade through on-the-job training; instruction in civic duties and responsibilities; equal education for both sexes--all important characteristics in today's educational programs--were warmly accepted and highly recommended by the urban dwellers. These were remarkable, innovative measures, especially when one considers them in light of the instructional programs that existed only five years earlier in the schools of the ancien régime.

Another observation that is evident in reviewing popular views on education was their complete distrust of school systems incorporating graded academic institutions. Evidently such training was too strong a reminder of the schools of the past to be accepted by the common people. They stubbornly refused to recognize the fact that such schools could be sources of valuable benefits and services to their society. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the question of graded institutions was largely responsible for the defeat of the Lepeletier Plan, while the Bouquier project--the program that was enacted into law--totally excluded this type of instruction.

The above lack of confidence in academic training apparently cannot be translated to mean, however, that the sans-culottes were anti-intellectual per se; it appears that they were simply opposed to providing funds for specialized academic instruction that would reach only an elite. In addition, their statements reflect the rather unrealistic notion that true men of genius had little need of academies in which to develop their talents. Briefly stated, it cannot be demonstrated that the educational views of the popular classes included a particularly prejudicial opinion against the learned; they objected to the principle that an egalitarian state had a responsibility to provide instruction aimed at producing scholars. As demonstrated in the chapter dealing with the general characteristics of the sans-culottes, such training was deemed impractical, ineffective, and--equally important--extremely dangerous.

Although most common Parisians agreed that academies as they existed during the ancien régime were not acceptable in a republic, a substantial group approved of advanced schools specializing in technical training. This is clearly expressed in the petition of September 15 which called for several stages of such schools. Yet, to many, such institutions were not compatible with the basic philosophy of their movement. It appears that the sans-cuotterie was torn between its fundamental ideal of l'égalité de fait (complete equality) and the belief that specialized skills would be a benefit to the entire nation. The fourteen-month history of the Montagnard Convention is marked

with the controversy over what role, if any, the government should play in the area of advanced education to develop and perfect artistic and mechanical skills.

One notes that the dilemma was never really solved. The officially accepted plan, the Bouquier Law, completely avoided the question by creating no technical schools. All manual training was to be carried out in shops or places of business where the student worked in a practical rather than in a classroom atmosphere.

Unlike the dispute over the desirability of graded technical schools, there was one area of thought among the common people where complete harmony existed; all agreed on the importance of manual training. One sees the teaching of technical skills in every major program that enjoyed the backing of the sans-culottes. Although the proposed form of such training varied from plan to plan, it was, nevertheless, a central feature of every suggested scheme. The Lepeletier Plan, for example, stressed the teaching of métiers (trades) in compulsory boarding schools, and the petition of September 15 recommended elementary as well as advanced trade schools. Although the Bouquier Plan removed the task of the teaching of technical skills from formal institutions and assigned it to private individuals, this aspect of the plan was, nevertheless, considered to be a vital part of the child's education.

A final observation in reviewing the educational views of the urban dwellers clearly reveals their reluctance to permit any form of centralized control over their schools. In

this aspect, their feelings closely paralleled their political sentiments; they considered direct democracy and local control over public servants to be the most effective method to govern their officials. This, of course, represented a sharp break from the system that existed during the ancien régime when bishops enjoyed an absolute authority over schools. So, too, was it different from programs following Thermidor--the month in which political power of the little people was considerably diminished. The Law of 3 Brumaire, the law that replaced the Bouquier Plan, emphasized state control over the entire instructional operation. This trend toward centralization continued under Napoleon, and reached its culmination in the Third Republic.

The experiences of the sans-culottes prior to 1789 caused them to look with disfavor on a centralized organization of their educational system. Their proposals consistently reflected their distrust in such an arrangement, and their plans all contain means by which parents could directly influence their schools. The Bouquier Plan, for example, was a model of private initiative. At all times, however, local approval was necessary for the execution of educational programs. The same can be said of the Lepeletier Plan. Although it placed a heavy emphasis on boarding schools operated by the Republic, each institution was directed by an assembly composed of fathers of the pupils and elected by the local population. In short, the sans-culottes believed that their schools should operate in a manner similar to the way in which their sections (wards) functioned--under the close and careful supervision of the

local citizens.

In examining the preceding observations and conclusions, one finds, surprisingly enough, that these simple men of the people had profound views on education. One need merely to mention several ideas to demonstrate the above: their lack of confidence in graded schools emphasizing academic training, their preference for manual instruction, and their fear of centralized control over the schools. The observer, however, must still pose the question as to their ultimate goal. What did they hope to achieve?

There is no question that the urban masses saw in free education an opportunity to improve their social status and destroy the prevailing power of wealth. So strong was their confidence in public instruction that it soon became the most characteristic feature of their campaign. When their movement came to an end in Thermidor, their disillusionment was all the keener for their having placed so much faith in education to strengthen the Republic and to improve their position in society. Of all their hopes for a better life through public instruction, little was to survive Thermidor except the realization that their dreams had not been fulfilled.

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