The Life and Writings of Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennes (1756-1819)

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Preface.

This study deals with the life and writings of a man who played a pivotal part in the history of the French Revolution. Billaud-Varennes has been neglected by historians, chiefly, it seems, because his personality does not lend itself to sympathetic treatment. While he may not have been as evil as some of his contemporaries asserted, he was still responsible for many of the excesses of the Terror. It was (and still is) impossible to clear him; even after the most objective examination he does not emerge in a more favorable light. He was a fanatic and an advocate of totalitarian methods, the type of man unpopular with all persons of moderate beliefs.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that documents, which would clarify many of his actions, do not exist. Billaud-Varennes avoided all publicity and his contemporaries were inclined to ignore a man, whom they generally regarded with distaste. Moreover, he destroyed personally all papers and records in his possession. To get a complete picture, it became necessary to describe his environment and the background of the events in which he participated in somewhat greater detail than is customary in dissertations. Even so, certain periods of his life (particularly his early years in Paris, before he became active in politics) remain shrouded in mystery.

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This is the first full-lenghth biography of Billaud-Varennes. Its aim is to present an unjustly neglected personality. Basically, the story speaks for itself. The established facts, reported without prejudice, supply insight into Billaud-Varennes character, and give as well a logical explanation for his rise and fall. The objective historian must accept this evidence, even if it should conflict with his personal views on politics. Moral judgment is, in any event, not needed here.

In the preparation of this study, a number of people and institution were of assistance. Above all, I wish to thank Professor Theodore F. Jones, of New York University, for reading this manuscript in its original form; and Professor Leo Gershoy, also of New York University, for helpful suggestions made in respect to part III. I acknowledge also my debt to Messrs. Rosaint, Mayor of La Rochelle, France, and O.de Saint-Affrique, Librarian of that city, who made valuable documents available to me. Miss G. E. Gaskill, at Cornell University, kindly extended the courtesies of the Andrew White Library, while the officials of the Archives Nationales and the Bibliothèque Nationale were also helpful in providing documentary material. I am particularly grateful to the staff of Columbia University Library, where most of my research was done, and to the officials of New York University Library, who obtained valuable books for

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George W. Domke

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Part I.

Chapter I.

Education: 1756-1783.

1. La Rochelle and Paris: 1756-1775.

On April 23, 1756, a son was born to Nicolas-Simon-Marie Billaud, lawyer at the siège présidial of La Rochelle.[1] The family was among the oldest and most respected of that city; its name appears on public records from the XVIth century on. Jacques-Nicolas was the eldest of three sons. The proud parents certainly intended their first-born to have all the advantages which were within the reach of the upper bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century. That may have been the reason why they sent him to Paris for his education. The details of this early schooling are not known to the historian, unless he accepts the strange "memoirs" which Billaud himself wrote at the age of nineteen.[2] We only know that in 1768, he received the second prize for French composition at the collège of his native city.[3]

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1) The certificate of baptism can be found in La Rochelle, Archives de la Ville. Mss.355-358. See illustrations.

2) Alphonse Aulard, ed., Mémoires de Billaud-Varennes", La Révolution Française, XIV(1888), 745-761, 835-851, 929-948.

3) La Rochelle, Archives de la Ville. Mss. 350. From Calendrier des armateurs rochelais.

The collège d'Harcourt in Paris was one of the famous institutions run by the Oratorian Order. Since its records have been lost for the most part, it can only be assumed that the methods of study there were the same as those in the other Oratorian schools.[4] The Order had gained great renown for its "progressive" approach to education and its introduction of reforms. The instructors were encouraged to meet their students outside of the classroom in order to gain insight into "human character". They were also told to be considerate and win the affection of the children by humane treatment. While the use of the whip was not prohibited, the ordinary form of punishment consisted rather in extra work or confinement to quarters.[5] The great reforms of the Oratorians were in the curriculum itself. Contrary to common practice in French schools of the time, the French language alone was used in the classroom. Only religious instruction was in Latin.[6] The dead languages were by no means neglected in the Oratoire, but French grammar, spelling and history were emphasized (three years of required study). Unique in their time were the courses in geography, physics and mathematics. The first of these was taught with the aid of maps fastened to the walls of the classroom.[7] The students could

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4) The best general study of the Oratoire is R.P.Paul Lallemand, Histoire de l'Education dans l'Ancien Oratoire de France (Paris, [1888]). Most of the colléges have been examined in monographs. See below, the references to that of Jully.

5) Charles Hamel, Histoire de l'Abbaye et du Collège de Juilly depuis leurs Origines jusqu'à nos jours (2ème.éd. Paris, 1868), p. 251.

6) Ibid., p. 215.

7) Ibid., pp. 220-221.

also take private lessons in drawing, music, horseback-riding, fencing and dancing - the necessary social graces for the eighteenth century gentleman. On the other hand, the daily schedule included several periods of prayer and meditation. Preoccupation with the stage in any of its manifestations was strictly forbidden (as a waste of time).[8] In these respects, as well as in the texts used for instruction, the Oratoire did not seem to differ from the other collèges, under Jesuit control before 1762, and run privately by laymen after that year.

During the first year, the students read Phaedrus' Fables, Sallust, Caesar and Terence; Livy, Tacitus and possibly Ovid followed later on.[9] Every one of these authors was studied for a year. Horace, Virgil and Cicero were exceptions, the latter's works being read during four full years; those of Horace and Virgil during three.[10] Two eighteenth century works, rationalist in character and proclaiming the virtues of the Ancients, Rollin's Histoire ancienne, and Vertot's Histoire des révolutions arrivées dans le gouvernement de la République romaine, were used as textbooks for history classes.[11] It shows the degree of worldliness

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8) Ibid., p.224.

9) Ibid., p.231. See also a very similar listing in Harold T.Parker, The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries (Chicago,1937), pp.14-15.

10) H.T.Parker, idem.

11) Ibid., p.16.

or "enlightenment", which, in matters of education, had been accepted by the religious establishments of the time. Most of the well-known revolutionaries of a later period were brought up on these and similar books. It can be seen that most of their reading came from Cicero, and it is surprising that these children did not all become Republicans from the very beginning. Rollin and Vertot were hardly less "progressive" than Voltaire and Montesquieu; they left no doubt in the reader's mind that parallels could be drawn between certain events in Roman history and those of contemporary France. However, the political implications seem to have escaped most instructors and pupils. Evidence shows that the prominent men of 1789-1795 were extremely well-versed in the classics and developped a style of rhetoric which, to their minds, approached that of Demosthenes and Cicero. It is interesting to note that the "progressive" education of the Oratoire, with its emphasis on French language and grammar, did not produce a single writer of extraordinary skill. Furthermore, despite all the instruction in history, geography and science, the men of the generation of 1780-1800 did not appear to have had as much all-around knowledge of the world as those of the preceding period, who lacked the benefits of the modern methods. There is hardly an "encyclopedic" mind among the great revolutionaries of 1789 (Condorcet and Napoleon Bonaparte being possibly the exceptions); no Voltaire or Diderot can be found among the French intellectuals of 1800.

Billaud-Varennes stayed at the collège d'Harcourt for six years, possibly till his nineteenth birthday (1775). In that year, he began to write his "memoirs", Porphyre ou le tableau de la vie. The title page of this, his first, manuscript, is dated September 20, 1775. A page of dedication follows; the text itself is in a slightly more mature handwriting, leading Aulard to believe that the whole manuscript was written in 1786.[12] The hero of the story, the son of an upper-class family, describes his adventures at home and in various educational establishments. The reader is introduced, in turn, to an abbott tutor, who "flirts" with the chambermaid of the household, and when she bears him a child, doffs his cassock and marries her;[13] to a sadistic school principal who is attacked by his students and saved from assassination by the police;[14] to the hero's mother in the arms of her confessor;[15] to lenghthy discussions on sexual aberrations.[16] Only on few occasions is the sensational account interrupted by serious reflections, and these alone are of interest to the historian. The story itself can hardly be taken seriously. It is doubtful that many schools existed in eighteenth century France, in which conditions prevailed such as Billaud described. Assuming that the one described is the collège d'Harcourt, the

12) A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XIV, (1888) 752.
13) Ibid., XIV, 755.
14) Ibid., XIV, 936-938.
15) Ibid., XIV, 761.
16) Ibid., XIV, 757-758, 931-932.

religious character of the institution is not even hinted at. But the reader's credulity is challenged on all other points as well. It is odd, to say the least, that a person should speak about the place where he received his education in these words:

> " Je croupissais depuis quatre ans dans ce séjour de débauche, ne me perfectionnant que dans l'art infernal de me pervertir le coeur et de me ruiner le tempérament." 17)

Throughout the manuscript, Billaud mentioned neither names nor dates, nor places, which makes it more likely that the story is an invention from beginning to end.[18] Only one fact and one observation may be accepted (there would hardly have been a reason to invent them): as a small child, Billaud nearly died in an epidemic;[19] and the proscription of the Society of Jesus was a heavy blow to education in France, since incapable laymen-instructors took the places of the excellent brothers.[20] This, by the way, is an opinion held by many contemporaries. Also, the last section of the manuscript is of great interest. In a semi-monastic institution, the Father Superior engages in discussion with the hero, very much in the manner of the "Pasteur Savoyard" and his disciples. Just before his first communion, Prophyre is beset by

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17) Ibid., XIV, 931.

18) Daniel Mornet, Les Origines Intellectuelles de la Révolution Française (1715-1787) (4ème. éd., Paris, 1947), p. 417, seems to imply that Porphyre derived from Billaud's personal experience. But he offers no proof for his statement.

19) A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit.

20) Ibid., XIV, 945-948.

religious doubts.[21] The story breaks off suddenly, but what there is demonstrates that Billaud had completely absorbed the teachings of Rousseau. That philosopher's works were indeed the lasting literary influence in his life; Billaud accepted the theory of the Social Contract as if it were a religious belief. He remained a faithful disciple until his last years, as shown by constant references to Rousseau in the works written in exile.

Aulard refrained from comment on Porphyre; he just edited the manuscript, but did not discuss it. The historian is obliged to have his doubts as to the date of the writing. It is possible that an adolescent boy should have romantic notions and write a story in which sex becomes the predominant factor. But would a respectable lawyer at the parlement of Paris and a happily married man be inclined to do so? Billaud fulfilled both these latter conditions in 1786.

Aulard also discovered an unpublished novel from Billaud's hand, called Lettres Recueillies par J.N.B. It tells in form of letters about the violent seduction of a beautiful peasant girl by an evil aristocrat, and her rescue from imprisonment by a young man of good family.[22] The most logical explanation for both manuscripts would be that they were written by a boy of nineteen, in the collège d'Harcourt or shortly thereafter. In or about 1786, the lawyer Billaud found the works of his youth. Thinking that he could make some money because of the then current vogue of erotic novels, he copied them, adding possibly the last section

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22) Ibid., XIV, 750.

of Porphyre, to satisfy the admirers of Rousseau. In any event, neither manuscript was ever published and they are not of the slightest importance, except insofar as they present the first literary efforts of Billaud.

2. Poitiers, La Rochelle and Paris: 1775-1783.

From the collège d'Harcourt, young Billaud went to the University of Poitiers to study law. Members of his family had probably graduated from there before him, otherwise it would be difficult to understand why a young man with a future should continue his studies at so obscure a place. In the eighteenth century, the once proud University was no more than a shadow of its former self.[23] Its decline had already started at the time of the Wars of Religion and continued until the nineteenth century. In 1775, the faculty of Law had still about 200 students; in 1790, this number had decreased to 56![24] A canon lawyer famous in his day, Charles du Tréhaut, was Chancellor of this faculty (1762-1790), separated from the rest of the University in administrative matters since 1768 by act of the parlement of Paris.[25] The students were still organized as a guild, with

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23) P.Boissonade,ed.,Histoire de l'Université de Poitiers.Passé et présent (1432-1932) (Poitiers,1932),p.160.

24) Ibid.,p.75.

25) Ibid.,pp.36,46.

their own President (elected annually), Provost, Lieutenant, flag and arsenal.[26] There was constant trouble between the guild and the faculty; as well as between the former and the military garrison stationed in the town of Poitiers.[27] No information at all can be obtained about Billaud's activities during his student years.[28] In fact, the obscure period in his life is now beginning. Except for the year-long interlude (1783-1784) in Juilly, much is unknown about Billaud's development before 1791.

The chief reason is the non-existence of personal papers of any kind. For years, he corresponded weekly with his family in La Rochelle, but these letters are of no special significance.[29] Since he had apparently no interest in politics before 1787, they do not so much as mention the subject. Early in 1795, when awaiting investigation for his political activities, Billaud is said to have buried all his personal papers in a secret hiding-place.[30] They were never found; the historian was thus deprived of much documentary material. It becomes, indeed, almost impossible to appreciate the man fully. Billaud had few friends during his lifetime; they wrote very little about him. Later, he

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26) Ibid., p.78.

27) Ibid., p.161.

28) The list of famous students in the XVIIIth. century in the yearbook of the University for its quintecentennial, ibid., pp.99-101, does not even include Billaud's name.

29) The Archives in La Rochelle own none; the Archives Nationales in Paris, a few from his brother Benjamin, covering the years 1784-1786 (F 7.4,582).

30) Georges Lenôtre, "Les Deux Femmes de Billaud-Varennes", in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux paniers, 3ème. série (Paris, 1906), p.279.

became tight-lipped and unwilling to speak about himself. But not in his youth, apparently. From the few glimpses we get of him, he seems to have been a quite ordinary young man. No special characteristics of a revolutionary temperament are as yet discernible, no bitterness or sense of injustice.

This much can be said about the study of Law in general in eighteenth century France (indicating Billaud's professional progress): It was regulated by a Royal Decree (registered by the parlement of Paris) of January 19, 1700.[31] No certificate of lower studies was required; the only condition for admission into a university was that the candidate be over sixteen years of age (Royal Decree of November 17, 1690).[32] The course of study lasted three years, yet Billaud graduated after slightly over two.[33] At the end of this period, the candidate became licencié ès Lois. The next step was the doctorate, which meant only taking another examination.[34]

Study itself was on the practical side; the application of Roman, Canon and French Law in eighteenth century legislation was emphasised throughout.[35] All courses but those in French law were still taught in Latin; the graduates from the schools of

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31) Baron Francis Delbeke, L'Action Politique et Sociale des Avocats au XVIIIème Siècle (Louvain, 1927), p.45. This excellent study deals with all aspects of law in the XVIIIth. century.

32) Ibid., p.46.

33) Idem.

34) Ibid., p.47.

35) Ibid., pp.54-55.

the Oratoire, who had not had such rigid training in that language, were at a certain disadvantage. Discipline changed according to university; theses were sold and bought on the open market in all of them.[36] One historian maintains that the law student everywhere lived in his guild or corporation, out of contact with the rest of the world. He ignored all the controversies and problems of the century; when he graduated, he was unprepared for the struggle for life.[37] That view is certainly open to question, since it is hardly founded on evidence.

After a little over two years, Billaud passed his examinations. According to regulations, the young man submitted his credentials to the oldest avocat général of the city where he wished to practice his profession (in Billaud's case, La Rochelle). After having been recommended by another lawyer, he took an oath and was admitted to the Order of Lawyers (Ordre des avocats).[38] He became a novus or audientus, and had to attend court sessions to acquire practical experience.[39] According to the regulation of August 28, 1772 by the Ordre des avocats of La Rochelle, novi could be inscribed in the Tableau des avocats of La Rochelle after one year of pleading and two of court attendance.[40] In Billaud's

36) Ibid., p. 61.
37) Ibid., p. 65.
38) Ibid., p. 66.
39) Ibid., p. 68.
40) Ibid., p. 70.

case, the whole procedure was waived, since sons of inscribed lawyers were specifically exempt from the decree.[41] But since he was inexperienced, it may be assumed that he obtained a position in his father's office.

There is no evidence that he devoted much time to his job, and despite his father's social position, he does not seem to have had prominent clients. In 1779, he won a case for a farmer, Jacques Merlin, against the innkeeper Elin; further details are unknown, but a memorandum of plaintiff's counsel to the court is signed: "Billaud fils, avocat."[42] To his memorandum are added remarks by Morin père, another lawyer of La Rochelle, and possibly counsel for the other side. He had this to say about Billaud:

> " Tant qu'il demeure à La Rochelle, il ne montra aucun talent ni aptitude. C'étoit le plus mince des avocats, taciturne, mélancolique, vain, etc." [43]

This same witness gives also the most detailed account of the incident which led to Billaud's hasty departure from La Rochelle.

> " En 1780, il fit une mauvaise comédie qu'il vouloit faire jouer. Cet ouvrage étoit pitoyable et fut sifflé à outrance. Billaud garda sagement l'anonyme, mais le public étoit dans le secret. Cette pièce étoit intitulée La femme comme il n'y en a plus. Le lemdemain de la représentation qui n'alla pas à la fin il partit pour Paris." [44]

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41) Idem.

42) La Rochelle, Archives de la Ville. Mss. 350 (Collection Morin père).

43) Idem.

44) Idem. The manuscript of the play is apparently lost or was destroyed by Billaud right after its failure.

The "femme comme il n'y en a plus" was a virtuous one. The play showed the leading ladies of La Rochelle Society in their various infidelities and amorous intrigues. A youthful prank, but one that cost young Billaud his popularity. Despite the fanciful names of the characters in the play, everyone in the audience recognized their real-life models. A wit made up the following quatrain for this occasion:

" Désertant le barreau qui ne perd pas grand'chose,
Billaud crut chez Thalie avoir plus de succès;
Mais, auteur sans talent, avocat sans procès,
Quel fruit a-t-il tiré de sa métamorphose?" 45)

Thus, Billaud went back to Paris. For over two years, he eked out a meager living drafting memoranda for other lawyers. Finally, in March 1783, recommended by the Bishop of La Rochelle and the General Procurator of the Order of the Charité (both friends of his father's), he obtained a position as a lay teacher in one of the most famous of the Oratorian collèges, that of Juilly. 46)

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45) Alfred Bégis, ed., Curiosités Révolutionnaires: Billaud Varennes.... Mémoires Inédits et Correspondance (Paris, 1893), p.2.

46) Ibid., p.3.

Chapter II.

Before the Storm: 1783-1789.

1. Juilly: 1783-1784.

The collège of the Oratoire in Juilly had 375 students and a faculty of about 30.[1] In 1783, the Father Superior (Supérieur) was Père Louis Petit. He was not only one of the most capable and famous educators of the century, but also an exceedingly good and honest man. A student of the time characterized him as follows:

> " Administrateur habile, directeur prudent, esprit sans préjugés, sans illusions, plus philosophe qu'il ne le croyait peut-être, indulgent et malin à la fois..." [2]

Quite wordly in his ways, he ran the school with as little emphasis on religion as possible. As a lay teacher, Billaud did not have to wear the cassock, but he was expected to attend prayer-meetings and to study in his spare time the Bible, the writings of the Church fathers, the decisions of the Ecclesiastical Councils, Canon Law, and scholastic and moral theology.[3] Every instructor had two classroom periods during the day, one in the morning and one in

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1) The best study is the very detailed Charles Hamel, Histoire de l'Abbaye et du Collège de Juilly depuis leurs Origines jusqu'à nos jours (2ème.éd.,Paris,1868).Also Jean-Félissime Adry, Notice sur le Collège de Juilly(2ème.éd.,Paris,1816),generally dealing with the period after 1784. On the influence of the Oratoire on the future revolutionaries,see Alphonse Aulard,La Révolution Française et les Congrégations (Paris,1903),p.34.

2) Antoine-Vincent Arnault,Souvenirs d'un Sexagénaire(Paris,1833),I,47.

3) Ch. Hamel,op.cit.,p.246.

the evening.[4] Since the day began at 4.30 a.m., there was much time for individual study and leisure. The historian should also take notice of a colleague of Billaud's, the first of the future revolutionaries with whom he came in contact. Père Joseph Fouché, member of the Oratorian congregation since 1781, and probably an ordained priest,[5] taught mathematics at Juilly in the 1780's.[6] Arnault in his memoirs calls Fouché a hypocrite. Yet, Napoleon's Minister of Police seems to have adapted himself well to the strict life of the collège. Fouché and Billaud, who was teaching French literature, became friends. The latter fitted poorly into the semi-monastic atmosphere of the school. After some months, Père Petit sent the following report on Billaud to the General of the Order:

> " Billaud.-A en juger par la manière dont il lit le latin,il ne le sait pas fort bien. A-t-il de l'esprit? Je n'ai pas eu assez de moyens de le connaître. Mais il a beaucoup d'amour-propre, et je ne le regarde que comme un mondain,... froidement régulier et honnête,qui a tâché de ne pas se compromettre surtout depuis quelques mois, car au commencement il n'était pas des mieux engagés. Quoiqulil soit judicieux dans sa conduite,

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4) Idem.

5) All the biographers of Fouché,without a single exception, have underemphasised his early religious training. According to Ch.Hamel, op.cit.,p.339,Fouché stayed in Juilly between 1784 and 1787.But A,-V. Arnault,op.cit.,I,63,writes about him. He must consequently have arrived before that date,since Arnault arrived in 1776 and stayed until 1783.Louis Madelin,Fouché.1759-1820(2ème.éd.,Paris,1903),I,5,the best biography,erronously mentions 1787 as the date of Fouché's arrival in Juilly. This mistake was repeated in Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels(Paris,1916),p.261.

6) A.-V.Arnault,op.cit.,I,63.

à raison de son âge,de ce qu'il a été et de ce qu'il est, je ne le crois pas propre à l'Oratoire." 7)

Antoine-Vincent Arnault, the future dramatist, who was a student in Juilly at this time, liked his instructor pretty well.

" Le Père Billaud,[he wrote],... paraissait alors un très-bonhomme aussi, peut-être l'était-il; peut-être même l'eut-il été toute sa vie s'il fût resté homme privé.... Plus mondain que ne le permettait le caractère de la modeste société dont il faisait partie, il était à la vérité quelque peu friand de gloire littéraire, et travaillait en secret pour le théâtre." 8)

He also tells the story of a paper montgolfière, built by Fouché and decorated with verse by Billaud, sent off by both men in the hope that the winds would carry it to Versailles. 9) The quatrain, poor as poetry, shows Billaud as an admirer of King Louis XVI:

" Les globes de savon ne sont plus de notre âge.
En changeant de ballon,nous changeons de plaisirs.
S'il portait à Louis notre premier hommage, 10)
Les vents le souffleraient au gré de nos désirs."

It appears also that Billaud wrote a tragedy, Polycrate. Did he give it to Larive, famous actor of the next generation, who was then a student at Juilly? 11) The latter performed a play by

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7) Ch.Hamel,op.cit.,p.336.This must have been a special report,since ordinarily,the Father Superior submitted remarks about his faculty only every other year.

8) A.-V. Arnault,op.cit.,I,64-65.

9) Ibid.,I,66.

10) Idem. Ch.Hamel,op.cit.,p.335;Charles d'Héricault,La France révolutionnaire 1789-1889(Paris, 1889),p.570.

11) A.-V. Arnault,op.cit.,I,65; Alfred Bégis,ed.,Curiosités Révolutionnaires: Billaud Varennes .... Mémoires Inédits et Correspondance(Paris,1893),p.3.

that name in 1880, but he always denied that he had written it himself.[12] Billaud never referred to it; Polyxrate was not printed and it probably did not deserve to gain public attention.[13]

In any event, Billaud's superiors heard about his activities. He was asked to give up his literary ambitions, but he preferred to resign his position.[14] He thus returned to Paris in the Summer of 1784, to establish himself permanently in the capital.

2. Paris: 1784-1789.

Two events in Billaud's life between 1784 and 1789 are of importance: he became a full-fledged lawyer in Paris, and he was married. It appears that it was quite easy for him to obtain the certificate which permitted him to practice law in Paris. Actually, novi had a difficult time in the capital to qualify as regular members of the bar (four years of regular attendance in court, certified by the written affidavits of six lawyers designated

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12) Alphonse Aulard, L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française: Les Orateurs de la Législative et de la Convention (Paris, 1885-1886), II, 481.

13) B. Hauréau, La Montagne (Paris, 1834), p. 50: "Un biographe dit avoir lu de lui une tragédie non imprimée, assez faible."

14) A.-V. Arnault, op. cit., p. 65; Ch. Hamel, op. cit., p. 336; Ch. d'Hérisault, op. cit., p. 570.

by a court).[15] But Billaud became a lawyer right away, probably because he had already practised his profession in La Rochelle (there is no evidence that licenses were for sale or ever bought). Administratively, this meant that he was inscribed in the Tableau des avocats; that he belonged to the barreau of Paris; that he could call himself avocat au parlement.[16] He could then choose between three specific types of occupation: he became either avocat consultant, or avocat plaidant, or avocat écoutant.[17] As avocat plaidant, he could take cases before the parlement or the Châtelet (the court of the Provost of Paris).[18] None of the avocats au parlement were members of the corps du parlement; they were thus not connected with that body at all, except insofar as they could plead cases before it.[19]

Billaud was not very ambitious at first; according to

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15) Baron Francis Delbake, L'Action Politique et Sociale des Avocats au XVIIIème. Siècle (Louvain, 1927), p. 72.

16) Ibid., pp. 76-77. Certain distinctions must be made: A Parisian lawyer of the XVIIIth century was avocat au parlement. There were also some jurists who had a license, but did not exercise their profession. They were avocats en parlement. Finally, in 1771, Chancellor Maupéou created 100 positions of avocats du parlement, procurateurs, who were supposed to plead for the Government's side when the parlement of Paris was not in session (it had just been dissolved by Royal decree).

17) Ibid., p. 78.

18) Idem.

19) See Marcel Marion, Dictionnaire des Institutions de la France aux XVIIème. et XVIIIème. Siècles (Paris, 1923), pp. 422-433. A lawyer working for the parlement was called conseiller général. It was a proprietary charge, was bought and sold. These positions were limited in number.

Lenôtre, his family continued to subsidize him.[20] He added the "title" "de Varennes (or = Varenne)" to his name, either to distinguish himself from his father, or (since that was unnecessary in Paris) for social reasons.[21] Varennes was a suburb of La Rochelle, where the elder Billaud owned a country house.

In the house in which he lived (21, rue de Savoie),[22] resided one Anne-Angélique Doye and her mother. Born in 1766 in Osnabrück, Westphalia, the young lady was said to be a natural daughter of M. de Verdun, the fermier-général. There is no evidence for such an assumption, since Anne-Angélique never acknowledged but one François Doye as her father. The historian does not know of a single meeting between M. de Verdun (the only one of the fermiers-généraux to survive the Revolution !) and Billaud; neither of payments made by the former to his "son-in-law".[23] Not much is known about Billaud law-practice; only

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20) Georges Lenôtre, "Les Deux Femmes de Billaud-Varennes", in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 3ème, série (Paris, 1906) p. 273.

21) A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 5-6, believes in the first of the two reasons. But Billaud père was not known at all in Paris. Both Varennes or Verenne are acceptable and were used indiscriminately by the contemporaries.

22) Billaud's addresses were in chronological order: rue Saint-Etienne-des-Grecs (number unknown); 22, rue de Savoie; and shortly after his marriage, 40, rue Saint-André-des-Arcs. This became his residence to the day of his deportation in 1795.

23) A. Kuscinski, op. cit., p. 56, took notice of this connection after a glance at Billaud's police file (Archives Nationales. F 7 4599), which was assembled from unreliable sources. Was it also from this document that the anonymous editors of the Biographie Moderne, published in London in 1811, got their information (I, 126)? Neither Bégis nor Lenôtre so much as mention M. de Verdun.

one case has come to the attention of the historian. It is thus quite impossible to assert that a connection with M. de Verdun brought him into prominence in legal circles, or that he had business contacts among the upper classes. In any event, father Billaud disapproved of the marriage, as he considered the bride to be well below his son's station in society. Anne-Angélique's family was not delighted either that she should choose a penniless lawyer of doubtful ability for her husband.[24] But the young couple were in love, and on September 12, 1786, they were married in the Church of Saint-André-des-Arcs.[25] The girl was, it appears, very pretty, though slightly on the plump side. The marriage seems to have been a good one. Among the wives of the famous revolutionaries, she was one of those who appeared least in public. Throughout the early years of the Revolution and the Terror, when Billaud was one of the most prominent men in France, she continued to live very modestly.

The historian is quite unable to determine, how Billaud earned his living at that time. Anne-Angélique received an annual pension of 150 livres from the Archbishopric of Paris, as a "nouvelle convertie" to Roman Catholicism, but that sum would hardly have been large enough for two people to live in comfort.

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24) A.Bégis,ed.,on.cit.,pp.6-9,gives the whole correspondence on the subject between all parties concerned.

25) Ibid.,pp.9-10. This is a reprint of the marriage certificate,with the names of all the witnesses,etc.

As to the legal fees, an attorney could only charge 3 livres for one day of pleading and 6 livres for his attendance at a hearing on appeal. For each brief, he was limited to 20 sols a roll. The famous lawyers, however, received "honoraires" up to 1 000 livres a case.[26] Billaud maintained an office at 2, rue de la Corderie. But up to the time of the Vialla case, in 1791, the historian cannot even guess who his clients were. The one exception is a note from the future Conventionnel Legendre (de Versailles), in which he and his wife ask Billaud "d'entendre ce Mosieur[sic!] [Legendre] et examiner ces pièces."[27] The latter was at that time a butcher by profession. That would seem to indicate that Billaud's clients were not wealthy, but small shopkeepers and artisans, and (as in Legendre's case), persons who lived in the same quartier (the district des Cordeliers).

In this atmosphere, his political career began. Billaud literally became a neighborhood politician. When and how is not known, probably only as the Revolution progressed, and when he had made clear his views in his writings. He may have known already at that time some of the prominent figures of a later day, such as Danton, who lived in the same district of the city.

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26) Baron F.Delbeke, op.cit.,p.126.

27) A.Bégis,ed.,op.cit., p.14.About this"biography",it may be said in all justice that it deals in great detail with the early years and the period of exile, but almost completely ignores the years of the Revolution and Billaud's political carrer.

It is possible that the friendship between Danton and Billaud dated from the years before the Revolution.[28] Bégis has maintained that Billaud worked in Danton's law office, that he drew up memoranda and legal documents there.[29] Danton said later that Billaud had been his "secretary", but he probably meant "political assistant",[30] a position he held after 1791. No close relationship between the two men before that year has come to light, particularly since Danton did not belong to the barreau of Paris after May 5,1787, but was avocat au Conseil du Roi. It meant, at any rate, that they did not meet in court, nor that they pleaded the same types of cases.

To sum up: Information is much too scant to speak with any degree of assurance about Billaud's professional activities during the years preceding the Revolution. Lenôtre mentions another tragedy from his hand, Alzire, but it was neither printed nor performed.[31] As a dramatist, he can thus be considered a failure. Not as a lawyer, however. There is no evidence which

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28) On Danton, the one excellent biography is Hermann Wendel, Danton (Berlin,1930). With reservations, Louis Barthou, Danton (Paris,1932), is an acceptable presentation, while Louis Madelin, Danton (Paris,1914), repeats all the errors, clichés and prejudices of the conservative historian. Mention should also be made of one of the milestones of the Dantonist legend, Dr. Robinet, Centenaire de 1789: Danton. Homme d'Etat (Paris,1889). Though blind idolatry, such as practiced by this author, would be condemned by presentday historians, the characterization remains perceptive.

29) A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., p.13. H. Wendel, op. cit., p.32 makes the same assertion, while the other biographers quoted above refrain from any mention of Billaud's name before the Revolution.

30) Notes de Topino-Lebrun... sur le Procès de Danton et sur Fouquier-Tinville. ed. J.-F. Chardoillet (Paris,1875), p.19.

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p.275.

would either characterize him as a success or as a failure. He seems to have lived simply (as any good Rousseauist should !), but does not appear to have been in need at any time. Several historians have claimed that misfortune caused him to be bitter, led him to blame the social conditions of his time for his own lack of success and to support the Revolution when it came.[32] There is absolutely no basis for such assumptions; even his two first books, published in 1789, are fairly sober reflexions on the state of France, and not yet the orations of a firebrand. But the events of that year led him to express his thoughts, brought his name to the attention of certain popular leaders, and thus started him on his political career.

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32) Notably Heinrich von Sybel, Geschichte der Revolutionszeit. 1789-1800 (Stuttgart, ed. of 1898-1900), II, 135. L. Madelin, op. cit., p. 27, who calls Billaud "avocat sans causes et auteur sifflé", and R. R. Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled. The Committee of Public Safety during the Terror (Princeton, 1941), p. 17.

Part II.

Chapter I.

The Revolution: First Phase: 1789 - August 10,1792.

1. The Three Books of 1789.

If ever a political career was based on a man's writings, it was Billaud-Varennes'. In 1789, nobody would have thought of the young lawyer with interests in the theatre as a political philosopher of some importance. But in that year, three of his books were published, all fundamental examinations of social conditions in France. While they were no financial successes, these writings established Billaud as a patriot and opened for him the way to political office.

The first book, Despotisme des Ministres de France (Full title: Despotisme des Ministres de France Combattu par les Droits de la Nation, par les Lois Fondamentales, par les Ordonnances, par les Jurisconsultes, par les Orateurs, par les Historiens, par les Publicistes par les Poëtes; enfin par les Intérêts du Peuple et l'Avantage Personnel du Monarque) was published in Amsterdam and smuggled into France. Billaud had started to write this three-volume opus already in 1787, but publication came only in early Spring of 1789. Already on the second page, the author, who calls himself "Citoyen qui aime son Roi et sa Patrie",[1] makes his purpose clear. He states that his

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1) [Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennes], Despotisme des Ministres de France (Amsterdam, 1789), I, 2.

aim is to inform the King of the abuses in the government; to induce the Monarch to push through reforms, even if it were against the best interests of the Court faction.[2] Unfortunately, Billaud's poor presentation reduces the effectiveness of his plea considerably. The same points are repeated over and over. The chief thesis is that the Ministers have usurped the powers inherent in the Monarchy. Nowhere is there a word of criticism against the "despotism" of the King. Billaud feels that if Louis XVI would rule in person, he would represent the interests of the French people. The common people are not considered as a political force at all, "la multitude,[he writes], est trop dépourvue de lumières,pour saisir les conséquences et les suites d'un évènement."[3] But the absolute ruler has also to obey the "laws of nature". As a student of rationalism, Billaud quotes Montesquieu and comments on that philosopher's words:

> " "La Loi, en général, est la raison humaine". Par conséquent tout Edit qui choque cette raison humaine,n'a et ne peut avoir d'autre caractère,que celui d'une volonté injuste que la force et la violence savent quelquefois faire respecter; mais par lequel on n'est réellement lié ni par honneur, ni par devoir." [4]

And it is against the "laws of nature" that the King,whose interests are the same as his subjects',should delegate his authority to someone else, Minister,Cabinet,or Council of State.[5] Yet, the

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2) Ibid.,I,9.
3) Ibid.,I,11.
4) Ibid.,I,38.
5) Ibid.,I,43.

French Monarchs had done just that, starting with Henry II, who had appointed M. de Laubespine Secretary of State, in 1559.[6] Burlamaqui is cited in support of the thesis that

> " la forme du Gouvernement Monarchique, où la puissance des Princes se trouve tempérée par les Lois sages et fondamentales, lui donne la préférence sur tous les autres." [6a]

To assist the King in his task, the parlements should have increased powers, since they are defenders against autocracy and injustice.[7] The theories expressed here by Billaud, like the argument as a whole, are not in the least original. Fifty years of rationalist writing had prededed the Despotisme des Ministres de France, much of it vastly more radical. Billaud merely repeated the ideas of some philosophes of the previous generation, quoting amply from their writings. He himself had neither the depth of feeling nor the ability to carry these ideas much further or to develop new ones.

The entire second volume discusses the abuses of the Ministers. It contains a lenghthy denunciation of Calonne, who, Billaud says, falsified budget figures to conceal his speculations.[8]

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6) Ibid., I, 53, 85, 92-135. The latter page numbers refer to a detailed discussion of the crimes of Richelieu, Mazarin, Dubois and Fleury, whom the weak Kings permitted to usurp power.

6a) Ibid., I, 136.

7) Ibid., I, 13, 150-175.

8) Ibid., II, 5-11.

There are also attacks on the lettres de cachet (as illegal), on restrictions of trade, on the Provincial Assemblies (as narrow-minded), on the conversion of feudal dues into money payment (as impractical).[9] These evils were generally recognized by the "enlightened" middle and upper classes of the time; Billaud only stated what everyone knew. But he then offers reform plans which deserve some attention. First, new hospital administrations; this is needed more than new buildings and facilities.[10] Second, a far-reaching reform of the educational system. French should be the only language of instruction; "morality" (in the eighteenth century sense of the term) is to be emphasised in the classroom. Furthermore, there should be equality of education for all, regardless of class or religion.[11] Third, changes in the judicial system. Procedure in civil cases must be simplified, court expenses lowered; better lawyers assigned by courts in criminal cases.[12] Fourth, the army and navy must be strenghthened by better training schedules and more adequate living-conditions for the enlisted men; but also by strict discipline while in the field and a more Spartan existence in the garrisons.[13] Fifth,

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9) Ibid., II, 99-132. Billaud's statistics, figures and documents are not open to question, since he used reputable sources. Even if there are some errors, the existence of the abuses as such cannot be denied.

10) Ibid., II, 132-141.

11) Ibid., II, 141-166.

12) Ibid., II, 167-192.

13) Ibid., II, 192-200.

commerce can be increased by putting more money into circulation, the abolition of lotteries, and the reduction of expenses at Court Sixth, the Ministers should be made responsible to parliamentary bodies like the Assembly of Notables of 1787, or the Estates-General.[15] Billaud offers long-range measures, which, adopted in a period of peace and calm, might in time have materially changed the social condition of the French people.

The third volume of the work repeats all the arguments of the previous two. Billaud discusses now also state finance. He praises Frederick the Great for balancing the Prussian budget, while at the same time raising the economic level of his country.[16] He proposes that the parlements should be the only authorities to draw up financial measures.[17] The Ministers should be restricted to the conduct of foreign affairs, and the administration of the armed forces.[18] With these suggestions, the work closes. Certain contemporaries, who managed to wade through the three volumes, were impressed. "On trouve dans cet ouvrage des développemens lumineux," said the Annonces de Bibliographie Moderne, a review catalogue issued by the publisher

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14) Ibid., II, 201-209.

15) Ibid., II, 210-390. Most of this section contains an extremely detailed account of the events of 1787-1788, in respect to the budg and ministerial reform. These 180 pages are a first-rate source on the Assembly of Notables of 1787.

16) Ibid., III, 1-2.

17) Ibid., III, 243-287.

18) Idem.

Lavillette in 1790.[19] Aulard characterized the ideas more soberly:

> " Dans ce fatras,[he wrote], il y a de la sagesse, de bonnes intentions, une combinaison d'esprit libéral et de fidélité royaliste qui répondait assez à la moyenne des tendances du Tiers-Etat en 1788." [20]

And, he added, Billaud's thoughts at that time were more closely related to those of Théodore Lameth and Barnave than to Robespierre's or Danton's.[21]

In Despotisme des Ministres de France, Billaud criticised the French state; in Le Dernier Coup Porté aux Préjugés et à la Superstition, published in London, he did the same for the Gallican Church. It must be noted that the book deals largely with the religious Orders; Billaud may have felt that the way of life of the secular clergy need only be slightly reformed. Throughout, the "abnormal" customs of monastic society are emphasized.

> " Voilà le voeu de la nature,[writes Billaud], mais celui qui fixe le sort des moines a été prescrit par une loi qui contrarie la nature et le droit des gens, et qui,par cela seul, est radicalement nulle." [22]

Billaud calls upon the Estates-General to change the rules of monastic life; not to abolish the Orders altogether.

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19) Annonces de Bibliographie Moderne, ed.Anon.(Paris,1790),I,316.

20) Alphonse Aulard,L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française:Les Orateurs de la Législative et de la Convention(Paris, 1885-1886),II,482.

21) Idem.

22) [Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennes],Le Dernier Coup Porté aux Préjugés et à la Superstition(London,1789),p.4.

" L'esprit de sagesse sait qu'il faut réduire, et non pas supprimer; qu'il faut mettre à profit, et non pas tout prendre.... Il faut que de tels changemens embrassent la politique et la morale; ... et que détruisant les erreurs,... ils donnent aux mortels un nouveau culte, lorsque l'ancien est à peu près totalement abandonné." 23)

The author repeats in the remaining 396 pages all the arguments of the rationalists against intense religious practices. The rough life of the monastery is bad for the health. Virtue is a great quality, but it cannot be found there. Whenever a monk has finished his prayers, he has to rest in order to restore his strenghth; thus, he gets no useful work done. 24) And too much meditation can only harm the soul.

" Sans doute il est bien, il est du devoir de l'homme de rendre des hommages à la Divinité; mais l'absurdité est évidente, lorsqu'on prétend que Dieu puisse exiger de sa créature que sans cesse celle-ci soit prosternée aux pieds de ses autels. Il a, au contraire, manifesté une intention toute différente, en nous donnant une imagination active, des talens à exercer, et des besoins à satisfaire." 25)

Then follows the history of the world, as the eighteenth century conceived it: The splendid ages of Greece and Rome, in contrast to the "dark" Middle Ages. 26) Billaud agrees with many philosophes(and particularly Rousseau) that God the Creator of the Universe is admirable; he is an unabashed Pantheist.

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23) Ibid., pp.6-7.
24) Ibid., p.20.
25) Ibid., p.34.
26) Ibid., 84-92.

> " Sans doute,[he writes], le ciel a fait des miracles. Chaque retour à la lumière en est un; chaque production de la nature en offre sans nombre; le plus vil des insectes présente un phénomène à l'oeil observateur: et tels sont les prodiges seuls dignes d'arrester la majesté, la gloire,la puissance du Créateur de l'univers." 27)

Now, what is to be done about the monastic establishments? First, they should be placed under the supervision of the Provincial Assemblies.[28] Second, the structure of the whole Gallican Church has to be modified. There must be a "rezoning" of parishes, Bishoprics and Archbishoprics, so that each part of France gets equal Church representation.(One parish for every 3 000 inhabitants or every 3 square miles in the wountryside; 19 Archbishopries and 119 Bishopries in the whole nation.)[29] All real property of the Church, if not in actual use, should be sold in public auctions; also furniture and treasures of unused churches.[30] The income from these is to pay for the salaries of the clergy. Prelates who absent themselves over a period of time, would lose their pay (on a sliding scale).[31] Vicars, curates and monks have to live away from their establishment; only lay orders would exist.[32] Monks could work either in four Ordres d'Instituteurs or four Ordres d'Hospitaliers.[33] Old ones

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27) Ibid.,p.166.
28) Ibid.,p.374.
29) Ibid.,pp.376-382.
30) Ibid.,pp.376-380.
31) Ibid.,p.382.
32) Ibid.,pp.397-398.
33) Ibid.,pp.399.

would be eligible for state pensions; after twelve years of service (ten years for nuns), they would receive a bonus payment of 3 000 livres.[34] They would also be permitted to marry and raise families, without prejudice to their professional status.[35]

Fantastic as these reforms may seem, they appealed strongly to Billaud's contemporaries. A reviewer, who has remained anonymous, wrote about the Dernier Coup Porté aux Préjugés et à la Superstition:

> " L'Auteur est un profond métaphysicien; il paroit avoir fait une étude particulière de la théologie .... Son style est fortement colorié... En général la morale en est fort bonne... Enfin l'Auteur nous paroît aussi bon écrivain qu'excellent patriote."[36]

Later in the year (November), Billaud picked up his pen again to record the accomplishments of the "Revolution" which had taken place during the Summer and Autumn of 1789. Le Peintre Politique, ou Tarif des Operations Actuelles introduces Billaud's personal style, full of invective as well as empty rhetoric; according to Aulard,

> " une phraséologie à la fois barbare et claire, qui constitue proprement la manière personnelle de Billaud, un nouveau jargon de métaphysique sociale." [37]

The pretentious sentences, empty phrases and endless repetitions make it very difficult for the modern reader to determine the quality

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34) Ibid., pp.398, 406.

35) Ibid., p.397.

36) Annonces de Bibliographie Moderne, II, 7.

37) A. Aulard, Eloquence, II, 483.

of the thought behind the elaborate façade. Le Peintre Politique starts with the characterization of three politicians of the Old Regime, Cardinal Loménie de Brienne, Lamoignon and the baron de Breteuil. What Billaud has to say about these men is typical for him; he uses very similar words in respect to Lafayette, Queen Marie-Antoinette, General Custine, Hébert, Danton and Robespierre on later occasions. Of Cardinal Brienne he says:

> " Prélat Athée,qui,pour prix de ses forfaits a été gratifié du Cardinalat,devenu par cette prostitution le sceau de la Turpitude; traître à sa Patrie,qu'il a perdue; à son Roi,qu'il a anéanti. ..." 38)

After Lamoignon,"qui n'a su faire qu'une seule action louable dans sa vie, celle de purger la terre en se donnant la mort," 39) the attacks on Breteuil seems almost mild.

> " Averton de la nature pour le moral et le physique: poison organisé,qui a souillé de crimes et la Cour et la Ville: exécration de la France et de la postérité; cloaque infect où aboutissent tous les vices;être infernal,qu'un ciel vengeur crée quelquefois pour châtier les peuples. ..." 40)

The rest of this very short book (103 pages) consists largely in repetition of the arguments in Billaud's two previous works. He shows his dissatisfaction with the Constituent Assembly, which works much too slowly:

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38) [Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennes],Le Peintre Politique,ou Tarif des Opérations Actuelles ([Paris],1789),p.4.

39) Idem. Lamoignon, the financial expert of the Court in 1788,committed suicide after the failure of his policies.

40) Ibid.,p.5. The baron had been responsible for the transfer of regiments to Paris and Versailles in late June and early July of 1789.

> " Il est émané de l'Assemblée Nationale des momens de philosophie, des chef-d'oeuvres d'éloquence; mais pas une opération d'une politique éclairée, pas une réforme d'un avantage prédominant; pas une institution heureuse; pas un encouragement louable." 41)

He continues with an attack on martial law, on the devaluated assignats, on the Ministers who have hoodwinked the King. 42)

There are, however, some differences between this and Billaud's previous writings. Le Peintre Politique is simply one long emotional outburst, an outpouring of abuse without specific aim, an undocumented denunciation lacking any broader purpose. Billaud arrives at no solution this time; offers no concrete proposals unless it is that of bringing pressure to bear on the deputies of the National Assembly, to push through reforms. 43) But the charges are unsupported by facts; Billaud does not even clearly state, what he wishes to accomplish with this book. Yet, the contemporary reader found that

> " Des vérités importantes, des idées neuves et hardies.... font le mérite de cet ouvrage. L'effervescence d'un zèle ardent pour le bien public, emporte quelquefois l'Auteur au-delà du but et lui fait prêcher une défiance charmante .... " 44)

Although the reception of the three books by the critics might have been favorable, they did not sell well. Several historians confirm

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41) Ibid., p.42.

42) Ibid., pp.42-67.

43) Ibid., p.102.

44) Annonces de Bibliographie Moderne, II, 8.

that after the first printings, no new ones came off the press.[45] They exercised no influence whatsoever. A legend has been built around the fact that all three books were published anonymously; the first two smuggled into France from Holland and Great Britain respectively. There is no evidence that copies of Despotisme des Ministres de France were seized by the police and that Billaud had to go into hiding.[46] There was no reason for prosecuting him as the author of the first two works, at any rate; he showed himself as a good Royalist and a defender of the Monarchy. As for Le Peintre Politique, Brienne and Breteuil could probably have instituted libel suits against Billaud, but such a practice was uncommon, if not unknown, in the eighteenth century.

2. The Transition to Republicanism and Federalism: 1790-1791.

In September 1790, three regiments of the garrison of Nancy rose in revolt. The marquis de Bouillé, with the assent of the National Constituent Assembly in Paris, laid siege to the city. The mutineers surrendered, but the Government troops opened

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45) B.Mauréau, La Montagne (Paris, 1834), p.50, says that all three books are very rare. He, as well as H.Morse Stephens, A History of the French Revolution (New York, 1886-1891), II, 307 (a very reliable work) remark that they were not widely read and, consequently, exercised little influence.

46) Alfred Bégis, ed., Curiosités Révolutionnaires: Billaud Varennes. Mémoires Inédits et Correspondance (Paris, 1893), p.15. Billaud possibly had to hide, to avoid prosecution, after his L'Acéphocratie, written in 1791.

fire and massacred three thousand persons, many of them civilians who had taken no part at all in the rebellion. In Paris, the radicals protested in a body. Billaud took up his pen again to write a long pamphlet, Plus de Ministres ou Point de Grace, Avertissement donné aux Patriotes François, et justifié par Quelques circonstances de l'affaire de Nancy. Among his longer writings, this is the most unimportant; simply a detailed examination of the evidence, to which comments are added. The massacre led to an investigation by a Royal Commission; Billaud uses the final report of that body for documentation. He also repeats his old argument: that the Ministers are responsible for the whole sad affair. Only a "half-way" Revolution has taken place until now, he maintains.[47] As long as the Executive can impose its will upon the National Constituent Assembly, freedom will not be established.[48] The Ministers imposed the appointment of Bouillé; they ordered him to slaughter the common people.[49] The poor soldiers, who were not educated enough to see that there was a plot against them, let themselves be ruled by passion, rose in rebellion, and were victimized.[50] This was the Ministers'

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47) [Jacques-Nicolas]Billaud-Varennes, Plus de Ministres ou Point de Grace (Paris, 1790), pp.2-3.

48) Ibid., pp.3-7.

49) Ibid., pp.10-20.

50) Ibid., p.25.

opportunity to avenge themselves on the people.[51] La Tour du Pin, the Minister of War, is the archcriminal (he resigned after the affair).[52] While the Royal Commission rightly blamed him and others for evil intentions, it did not find evidence of a "conspiracy" against the soldiers; this is obviously Billaud's invention. After a demand to bring everyone connected with this matter to trial, he writes page after page of rhetoric, calling for a more complete "Revolution" and restriction of the powers of the Executive.[53] The King is not mentioned once; the question of the Monarchy not discussed. Already, Billaud asks for strong measures, for emergency legislation. The following sentence could have been written by him in 1794, during the high tide of the Terror:

> " Faisons donc parler la Loi, sans nous inquiéter des suites, peut-être sanguinaires, de ses arrêts. ne vaut-il pas mieux qu'elle foudroye en un jour tous nos ennemis déclarés, que d'exposer éternellement le sort de la Constitution, le bonheur des peuples, leurs propriétés et leurs vies à la merci de quelque trahison nouvelle?" [54]

Billaud is no more the sound eighteenth century rationalist here; his pleas are entirely based on his emotions; he is a pamphleteer of the opposition, who calls for a fight. And he also asks for

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51) Ibid., p.20.
52) Ibid., pp.34-35.
53) Ibid., pp.36-43.
54) Ibid., p.44.

measures which seem revolutionary in the light of his previous proposals: A decree which says that

> " On est criminel de lèse-Nation, chaque fois que, par lâcheté ou par perfidie, on trahit l'Etat, soit en menaçant, soit en exposant la liberté et la prospérité publiques." 55)

Also, he demands the establishment of a special, impartial, court, set up by the Constituent Assembly and independent of the Executive to try such crimes. 56) Ministerial responsibility must be introduced; if guilty of some misdemeanor or lacking the Assembly's confidence, a Minister must be translated before this special court and has to be discharged from office, if found guilty of even a minor offense. 57) This small book, like the previous ones from Billaud's pen, was not read extensively by those who would have had to start the reforms. But others, who more or less agreed with him, felt that a true patriot had spoken, a man who stood for the people and defended its rights with vigor.

These people were responsible for Billaud's debut as a politician. It was through the clubs that he became known to those who could not read his books: workers, artisans, etc. 58)

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55) Ibid., p.45.

56) Ibid., p.46.

57) Ibid., pp.49-51.

58) A good study, covering some aspects of club life in detail and ignoring others, is Isabelle Bourdin, Les Sociétés Populaires à Paris pendant la Révolution Francaise jusqu'à la Chute de la Royauté (Paris, 1937). Alphonse Jouet, Les Clubs (Paris, 1891), a small book which attempts to deal with all clubs in France from 1789 to 1871 does not succeed in its task.

The early years of the Cordeliers Club have not been investigated in detail, but as Danton's assistant, Billaud probably attended meetings there.[59] The only listing of his name is as a member of a commission, which presented a petition to the Paris Municipality on July 16,1791, demanding the abdication of King Louis XVI.[60] As for the Jacobin Club, the historian does not know for certain, when Billaud joined it.[61] The title page of his Plus de Ministres ou Point de Grace, published in October 1790, reads: "Par M.Billaud de Varennes, de la Société des Amis de la Constitution". But he is not listed among the members of the Club until almost an entire year later. Aulard is not even certain that the "M. Varenne", who spoke on July 1,1791, was Billaud,

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59) Dr.Robinet,"Danton et le Club des Cordeliers en 1791",La Révolution Française,XVII(1889),130-159,is the only examination of the mechanics of control within the Club.It fails to prove its point, that Danton ran the society as a branch of his"machine".But L.Madelin, Danton(Paris,1914),p.52,says that Billaud was in the "General Staff" of the Cordeliers.

60) Albert Mathiez,Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la Crise de Varennes et le Massacre du Champs de Mars(Paris,1910),p.127.The petition was the result of the Massacre.The commission(on which Fréron and Desmoulins also served)presented only a copy to the Municipality;the first draft was read publicly that same morning on the Champs de Mars.

61) After a century of investigation,J.W.Zinkeisen,Der Jakobiner-Klub (2vs.,Berlin,1852-1853),still remains the one sound and inclusive study of the Jacobins in Paris.However,the author believed that factions and party alignments should be emphasized,rather than individuals.Thus,while he deals extensively with the Mountain party, he does not mention Billaud by name a single time.The recent Gérard Walter,Histoire des Jacobins(Paris,1946),is a short survey; very useful,but not free from factual errors.On the early period,see Alphonse Aulard,"Le Club des Jacobins sous la Monarchie", La Révolution Française,XXIII(1892),106-123.Again,particular personalities are neglected.

although a later historian is convinced that this was his maiden speech.[62] This meeting was held six days after the King's return to the capital (June 25), after his unsuccessful flight to Varennes. A "M. Varenne" appeared on the speaker's stand.

> " Aujoud'hui, [he said], que le trône est presque renversé par la fuite du roi, je suis encore plus étonné qu'elle [the Constituent Assembly] ne s'occupe pas des moyens de l'abattre. Voici donc les questions que je me suis proposé de traiter: quel est, du gouvernement monarchique ou du gouvernement républicain, celui qui nous convient le mieux? (Grand bruit, brouhaha)." [63]

The speaker was unable to go on. One Bouche, who presided over the meeting, accused him of wanting to destroy the Constitution, which declared that the government of France was to be a Monarchy, and "il ne s'agit pas de savoir si tout autre gouvernement lui convdendrait mieux."[64] Jean-Baptiste Royer, the Constitutional Bishop of the Ain, asked: "Peut-on se dire Ami de la Constitution et annoncer un sentiment qui en sape les fondements?"[65] Finally,

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62) Alphonse Aulard, ed., La Société des Jacobins (Paris, 1889-1897), VI, 727. (This work is hereafter referred to as A. Aulard, ed., Société). For the opposite point of view, see G. Walter, op. cit., pp. 180-181. Most evidence supports the latter.

63) A. Aulard, ed., Société, II, 573-574. The incident is told in Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution (the official journal of the Jacobin Club), I (1791), no. 19, 3-4. Also in G. Walter, op. cit., pp. 180-181; and I. Bourdin, op. cit., p. 256.

64) A. Aulard, éd., Société, II, 574.

65) Idem. Royer (1743-1804) became later a deputy of the National Convention. He voted with the Girondists and remained in hiding during the Terror.

" après beaucoup de discussions, de chaleur de la part de l'opinant pour énoncer son opinion, et d'opposition de la part de l'assemblée à l'entendre, il s'élance de la tribune et sort de l'assemblée."66)

If this was Billaud, he did not return to the Club until September of that year.

Billaud's failure to assert himself in the Jacobin Club is matched by his lack of success in his first attempt to win a political office. Yet, he seemed to have had all the necessary connections. In fact, his friendship with Danton should have given him at least a few votes. In these early stages of the Revolution, Danton's influence is difficult to judge. The "machine", as a city-wide organization, did not become prominent before August 10, 1792. Danton's biographers have constantly neglected his role as a political "boss". Yet, from the very beginning, he exercised a strong influence over elections, appointments to political posts, particularly in his own quartier (the district des Cordeliers before May 1790; then the section du Théâtre-Français; and, three years later, the section de Marat et de Marseille).[67] That section of Paris, in the Latin Quarter, was inhabited mostly by students, artisans and small shopkeepers. By no means one of the most radical of the city, it was nevertheless in the forefront of the revolutionary activity,

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66) Idem.

67) The records of this section were lost in the fire of the Hôtel-de-Ville in 1871. Thus, almost nothing is known about one of the most important districts of Paris during the Revolution. Aulard was therefore unable to ascertain Danton's power during these early years. See his "Danton en 1791 et 1792", La Révolution Française, XXIV (1893), 304-344.

chiefly because more literate persons (especially lawyers, writers and journalists) lived there rather than in the working-class districts. A list of famous addresses in the section du Théâtre-Français reads like the Who is Who? of the French Revolution, from Danton, Marat and Fabre d'Eglantine to Hébert and Chaumette. Billaud by his writings, and more probably as a lawyer, was rather well-known in 1790 and 1791 to the "little men" in the section. But he had even one more advantage: He was one of Danton's chief political assistants. The historian will probably never know what that meant in terms of activities, any more than he knows what Desmoulins, Manuel, and Fabre d'Eglantine, Danton's other "lieutenants" at that period, did for their patron. But it is of importance to realize that the post was a starting-pdnt of much value for a budding politician. The three men mentioned above, as well as others, reaped great profits as a result of their friendship with Danton. It is therefore surprising that Billaud did not take better advantage of his opportunities. But when elections for an assistant judgeship (juge suppléant) at the criminal court of the sixth arrondissement were held in June 1791, he received only 8 votes (out of 312) in the first scrutin, and 3 (!!) in the second (out of 300).[68] A day later (June 14), in elections for the same post in the first arrondissement his name appeared only on the second scrutin, when 7 (out of 293) votes were cast for him.[69]

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68) Etienne Charavay, ed., Assemblée Electorale de Paris. 18 Novembre 1790-12 août 1792 (Paris, 1890-1894), I, 600.

69) Ibid., I, 608.

It is likely that he felt bitter about his defeat. The Billaud-Varennes of a later period is recognizable from the moment he entered public life; a man without humor or redeeming human qualities, relentless in the pursuit of his ideals. It is impossible to know what produced that change during the Summer of 1791. Impatient with the progress of the Revolution, he was one of the first of the men of future prominence to embrace Republicanism. That idea was only implied in his remarks at the Jacobin Club on July 11st; in fact never fully stated until the Republic was a reality, after August 10,1792. But even then many patriotic Frenchmen still believed that the abolition of the Monarchy had been an act of rashness, rather to be regretted. Billaud also became an outspoken advocate of federalism shortly after the King's flight to Varennes (June 20-21,1791). That event and the formulation of his new political theory are somewhat related, though not as closely as it may seem at first. But a few months, if not weeks, after the weakness of the Monarchy had been so clearly demonstrated, Billaud's next book was published. It was to become the Bible of the federalists and admired far beyond its actual worth.

L'Acéphocratie,ou le Gouvernement Fédératif,démontré le meilleur de tous, pour un grand Empire, par les principes de la politique et les faits de l'histoire, says far less than its title implies. But its 78 pages make for much more vivid reading than Billaud's other books. While the rhetoric still sound unpleasant

to modern ears, it contains several interesting arguments. The beginning is, however, in the customary style:

> " Aux Français qui veulent être libres. ...
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> Vous vous flattez d'être libres, ou plutôt ceux qui se sont rendus vos maîtres, s'éforcent de vous le faire accroire, en tenant suspendues sur vos têtes, les chaînes nouvelles qu'ils vous préparent; ce qui vous empêche d'en sentir le poids..." [70]

The "new masters" are Lafayette and Bailly, "reptiles devant un despote absolu." [71] That latter has practically abdicated and leaves his henchmen to cause havoc among the peace-loving citizens. [72] Then follows a long discussion of history. Billaud rejects the eighteenth century view that the British Government promotes the happiness and welfare of its citizens. Parliament, he says, is ruled by bribery. The reason why Englishmen enjoy freedom is the absence of an army in the British Islands, and the excellent geographic location which guarantees safety from invasion. [73] France was also in that position once, in the Middle Ages, when the country was divided into small principalities and the King was merely a figurehead. [74] This is not only a complete denial of the rationalist concept of the "Dark Ages", but a contradiction of Billaud's own concepts of that period, stated only a year before in Despotisme des Ministres de France. It is a truly "modern" concept

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70) Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennes, L'Acéphocratie (Paris, l'an second de l'acheminement de la liberté-1791), p.1.

71) Ibid., p.3.

72) Ibid., p.7.

73) Ibid., p.5.

74) Ibid., p.14.

of history; he is turning away from traditional views. Rousseau is quoted as saying: "J'aurois voulu naître sous un gouvernement démocratique, sagement tempéré."[75] Yet, says Billaud, the French people are not yet ripe for a democracy; in fact even too immature for a Republic, which would be the best form of government, since it permits no arbitrary actions on the part of the rulers.[76] No Kings were ever great; they were given that surname by priests. Billaud discusses in detail the criminal acts and scandalous private lives of Constantine, Theodosius and Charlemegne.[77] As proof, he offers the "authentic details and simple truths" offered by the "écrivain patriote" (Lavicomterie) in his Crimes des Rois de France depuis Clovis jusqu'à Louis XVI,[78] which had just been published. Out of sixty-nine Kings of France, the only good ones were Louis XII and Henry IV, but the first of these was stupid, and the second bloodthirsty and immoral.[79] But the people do not see this; they act only when bayonets are driven in their chests. Consequently, they missed

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75) Ibid.,p.41.

76) Ibid.,pp.42-48.

77) Ibid.,pp.49-50.

78) Ibid.,p.50. Louis-Thomas-"Hébert" de La Vicomterie de Saint-Samson(1732-1809), engaged almost solely in polemical writing during the early years of the French Revolution.A member of the Committee of General Security of the National Convention during the Terror,he became an extreme radical,admitting freely that Robespierre exercised a "hypnotic" influence over him.He remained in hiding during the whole period of the Thermidorian Reaction.

79) Ibid.,p.51.

the one chance they had to create a better government, in July 1789.[80]

> " La nation française désire-t-elle donc sincèrement être libre? Que sans tarder plus longtemps, elle s'occupe du soin de recouvrer ses droits usurpés, pour anéantir définitivement ce régime oppresseur de l'arbitraire." [81]

Federalism is the answer. As in the United States of America, each part of the country should be sovereign. Every one of the 83 departments would then be a "political" power", with the same rights as other "political powers" (the Assembly, the King, etc.).[82] Cooperation would be assured, since decrees would only be legal if a plurality of the administrations of the departments accepted them.[83] Since no such majority could be induced to declare war, peace would reign forever.[84] The conclusions: "Pesez donc ces importantes vérités, ô mes concitoyens." - and act accordingly.[85] It is regrettable that Billaud could not think of practical measures, which would bring about this ideal state. This is the only one of his books, in which no concrete suggestions at all are put forward.

Did Billaud have to hide after the publication of L'Acéphocratie? In January 1793, when Jacques-Antoine Dulaure had attacked Billaud in his Le Thermomètre du Jour as a federalist,

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80) Ibid., pp.53-55.
81) Ibid., p.63.
82) Ibid., pp.68-71.
83) Ibid., p.64.
84) Ibid., p.65.
85) Ibid., pp.75-78.

the latter answered by reminding him, that, in 1791, he had lived for a short period in Dulaure's house, after "les satellites de Lafayette" had confiscated some copies of the work in the bookstores.[86] But why should the authorities object to this harmless political discussion, when they did not do so after Plus de Ministres ou Point de Grace, which was a much more emotional denunciation of the rulers of the state? In any event, Billaud did not remain out of sight for long. From September 1791 on, his movements can be traced quite clearly. Only a few weeks in August cannot be accounted for; those may have been the days when he kept away from public life.

After L'Acéphocratie had been published, Billaud was considered one of the High Priests of federalism. It is doubtful if the book found more readers than the previous ones, but it appeared at the most opportune time for the author's political career. Billaud became one of the first political philosophers during the Revolution to promote either the Republic or federalism. The Girondist alignment had not yet materialized; the "party" of federalism was not yet born. When this came about in the late Autumn of 1791, much more was written on the subject. But Billaud's

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86) [Emile Taschereau, ed.], "Lettre de Billaud-Varennes", Revue Rétrospective, Seconde Série no.32, XI(1837), 320. Dulaure(1755-1835), an architect by profession, became a moderate deputy in the National Convention. Forced to hide during the Terror, he became one of the most rabid reactionaries, writing a Supplément aux crimes des anciens Comités de gouvernement. As documentation, his books are extremely unreliable, largely unproved rumors and false accusations.

work remained one of the pioneer efforts. As late as 4 germinal year III (March 24,1795), Marie-Joseph Chénier quoted from it in the National Convention.[87] And when the author returned to the Jacobin Club and became known as a speaker there, he could be certain of support.

3. Speaker at the Jacobin Club: September 8,1791-August 10,1792.

Between September 8, 1791 and August 10,1792, Billaud made eleven speeches at the Jacobin Club, some of no importance at all; others of importance in the history of the French Revolution.

As soon as he returned to the Society, he gave a long lecture on education.[88] It was not part of any particular debate; he merely requested to make his opinions known. The speech has been generally ignored by historians, even by those who wrote special studies on the subject.[89] Billaud proposed that the state take over the instruction of children. Unfortunately,

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87) Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur (8 germinal an III-March 28, 1795),XXIV,57(hereafter referred to as Moniteur).

88) "Discours de M.Billaud de Varennes sur l'éducation", in Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution,I(1791)no.57,2-4;no.59,24; no.60,3.Alphonse Aulard,ed., Société,III,121,says only:"M.Billaud-Varennes prononce un long discours sur l'éducation."

89) Notable E.Allain,L'Oeuvre Scolaire de la Révolution.1789-1802 (Paris,1891),and Victor Boisdé,L'Enseignement primaire sous la Révolution(Paris,1908).

the endless repetition of the same points merely bored the audience and did not even lead to a discussion of his proposals. He started out by explaining why children should be taken away from their parents at an early age.

> " Rien n'est donc plus nuisible à l'expension des talens,[he said], que l'usage qui laisse les pères de famille régler eux-mêmes arbitrairement,le carrière que doit parcourir chacun de leurs enfans. L'expérience atteste que ce n'est ni la raison, ni le bon sens qui présidents à ces déterminations; mais uniquement des vues d'intérêts, ou l'empire de l'habitude... Il faut de grands hommes pour faire des révolutions; et pour en avoir il faut en former." 90)

Private tutors are tradition-bound; moreover, they occupy so law a rank on the social scale that children despise instead of respect them. 91) It is necessary to prepare young people to live in society. The example of Sparta shows that this can best be accomplished by physical education, or rather bodily activity. In a moment of rest, the child becomes corrupt; if kept constantly on the move, it never thinks of temptation. 92)

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90) Journal des Débats... de la Société,I,no,57,2-3.

91) Ibid.,I,no.57,3.

92) Idem. Harold T.Parker,The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries(Chicago,1937),p.152,points out the contrast between Billaud's and Saint-Just's praise of Sparta, as against Desmoulins' admiration for Athens.

" Tenez-les dans une telle activité,qu'ils puissent s'oublier les uns les autres... c'est ainsi qu'on parvient à les tenir en garde contre eux-mêmes. C'est ainsi que dans le seul moment où l'on ne peut les surveiller, le besoin de repos supplée le défaut de vigilance." 93)

The only other instruction should aim at developing taste and morality.[94] Teachers and students should discuss problems frankly. Textbooks and manuals are of no use whatsoever, since young people read carelessly.[95] Instead, walks in the countryside would supply information, and

" que toujours l'explication conduise à quelque précepte de morale. C'est ainsi qu'on rectifie les moeurs,en meublant l'imagination." 96)

When the student is able to understand beauty of language and style, the classical and modern authors should be learned by heart and discussed.[97] This, in the end, would develop perfect men, trained to work for a perfect society.[98]

On October 16 came the speech about emigration.[99] Billaud deplored the fact that so many persons of wealth and industry were leaving the country. Referring to the example of Spain

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93) Ibid.,I,no.59,3.

94) Idem.

95) Ibid.,I,no.59,4.

96) Ibid.,I,no.60,3.

97) Idem.

98) Idem.

99) Discours sur les Emigrations par M.Billaud-Varennes([Paris,1791]). Not at all mentioned in Journal des Débats...de la Société.A.Aulard, ed.,Société,III,194,makes no comment,but mentions the title of the speech in a footnote.

(after departure of Jews and Moors) and France (after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes), he demonstrated that the removal of capital and technical knowledge led inevitably to the decline of a nation.[100] He admitted that the French émigrés of 1791 were a danger to the state, but he felt also that, if they were allowed to leave the country, they might become an even greater one, since they would then have opportunities to induce the Monarchs of Europe to wage war against France.[101] What to do about it? First, in order to prevent the export of money from the country, the state should confiscate one half to two-thirds of the revenues from incomes or the properties of those who would want to leave or who had already gone, but had left part of their fortunes in France.[102]

> " Jean-Jacques,[he said], a bien établi dans son Contrat Social; qu'il devoit être licite à tout citoyen de déserter ses foyers à volonté. Cependant,il y a mis cette exception: Hors les circonstances où la patrie se trouveroit être en danger ...
> Quant aux émigrés sans fortune,la déplorable existence qu'ils ont déjà,les rend,sous tous les rapports,des êtres bien dignes de pitié." [103]

Second, in order to prevent these émigrés from doing more damage, the frontiers should be fortified and the armies reformed. Sodiers in regiments, whose officers had "deserted" into emigration,should appoint new commanders from among themselves.[104] The new

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100) Discours sur les Emigrations...,pp.2-4.
101) Ibid.,p.7.
102) Ibid.,pp.12-13.
103) Ibid.,pp.13-14.
104) Ibid.,p.9.

Legislative Assembly should develop plans for the defense of the country.[105] If these measures were adopted,

> " c'est alors, messieurs, que ces émigrés, soit pour prévenir leur ruine totale, soit en manquant d'un dernier nécessaire, se trouveront fort heureux si vous voulez encore les recevoir dans une contrée que vous aurez rendue plus attrayante, en l'affranchissant à jamais des préjugés, de l'ignorance et du joug de l'opression." [106]

Shortly before this address, Billaud had engaged in his one case as a lawyer, which received some publicity at the time. Captain Vialla was aide-major of the battalion de Popincour, one of those which had fired into the crowd during the celebration on the Champ de Mars on July 14, 1791. During the massacre, Vialla, a convinced Republican, had refused to obey the orders of his Commander, Colin de Caucey. The latter insulted the Captain after the event, and ordered him to resign his commission. Instead, Vialla, in a most unmilitary gesture, went to the Committee of Administration of the section de Popincour, and issued a written complaint against his superior officer.[107] This was turned over by the section to the Commune of Paris, which publicly cleared Colin de Caucey. The Commander thereupon brought action for slander against Vialla.[108] The latter retained Billaud-Varennes as counsel and wrote a pamphlet, Rêveries républicaines, in his

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105) Ibid., p.8.

106) Ibid., p.15.

107) Révolutions de Paris, IX, (1791), no.114, 506. The case has never been mentioned by any historian.

108) Ibid., IX, no.114, 507.

own defense. The case came before the criminal court of the fourth arrondissement in late September. The judges were apparently prejudiced. They warned Billaud not to disturb the proceedings, while "son plaidoyer a été interrompu vingt fois par ses adversaires, et les juges l'ont souffert."[109] After four sessions, Villa was declared guilty, fined 50 livres and court costs, and his pamphlet ordered suppressed, on September 24. In a final grand gesture, Colin de Caucey gave the money to charity.[110] Billaud had lost his case. But he now had claims to martyrdom in the people's cause, a most useful title during a revolution.

Billaud did not speak again in the Jacobin Club until December 5. But he was among the twelve members of the society who gave lectures on "morals and the Constitution" during October and November.[111] And he belonged to the Committee of Constitution of the Club.[112]

His next speech, on December 5, 1791, was on the political situation of France.[113] Extremely long, it dealt with the various abuses in the government. It contained attacks on the Legislative

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109) Ibid., X, no. 117, 35.

110) Idem.

111) A. Aulard, ed., Société, III, 178. Other lecturers were Pétion, Robespierre, Sillery, Roederer, Brissot, Collot-d'Herbois and Tallien.

112) Idem. Among his twenty-five colleagues were many Girondists, like Pétion, Buzot, Brissot, Carra, but also Robespierre.

113) "Discours de M. Billaud-de-Varennes", in Journal des Débats...de la Société, I (1791), no. 106, 2-4; no. 107, 3-4 and 4 pages of supplement; no. 108, 4 (15 columns fine print in all. Aulard does not mention this speech; he lists no meeting of the Jacobin Club for December 5. But there is a discussion of it in Gérard Walter, Robespierre (Paris, 1936-1940), II, 58-60.

Assembly, the Ministers, priests, aristocrats, and financiers.[114] Billaud had already spoken about these matters before, and discussed them in detail in his books. Again he proposed close supervision of the Ministers, as well as measures to bring them to justice.[115] Again, he demanded that officers be elected; each company would choose its own captains and lieutenants, each regiment its staff.[116] The Assembly should also set down fixed and easy methods of accusation

> " qui déléguent à chaque citoyen le droit et la faculté de poursuivre juridiquement le crime, n'importe où il se trouve."[117]

But Billaud did not say what methods he had in mind. Finally, the Legislative Assembly should declare that it would hold Louis XVI personally responsible for an enemy invasion of French territory, and that, if the intrigues of the émigrés were not brought to a halt by an order of the King, "la Constitution décide en ce cas, qu'il est ipso facto destitué de la couronne, étant censé de l'avoir abdiquée."[118] Billaud's audience voted that the speech contained "des mesures très sages" and that debate on it would begin the next day. But when the time came, it was indefinitely postponed, to make way instead for the reception of a delegation from an English patriotic society.[119]

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114) Journal des Débats... de la Société, I, no.1-7, supplément, 1-2.
115) Ibid., I, no.107, 3.
116) Ibid., I, no.107, 3-4.
117) Ibid., I, no.107, 4.
118) Ibid., I, no.107, supplément, 3.
119) G.Walter, op.cit., p.60.

During these last months of 1791 and the early ones of 1792, the question of war dominated French politics. In the Jacobin Club, the matter was debated at lenghth. For the first time, the Society was split on a basic issue; the Girondists (led by Brissot de Warville) conducted an aggressive campaign in favor of war against the Monarchs of Europe, while Robespierre and his friends opposed these plans. Early in December 1791, Billaud seems to have rejected military engagements altogether. According to statements in his speech of December 5, it was in the King's power to prevent bloodshed. But only two weeks later, he appears to have changed his mind, as his next speech showed (on December 19).[120]

> " Ce n'est pas contre la nécessité cruelle d'une guerre inévitable,[he began], que je viens de m'élever. Quand on s'applaudissoit en 1789, en disant "que jamais une révolution n'avoit coûté aussi peu de sang", j'ai toujours répondu: "qu'un peuple qui brisoit le joug de la tyrannie, ne pouvoit sceller irrévocablement sa liberté qu'en traçant l'acte qui la consacre avec la pointe des bayonettes..." [121]

From this time until August 10,1792, Billaud-Varennes supported the French"War of Liberation" against all of Europe. But he always rejected the optimistic views of the Girondists. Neither did he agree with Robespierre, although the speech of December 19 was in

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120) Discours sur Cette Question: Comment doit-on faire la guerre,au cas qu'il faille la déclarer?....par M.Billaud-Varennes([Paris,1791]). Only mention of the title in A.Aulard,ed.,Société,III,293.Large excerpts in Journal des Débats ... de la Société,I(1791),no.114,2-4. Reprint in P.-J.-B.Buchez et P.-C.Roux,eds.,Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française(Paris,1834-1838),XII,413-418.Long comment in G.Walter,op.cit.,II,78-80.

121) Discours .... Comment doit-on faire la guerre,pp.1-2.

the latter's support.[122] Billaud saw with horror the condition of unpreparedness of the French armies. Consequently, all his efforts, in speech after speech, were directed against the rulers of France, whose neglect of defense preparations he considered a crime. While he did not oppose war in principle, he wanted to see it conducted for the people's benefit and without needless sacrifices. On December 19, he accused the Legislative Assembly of leading the country to ruin by entrusting the poorly equipped armies to treacherous officers.

> " A-t-on jamais plus formellement mis en évidence [he asked], un plan de contre-révolution, dont assurément l'exécution deviendroit aussi facile que le succès en seroit certain?" [123]

He maintained that the King and Lafayette would use the crisis to crush the Revolution, that "war emergency" measures would be applied to silence the good patriots.[124] The army on the frontiers, composed of volunteers and national guard regiments, would be led

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122) Only very few recent books on Robespierre are of value to the historian. G.Walter, op.cit., is a very careful study of the original sources; in particular, an excellent analysis of Robespierre's own speeches and writings. But it fails to place him in his environment, and the period of the Terror is practically ignored. The very best interpretation of the man's complex character is Peter Richard Rohden, Robespierre. Die Tragödie des politischen Ideologen (Berlin, 1935). But it is undocumented. James M. Thompson, Robespierre (2 vs., New York, 1936) is an excellent synthesis of previous studies, the most valuable of the biographies. The great milestone in the Robespierre legend, Ernest Hamel, Histoire de Robespierre et du Coup d'Etat du Neuf Thermidor (3 vs., Paris, [1865]), has no value any more.

123) Discours ... Comment doit-on faire la guerre, p.2.

124) Ibid., pp.5-9.

to slaughter, since it had neither been furnished equipment, nor received proper training.[125] If the armies were victorious, the King's position as a military leader would be strenghthened; if it were defeated, the Coalition would be able to maintain the Monarchy and abolish the gains of the Revolution.[126]

> " Point de fausses démarches [he declared], point d'inconséquences, point d'écarts. Notre conduite doit être tracée par la prudence et par la raison; c'est en marchant en sens contraire, c'est par une précipitation irréfléchie, que nous mériterions en effet le titre d'"inconsidérés" dont on nous menace, en s'efforçant de nous le faire mériter. Que dans une question aussi délicate, les raisons pour et contre soient pesées sans prévention comme sans enthousiasme." [127]

The best (and only true) solution would be to force the King to abdicate. The Legislative Assembly, representing the people, could take over the administration of France.[128] In particular, the ultimatum which Louis XVI had sent the Archbishop of Trier to eject the émigrés from his state by January 15, 1792 or face war with France, would then become inoperative. Since this declaration lead the small German princes to look around for allies, France might appear to be the aggressor.[129] On the other hand, the Assembly

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125) Ibid., p.10.
126) Ibid., pp.16-20.
127) Ibid., p.21.
128) Idem.
129) Ibid., pp.21-25.

could just declare that the presence of émigrés in Trier after January 15, meant de facto a declaration of war against France. In that case, the guilt would be on the other side, and the Government would be justified in starting military action.

> " car ne combattant plus après cette notification que pour se défendre,ce seroit mettre entièrement la justice de son côté; se seroit contraindre les autres puissances de l'Europe à garder la neutralité,ou du moins à manquer de prétexte valable pour se joindre à nos ennemis." 130)

And Lafayette should be recalled, as the very first step in the removal of traitors from the armed forces.[131] In a final burst of rhetoric,Billaud expressed his hope for the defeat of the counter-revolution:

> " Peut-être qu'après avoir chassé le despotisme de leur empire,et se trouvant provoqués de nouveau par ce monstre ...,les verra-t-on,comme Hercule, s'élancer sur l'hydre,la combattre,l'assommer,en purger la terre,et délivrer les autres peuples de ce fléau de l'humanité,que l'écriture appelle,avec tant de raison,un présent de la colère du ciel."[132]

This speech is generally considered one of Billaud's most brilliant efforts. A modern historian noted the difference between it and Robespierre's address of the previous day:

> " Point de ménagements oratoires,[he says],point d'arabesques subtiles et compliquées,déployées, avec un art consommé,par son prédécesseur,point de nuances finement tracées d'une main avisée.Un cri d'alarme,tout simplement.Mais l'angoisse n'empêche pas l'homme de voir clair,de juger clair, de parler clair." 133)

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130) Ibid., p.25.
131) Ibid., p.30.
132) Ibid., pp.31-32.
133) G.Walter, op.cit., II, 78.

During the next month, Billaud did not speak in public. Since his warnings had gone unheeded, he repeated his previous remarks,with only a few modifications, on January 29,1792.[134] He began this time by defending Robespierre against the charge that the latter alone was opposed to war. Billaud declared that Danton and Desmoulins also disagreed with the Girondist plans of conquest. Any sensible person should do so, he said, because not only were the defense preparations inadequate, but the position of the Legislative Assembly in respect to the declaration of war was weak.[135] According to the Constitution, the King had to request such a declaration from the Assembly before that body could even debate on it; if it did so without his approval, it would violate the Constitution. Louis XVI would,under the circumstances, be in his rights to veto any of the decisions and take measures against the Assembly in order to "save the Constitution".[136]

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134) Second Discours de M.Billaud-Varennes,Sur la guerre([Paris,1792)] A.Aulard,ed.,Société,III,347,makes only a few remarks.The whole speech is reprinted in Journal des Débats .... de la Société,II(1792),no.135, 1-4;no.136,3-4.Short excerpts in P.-J.-B.Buchez et P.-C.Roux,eds., op.cit.,XIII,169-170.

135) Second Discours,pp.3-5.

136) Ibid.,pp.7-8.The Constitution of 1791 merely declares(chapter IV, sect.3),that foreign relations are the sole province of the Executive Power(meaning the King),but that all"conventions he deems necessary for the welfare of the state,are subject to ratification" by the legislature.Billaud's opinions regarding the declaration of war,are a lawyer's interpretation,subject to dispute.For the Constitution, the best reprint in English is in John Hall Stewart,ed.,A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution (New York,1951),pp.230-262.

> " A la vérité,[Billaud declared], on nous promet que le premier coup de canon doit ébranler tous les trônes des despotes.Les rois sont mûrs,s'écrie-t-on! Eh bien!laissez les donc tomber d'eux-mêmes. Eh! pourquoi cette fureur de faire égorger des millions d'hommes pour abattre des ennemis que vous regardez comme déjà terrassés? Il faut prévenir la ligue des tyrans... Mais qui de nos adversaires,ou de nous, proposent les meilleurs mesures pour déjouer les complots qui nous menacent? Eux,qui prétendent qu'il faut sur le champ porter la guerre au dehors,avant d'établir la paix et l'ordre dans l'intérieur; et nous,en soutenant qu'on de doit parler de guerre qu'après s'être mis en état de la faire avec succès; nous qui exigeons plus encore,qui demandons qu'on décide préalablement si Léopold [II, of Austria] est notre plus redoutable,est notre véritable ennemi;"137

The real enemies are Louis XVI, as well as Lafayette and the other important generals. Billaud attacked the latter only in their professional capacities, as being unable to prepare France for war, or to win a battle, or to guarantee that the peoples of Europe would receive their "Liberators" with open arms.[138] But he considered the King guilty of every possible crime.[139] After the attacks came the constructive proposals, but Billaud repeated only what he had stated previously: Create a citizen army, organise defense production, remove unpatriotic persons from positions of leadership.[140]

These were his final recommendations regarding the war. It should be noted that he hardly followed an independent line;

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137) Second Discours,pp.8-9.
138) Ibid.,pp.9-12.
139) Ibid.,pp.17-20.
140) Ibid.,pp.24-25.

in fact, during the January 29 speech, he jumped on Robespierre's (or Danton's) bandwagon. Having exhausted his arguments, he then remained silent for a time.

On March 4, when he was again ready to make his views known, he approached a different subject altogether. The records of the Jacobin Club describe this meeting as follows:

> " M.Billaud-Varennes commence un discours dans lequel il paraît vouloir proposer,comme moyen de faire disparaître la différence qui existe entre les assignats et le numéraire,de renoncer à l'usage des objets de commerce étranger.Cette opinion élève,au moment où elle se montre,l'opposition de quelques membres,qui réclament l'ordre du jour.M.le Président [Thuriot] met aux voix la proposition de savoir si M.Billaud continuera ou non son discours.-La majorité de l'Assemblée se déclare pour que M. Billaud continue.-Malgré cette décision formelle, le tumulte que font les personnes qui n'étaient pas disposées à l'entendre forcent M.Billaud-Varennes à renoncer à émettre son opinion." 141)

This is rather astonishing, in view of the fact that the Dantonist and Robespierrist factions should have backed their speaker more forcefully than they actually did.

Yet, this second failure at the Jacbin Club was not repeated in the public arena. As March 1792 came around, elections were held for assistant judgeships in the fourth arrondissement and Billaud's name was again proposed. On the first day (March,5),he failed to obtain the necessary plurality of votes (83 out of 297, and 94 out of 191, in the first and second scrutins respectively). 142) Since

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141) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,III,423-424.Also in Journal des Débats.... de la Société,II(1792),no.154,2.

142) Etienne Charavay,ed.,Assemblée Electorale de Paris.18 Novembre 1790 - 12 Août 1792(Paris,1890-1894),II,457-458.

none of the candidates won, a scrutin de ballottage was held the next day. In the first round, 335 voters cast 152 ballots for Billaud, but 168 were necessary for election.[143] But in the second scrutin, he received 163 votes out of 310, 7 more than necessary to win.[144] On March 8, he appeared at the Electoral Assembly of Paris. He requested immunity from a law of October 17, 1791, which forbade successful candidates to make speeches of gratitude. Having been granted his wish, he said:

> " Pour moi, Messieurs, j'accepte le poste que vous m'avez confié comme une épreuve de mes principes. Le peuple et la loi seront mes idoles, mais encore une fois qu'elles m'écrasent dès le premier faux pas que je pourrais faire."[145]

Billaud thus obtained his first official position; his first reward as man of the "machine". No instance is known of his ever attending either a session of his court or a meeting of the General Council (Conseil Général) of the Commune of Paris, to which he now belonged by virtue of his election.[146] Yet, his victory had made him even more ambitious. On April 26, he ran for President of the Electoral Assembly of Paris, receiving 2 (!!!) votes out

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143) Ibid., II, 459.

144) Ibid., II, 460.

145) Ibid., II, 465-466. See also A. Douarche, ed., Les Tribunaux Civils de Paris pendant la Révolution (1791-1800) (Paris, 1905-1907), I, 10.

146) By an oversight, P. Robiquet, Le Personnel Municipal de Paris pendant la Révolution. Période Constitutionnelle (Paris, 1890), fails to mention Billaud-Varennes at any time.

of 423.[147] And, in an attempt to become Public Prosecutor (accusateur public) on the next day, he obtained no more than 7 (out of 499) votes.[148]

Billaud's next speech at the Jacobin Club, on May 14, was the result of a denunciation against him.[149] He and another member of the General Council of the Paris Commune had written a pamphlet (Dix millions de Français à l'assemblée nationale), asking for the creation of a Republic and the trial of the leading Ministers.[150] An enemy notified the police, and, although the latter took no action, Billaud found it necessary to justify himself.[151] His very short address lacks the slightest interest. It is sufficient to quote only a few excerpts from that emotional outburst:

> " Lorsqu'entraîné par l'élan impétueux du patriotisme, j'élevai pour la première fois la voix dans cette tribune, les vérités que j'y venois dénoncer me valurent aussi le titre de scélérat...
>
> Jamais, non jamais de pareilles injures ne sauront m'atteindre; et si ce n'étoit la crainte de voir égarer le peuple, je me garderois bien de repousser ces calomnies...[152]

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147) E.Charavay, ed., op.cit., II, 475.

148) Ibid., II, 481.

149) Discours de M.Billaud-Varennes([Paris, 1792]). A.Aulard, ed., Société, III, 581, says only: "M.Billaud-Varennes répond à une dénonciation dont il a été l'objet". Two paragraphs of speech in Journal des Débats ... de la Société, II(1792), no.195, 4.

150) This pamphlet was never printed, and the manuscript appears to have been lost or destroyed.

151) Discours..., p.2.

152) Idem.

> Ames viles! que vous me connaissez peu! Je ne tiens pas plus aux richesses qu'à mon existence; ma patrie et la liberté, voilà les deux seuls sentimens qui m'animent ..." 153)

The speech contains really nothing but assurances that Billaud is an honorable man. It is difficult to understand why the Club felt that it should be printed.

But on June 29, he was again in top form. 154) The subject of his dislike this time was Queen Marie-Antoinette.

> " Deux ou trois factions,bien prononcées,[he said],se disputent dans ce moment l'usurpation du pouvoir absolu... La première de ces factions est celle de la cour,à la tête de laquelle je vois une femme,qui depuis quelques temps on affecte d'oublier,je ne sais trop pourquoi;...une femme que son origine a fait naître la rivale et l'ennemie de la prospérité françoise...une femme qui,n'ayant plus d'or à dévorer,a voulu s'abreuver de sang..." 155)

This faction has two alternatives: 1.To reestablish the old regime at its most effective, with a return to feudal conditions and Royal courts in place of the parlements. 2.To create, as a concession to the upper bourgeoisie, a two-chamber government on the British model. 156) The upper chamber would prevent the passage of liberal laws. Billaud discussed this question at length, giving a highly unfavorable description of the British Parliament in operation. 157)

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153) Ibid.,p.4.

154) Discours de M.Billaud-Varennes,Sur notre situation actuelle et quelques mesures à prendre pour assurer le salut public([Paris,1792)]. A.Aulard,ed.,Société,III,581,says only:"M.Billaud-Varennes prononce un long discours sur la situation".Reprint in Journal des Débats...de la Société,III(1792),no.233,1-4;no.224,2-4.Only short mention in P.-J.-B.Buchez et P.-C.Roux,op,cit.,XV,237.

155) Discours...Sur notre situation actuelle,pp.203.

156) Ibid.,p.4.

157) Ibid.,pp.10-11.

He believed also that the task of imposing a two-chamber government upon the French people would be assigned to the second faction at Court, headed by Lafayette.[158] Rarely did Billaud use more violent language against an opponent than he did against the General in this speech. He held him responsible for various counter-revolutionary measures; called him "massacreur", a buyer of false testimonies, a promoter of arbitrary arrests, Caesar crossing the Rubicon, Catilina, a criminal, a traitor and a dictator.[159] Billaud followed a majority of the Jacobins and practically all their prominent speakers in voicing these opinions. He also praised the awareness and activity of the Club, as the force of opposition to the counter-revolution:

> " Vraiment si l'énergie des amis de la constitution ne se fût pas constamment opposée aux entreprises de l'orgueil et de la cupidité des grands, aux empiétations perpétuelles du pouvoir exécutif, et aux complots successifs de la cour et des intrigans, on conçoit aisément que la paix régneroit aujourd'hui dans toutes les parties de l'empire; mais ce seroit la paix de l'esclavage, la paix qui répandit son voile sombre et lugubre le lendemain de la journée sanguinolente du massacre du champ de Mars; la paix plus affreuse que celle des tombeaux, puisqu'elle est commandée par la consternation et la terreur." [160]

Then follow the old - and some new - recommendations: 1. Put Lafayette and his friends on trial.[161] 2. The Legislative Assembly

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158) Ibid., pp.10-11.
159) Ibid., pp.11-14.
160) Ibid., pp.15-16.
161) Ibid., p.16.

should warn the Court that any attempt on its part to change the Constitution would lead to the fall of the Monarchy.[162] 3. For the coming July 14, a new "federation" of the eighty-three departments should be decreed.[163] 4. A call for convocation of all primary assemblies, to take measures for common defense, must be issued.[164] 5. Finally, "_pour briser à l'instant de faux leviers de contre-révolution_", the Assembly should suppress the general staffs of the armies, and, instead, create an officers corps on a rotation basis, allowing deserving men from the ranks to lead the troops.[165] Billaud had no hesitation at all to call for such a radical change in wartime, with an enemy on French soil.

The importance of this speech lies in the fact that some of these proposals were immediately enacted, and led in the end to the suspension of the Monarchy on August 10. Billaud followed either the popular trend, or, less likely, incited the various factions in the Jacobin Club to common action. Already on June 20, the populace of Paris had shown the King that it would not permit him to assert his constitutional powers. The arbitrary arrests, dismissals and expulsions of members of the Commune led to the

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162) _Ibid._, p.17.
163) _Idem_.
164) _Idem_.
165) _Idem_.

"Revolution of August 10". And the calling of the "federation," followed by the arrival of deputies and volunteers from the departments early in July, prevented this "Revolution" from becoming merely an affair of the capital. During these June weeks, many speakers in the Jacobin Club and other popular societies expressed the same hopes and the same desires. It is therefore impossible to assign responsibility for the coming events to one man. But it seems possible that Billaud's address of June 29 was one of those which had considerable influence.

Billaud's next three speeches were rather anticlimatic. They were limited in scope and mostly repetitions of his earlier statements. The first, on July 8, was the result of a show of solidarity and unity in the meeting of the Legislative Assembly of the day before.[166] The lawmakers had decided to forget party differences and to work together. Billaud was shocked.

> " Je le dis comme je le pense;[he said], voir tel député se jeter dans les bras de tel autre,c'est voir Néron embrasser Britannicus,c'est voir Charles IX tendant la main à Coligny.Les judas ne donnèrent jamais de baisers que pour livrer les victimes ..." [167]

> " Comment croire que cette foi jurée va faire cesser le danger de la patrie? Les puissances de l'Europe mettront-elles moins d'activité dans leurs préparatifs hostiles? ... Et Lafayette,le traître Lafayette,en sera-t-il moins un scélérat?..." [168]

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166) Réflexions de M.Billaud-Varennes,Sur la Séance du matin de l'assemblée nationale,du 7 juillet 1792(Paris,1792).Short excerpts i A.Aulard,ed.,Société,IV,82; one-paragraph summary in Journal des Débats ... de la Société,III(1792),no.228,2.Reprint in P.-J.-B.Buche et P.-C.Roux,eds.,op.cit.,XV,343-345.

167) Réflexions de M.Billaud-Varennes,p.2.

168) Ibid.,p.4.

Billaud feared that it would become impossible to criticize the Government freely. But he had no remedy and saw no way by which to create dissention in the Assembly. All he could suggest was to remind his listeners that "Contre des brigands couronnés et des mangeurs d'hommes, il faut Hercule et sa massue."[169]

The "brigand couronné" was the subject of Billaud's remarks on July 15.[170] The denunciation of Louis XVI took five pages of small print (when the speech was published), but the arguments had been heard before. The only novel approach was toward the future of the Monarchy itself. Billaud proposed that the King and his family be deported, "qu'une escorte suffisante conduise le roi et sa famille hors des frontières."[171] But he objected to a formal suspension, since that would entail a protracted discussion in the Assembly.[172] He then called for universal suffrage in elections to a National Convention, and restated the federalist concept of each department's right of veto over all laws.[173] This short address is only remarkable for the abundance in it of references to heroes of Antiquity.

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169) Ibid., p.6.

170) Discours de M.Billaud-Varennes, Sur les mesures à prendre pour sauver la patrie([Paris,1792]). Brief mention in A.Aulard,ed., Société, IV,106. Reprint in Journal des Débats ... de la Société,III(1792), no.233, 2-4; One-paragraph summary already in no.232,4. Excerpts also in P.-J.-B.Buchez et P.-C.Roux,eds., op.cit., XVI,121-124.

171) Discours ... Sur les mesures à prendre,p.6.

172) Idem.

173) Ibid., p.7.

Before the storm broke, Billaud spoke again. On August 3, he issued one more call to decisive action.[174] He was convinced that, after the enemy had occupied the frontier departments, the King and his advisers would flee to Rouen and set up a counter-revolutionary government there.[175] He indicated that, since most of the generals were traitors, they could not be relied upon to defend the country against the invaders. The garrisons and outposts between Paris and the frontiers were not equipped to withstand attack.[176] Consequently, it was necessary to study a proposal by the section des Lombards, establishing a military encampment under the walls of Paris. Manned by "citizens" rather than by regular troops, such an armed grouping would be the best guarantee for the safety of the capital.[177] A delegation from this encampment would also be swnt to Orléans, to arrest Lafayette; "vous verrez,[declared Billaud], je vous en réponds, la tête du monstre au bout d'une pique."[178] In practically the same sentence, Billaud calmed the fears of the upper bourgeoisie, stating that

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174) Discours de M.Billaud-Varennes,Sur la Nécessité d'un camp de citoyens dans les murs de Paris([Paris,1792]).Short mention in A. Aulard,ed.,Société,IV,175.Only one-paragraph summary in Journal des Débats ... de la Société,III(1792),no.243,2;very brief mention in P.-J.-B.Buchez et P.-C.Roux,eds.,op.cit.,XVI,322.

175) Discours ... Sur la nécessité d'un camp,p.4.

176) Ibid.,p.5.

177) Ibid.,p.7.

178) Idem.

the military defense of Paris was essential to protect private property. He warned the rich merchants and industrialists that pillage of the conquered capital by the victorious foreign armies would be worde than the state of siege, which would be imposed by necessity, if the encampment were established.

> "Car c'est particulièrement à vous que je m'adresse, [he said], vous qui paroissez encore aujourd'hui moins tenir à l'intérêt public qu'à votre avantage particulier, vous qui penchez peut-être en faveur de l'ancien régime;... vous dont les palais splendides et les magasins éclatans d'or et de pierreries offriront à l'avidité du soldat ennemi tant de brillantes dépouilles; je vous le demande, pouvez vous croire qu'au milieu du cahos et des horreurs d'un sac d'une ville, on respectera vos hôtels, vos comtoirs, vos ateliers et vos boutiques... Bourgeois de Paris, devenez citoyens; embrassez comme nous la cause du peuple... Si donc vous n'êtes pas patriotes pour le succès de la révolution; devenez-le du moins pour tout ce que l'on a de plus cher au monde, pour vos épouses, pour vos enfans et pour vous-mêmes." 179)

The encampment was to be located between the Champs-Elysées and the river, near the tents of the fédérés from the departments, which had already been established in this neighborhood. Every section would have its own territory, but they would rotate in furnishing men, who would serve for forty-eight hours, and then be replaced. 180) Only volunteers would be admitted to the encampment. The chief duty would be the patrolling of streets at night; but during daytime, the volunteers would drill and train for combat. 181) The

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179) Ibid., p.8.

180) Ibid., p.9.

181) Ibid., p.10.

sections would be responsible for supplies, as well as for the confiscation of horses from civilians, for the formation of a cavalry corps.[182] Billaud felt that if these measures were taken, Paris would be safe. It so happened that the popular revolt broke out seven days after this speech, and that the Duke of Brunswick and his Prussian soldiers (whose threats against the capital on August 1 had created the need for the military defense of the city) were beaten at Valmy on September 20, and retreated.

Billaud's position and importance during the weeks immediately preceding August 10, cannot be analyzed. All his activities seem to have taken place in the Jacobin Club, where he was famous as a speaker. Yet, it would be interesting to know what he did all day long, since he apparently did not perform the duties of his office. As Danton's assistant, he might have helped to prepare the sections for the creation of the Insurrectional Commune (Commune insurrectionelle) of August 9. Years later, Billaud said: "Danton a fait le 10 Août."[183] But at the time, neither he nor his master gave the impression that they were at all involved in the revolt. Danton's contribution to the "Revolution of August 10" will forever remain a mystery, and Billaud's probably no less of a riddle. Even though he belonged to Danton's "machine",

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182) Ibid., p.11.

183) [Anon.], "Les Dernières Années de Billaud-Varennes", La Nouvelle Minerve, I(1835), 355.

he made no use of his connections, as far as the historian can discover. In the Club itself, he was not consistently a partisan of the Robespierrist faction. It may be stated with certainty that he was one of the chief promoters of federalism and an extreme Republican. On the issue of federalism, he was in full agreement with the Girondists, closer to them in his political philosophy than to Robespierre's concepts of the centralized state or Danton's emphasis on the Paris Commune. Practically all members of the Jacobin Club were Republican in feeling by August 10; if there were still Royalists in the Society, they remained without influence. Within half a year, Billaud would be the enemy of the Girondists and proclaim federalism as the greatest evil. Within half a year, he would choose to stand on the side of Robespierre and work for the extreme centralization of France. As of August 1792, the young lawyer from La Rochelle had progressed rather slowly in his political career. As yet, he had no enemies among liberals and radicals. The "Revolution of August 10", inspired and led by his patron and his colleagues in the Paris Commune, boosted him into a more prominent position, from which he could then advance more rapidly.

Chapter II

After the Fall of the Monarchy: August 10 - September 20, 1792.

1. Assistant Prosecutor of the Paris Commune.

The "Revolution of the Tenth of August" will not be dealt with here, particularly since it is not at all certain that Billaud participated in it.[1] It is just possible that he was one of the three representatives of the section du Théâtre Français,[2] who met with representatives from other sections after 11 p.m. of the night of August 9-10, in order to remove the old municipal administration and set up a Revolutionary Commune in its place.[3]

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1) Albert Mathiez, Le Dix Août (Paris, 1931), can be recommended for a quick survey of the events of August 10, 1792. Emile Dard, La Chute de la Royauté (Paris, 1950), is more popular and anecdotical. Philippe Sagnac, La Chute de la Royauté (Paris, 1909), is slightly out of date nowadays.

2) The others were Pierre-François-Joseph Robert (1762-1826), member of the Convention, one-time Orléanist and speculator in rum during the Terror; and Antoine Simon, later guardian in prison of the Dauphin Louis; the latter guillotined with Robespierre on the 10th. of thermidor.

3) Billaud's name may be found on a list reprinted in P.-J. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, eds., Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française (Paris, 1834-1838), XVI, 410-423. The one reproduced by Mortimer-Ternaux in Histoire de la Terreur. 1792-1794 (Paris, 1863-1881), II, 445-453, contains only the names of Robert and Simon. Chaumette, in his "Autobiography" in Papiers de Chaumette, ed. F. Braesch (Paris, 1908), p. 136, claimed to have been the third commissioner of the section du Théâtre Français. F. Braesch, in idem, n. 1, and in his larger La Commune du Dix Août 1792 (Paris, 1911), p. 221, n. 1, considers this unlikely, since Chaumette was only appointed to the General Council of the Commune late on the 10th. A good account of the meeting of the sections during the night of August 9-10, is in the records of the section de la Poissonière, reprinted in Ernest Mellié, Les Sections de Paris pendant la Révolution Française (Paris, 1898), pp. 119-122.

It is pretty certain that he became secretary of the new General Council (Conseil Général) of the Commune, appointed sometime between 6 and 7 a.m. In that case, he probably spent the decisive hours of August 10 in the Hôtel de Ville. But no accounts of that day even so much as mention his name. The first definite information is from the 11th. Danton, Assistant Prosecutor of the Commune (Substitut adjoint du procureur) since January 20,1792, became Minister of Justice during that day, and the General Council appointed Billaud-Varennes to replace him. Billaud's attendance at the early meetings of the General Council of the Commune seems to indicate that Danton had sent, from the very beginning, one of his trusted lieutenants and close associates to defend his interests in the new administration. Before August 10, candidates for municipal posts were appointed by their section and then confirmed by a majority of the others: Billaud's nomination (as Assistant Prosecutor of the Commune) by the General Council broke a precedent. When it came up for confirmation by the sections, several protested.[4] Most delayed their action for some days, although such a move had no practical effect whatsoever. On August 26, the section de Mirabeau decided that the appointment "est attentoire aux droits du peuple à qui appartient exclusivement le choix des magistrats."[5] If the emergency had forced the General

4) One which agreed was the section des Postes. Procès-Verbaux de l'Assemblée générale de la section des Postes, 4 décembre 1790 - 5 septembre 1792. F.Braesch, ed. (Paris, 1911), p.213 n.2 has excerpts f the letter of confirmation of Billaud's appointment, dated August 22

5) F.Braesch, op.cit., p.302.

Council "à négliger les formes établies", it ought only to have made a temporary nomination. Then, due to Billaud-Varennes' merits, the section confirmed the appointment,

> " mais qu'elle désavoue formellement tout acte semblable qui pourrait avoir lieu par la suite et elle déclare qu'elle s'y opposera avec énergie." 6)

Is there more to these protests by the sections than meets the eye? Were they an attempt at rebellion against Danton's control of the machinery of city government? If so, the revolt was not conducted with much energy.

Although not confirmed by all sections till the end of the month, Billaud assumed the tasks of his new office from August 11 on. His superior was Pierre-Louis Manuel, also from the section du Théâtre-Français and a friend (though not a very close one) of Danton's. 7) He had been Prosecutor (Procureur) of the Commune since February 24,1792. There was also a first assistant, one Antoine-François-Evrard-Marie-Catherine Desmousseaux, in office since January 4,1791. Active as per interim Prosecutor during Manuel's suspension between July 7 and August 10,1792, he is not mentioned anywhere after that date and no document from August 10 through early September bears his signature. All the records

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6) Idem.

7) Manuel became later also a member of the National Convention. A moderate, he resigned his seat after the trial of Louis XVI. That made him a suspect, and he was executed on 24 brumaire year II (November 14,1793) for "federalist" sympathies.

emanating from the Prosecutor's office during that period, the various orders of arrest, testimonials, etc., are signed by both Manuel and Billaud-Varennes. The Prosecutor and his assistant belonged to the Parquet (the judicial branch of the Commune), and, consequently, to the General Council of the Commune.[8] Billaud continued to sign documents of the General Council as "secretary", although his neighbor, Jean-Etienne Brochet, was appointed to this office on August 11 (fifteen others also signed documents and assumed that title, not counting Tallien and his two assistants, who formed the Secretariat for the whole Commune, a separate office altogether). Yet, the most notable of the documents with Billaud's signature as "secretary" of the General Council is a very unimportant one. It is a circular, dated August 24, inviting the commissioners of the forty-eight sections of Paris to a meeting with the General Council the next day, some reorganization in the municipal government having become necessary.[9] Billaud also addressed members of the "sections armées", either on August 16 or 19; but this was probably in his capacity as Assistant Prosecutor.[10]

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8) According to F.Braesch, op.cit., pp.294-299, the Commune of Paris was divided into the Mayor's Office, the Bureau Municipal (5 departments: 1.social welfare; 2.police; 3.domains, finances and taxes; 4.public buildings; 5.public works), the Conseil municipal, the Parquet, and the Secretariat. The latter three formed the General Council of the Commune On the Commune, the only study except that of F.Braesch is Bernhard Becker, Geschichte der revolutionären Pariser Kommune in den Jahren 1789 bis 1794 (Braunschweig, 1875). It is still an excellent synthesis, despite all the recent discoveries of new documentary material.

9) F.Braesch, op.cit., p.305 n.5.

10) Ibid., p.320.

Chiefly, Billaud was engaged in the task of interrogating political prisoners. Certain persons close to the Royal family were arrested during the night of August 18-19.[11] The most prominent of these, Mme. de Lamballe, was taken to the Hôtel de Ville, where, at 3 a.m., Billaud asked her a few questions for purposes of identification.[12] Next night (August 19-20), it was the turn of Mme. de Tourzel, governess of the Royal children, and her daughter.[13] According to the older woman's account, they were examined around 3.15 a.m. Note the strange time; also that, at this hour, a large crowd filled the interrogation-room in the Hôtel de Ville, even overflowing the benches set up for spectators. Did the ladies really know the exact time? It is more likely that the whole incident took place sometime after 10 p.m., when the clubs usually closed and some political-minded people might drop in at the Hôtel de Ville. Mme. de Tourzel described her interrogation in the following words:

> " Billaud de Varennes interrogeait, et un secrétaire inscrivait les demandes et les réponses. Comme elles se prolongeaient infiniment, et que j'étais très-fatiguée, je crus pouvoir m'assoir sur un banc qui était derrière moi. Un grand nombre de voix

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11) These arrests are dramatically described in "Fragments des Mémoires de Charles-Alexis Alexandre sur les Journées Révolutionnaires de 1791 et 1792". Jacques Godechot, ed., Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XXIV (1952), 233-234.

12) Georges Bertin, Madame de Lamballe (New York, 1901), p. 262; Jacques Mérissay, Les Journées de Septembre 1792 (Paris, 1945), p. 61.

13) Mémoires de Madame La Duchesse de Tourzel, Le Duc Des Cars, ed. (2ème. éd., Paris, 1884), II, 248.

s'écrièrent:"Elle doit rester debout devant son souverain".Mais sur l'observation de Billaud de Varennes,qu'un criminel avait le droit de s'asseoir sur la sellette, on me laissa m'asseoir." 14)

It is unfortunate that the minutes of these interrogations are lost, since the kind of questions Billaud asked would undoubtedly throw additional light on his attitude. Such a polite behavior is strange in view of the defendant's status. Mme. de Tourzel was held in particular contempt by the revolutionaries. Prudhomme, the editor of the Révolutions de Paris,called her once "véritable démon sous le masque d'une femme." 15) But, as will be seen, Billaud may have harbored special feelings for this family. The fourth person from the group arrested on August 18-19 was François Hue, Louis XVI's valet. His interrogation did not take place until September 2, but Hue himself, who dealt with this incident in his memoirs, did not say a great deal. 16) Apparently, the time was 6 p.m. and not so many spectators present. Billaud shouted after some time: "Ce valet... a trahi la confiance du peuple, il mérite une punition exemplaire." 17) Mme. de Tourzel's and Hue's

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14) Idem. In ibid.,II,288,the daughter,Pauline de Tourzel,says: "Billaud de Varennes nous questionnait,et un secrétaire écrivait les réponses sur un grand régistre."

15) Révolutions de Paris,VIII(1791),no.104,634.Reprinted by Charles Vellay as "Mme. de Tourzel en 1791",Revue Historique de la Révolution Française,II(1911),446.She is supposed to have told the Dauphin,when he questioned her about members of the Constituent Assembly:"Ce sont des loups qui mangent votre Papa,et qui ne feront de vous qu'une bouchée."

16) François Hue,Dernières années du règne et de la vie de Louis XVI eds.[Du Menil de Maricourt et l'Epinois](3ème.éd.,Paris,1866),p.384.

17) Idem.

testimony hinge both on the fact that their examiner might not have been Billaud; someone else could have been in charge. How did all these courtiers suddenly know by name a minor bureaucrat, not among the most prominent even in his own circle? They could have come into contact with him through his law practice. But unfortunately, it is impossible at this time to ascertain who were his clients.

Around September 1, information becomes somewhat more abundant. During the evening session of the General Council of that day, Billaud took over the Presidency. The meeting lasted until 1.30 a.m. One Pierre Paulin, retired navy invalid, was sentenced to 24 hours in prison for insulting the General Council. One Savary, who "se conduit indécemment," was ejected from the room. A non-commissioned officer arrived to complain of the poor location of two pieces of artillery. No action was taken on the subject. One M. Leclerc de La Ronde was commended for honesty and patriotisme, after a commission appointed to investigate his business papers had made its report. The section des Droits de l'Homme was plublicly lauded for its "surveillance" and preparations for defense.[18] A small administrative body is shown in action. Thecases before the General Council were, it appears,

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18) "Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de Paris,10 août- 10 septembre."in Berville et Barrière,eds., Mémoires sur les Journées de Septembre 1792(Paris,1823),pp.185-186.Reprinted in Buchez er Roux,eds., op.cit. XVIII,249-279.

despatched with considerable efficiency. There is no justification for asserting, as one historian has done, that nothing was accomplished at all.[19] There is, furthermore, no evidence that the spectators caused a riot during the meeting and could barely be controlled.[20]

2. The September Massacres.

In the morning of Sunday, September 2, 1792, Billaud gave up the Presidency of the General Council, his place being taken by Sulpice Huguenin. Manuel appeared and reported that the enemy was before Verdun. Since that city would only be able to hold out for forty-eight hours, the General Council passed a resolution to defend Paris.[21] Billaud may have been at this meeting. Later in the morning or early in the afternoon, he interrogated several priests who had just been arrested.[22] The examination over, these men were transported to the Abbaye. Upon their arrival in

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19) Gérard Walter, Les Massacres de Septembre (Paris, 1932), 63.

20) Idem.

21) "Procès-Verbaux", in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., p.186.

22) G. Walter, op.cit., p.57.

that prison, they were massacred.[23] The time was between 2 and 4 p.m. At 3 p.m., the General Council of the Commune met again. The Feuille de Paris of September 3 reported that Billaud proposed to send two commissioners to the Abbaye, "chargés de parcourir les registres et de livrer au peuple les détenus relativement à l'affaire du 10".[24] Despite protests by one member, the General Council adopted the motion, appointing furthermore two commissioners, who were to obtain the assistance of the Legislative Assembly in this matter.

Did Billaud, as the sponsor of the resolution, "cause" the massacres ? In other words, does he bear prime responsibility ? For over 150 years, the point has been in dispute. The contemporaries believed the unfavorable reports, written long after

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23) On the September Massacres, the "definitive" study is Pierre Caron, Les Massacres de Septembre (Paris, 1935). After this achievement, there is no need for further investigation of the question. G. Walter, op.cit., is far from the "critical" study it purports to be; it is merely an undocumented account, relatively unbiased. The "classic" on the September Massacres, Granier de Cassagnac, Histoire des Girondins et des massacres de Septembre (2 vs., Paris, 1860), contains much useful material, but the author's conclusions are not based on concrete evidence. Jacques Hérissay, Les Journées de Septembre 1792 (paris, [1945]), disregards Caron's findings but repeats instead the various legends of the nineteenth century.

24) F. Braesch, op.cit., p.493; P. Caron, op.cit., p.270. Braesch includes a short speech. Also in J. Hérissay, op.cit., p.255; G. Walter, op.cit., p.65.

the event.[25] It was they who finally formed the picture of Billaud-Varennes as a bloodthirsty terrorist, practically the traditional view of the nineteenth century historian. To begin with, the question must be asked: was Billaud in a position to "cause" a chain of events of such magnitude? Was Billaud only a minor official in the city administration, or was he among those who determined policies? On his own authority, he could hardly have ordered the massacres, but he might have advised Manuel. Various theories have been advanced why Billaud acted independentl Yet, all evidence is lacking and, consequently, none of them can be accepted. It has, for instance, been assumed that rivalry existed between Manuel and Tallien. Did Billaud profit from it, playing off one man against the other, and thus assume a position of importance within the General Council which exceeded by far the limits of his functions?[26] Or was he jealous of Marat? When the latter called for stern measures to deal with the enemies of the state, did Billaud think he could go farther by organizing the massacres and, Having "saved" the city of Paris, did he expect to gain prestige for himself?[27] Was a "Comité secret" organized

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25) One of the few sceptics was Prieur de la Côte d'Or, who admits in "Révélations sur le Comité de salut public de la Convention nationale", reprinted in Georges Bouchard, Un Organisateur de la Victoire: Prieur de la Côte d'Or (Paris, 1946), p. 477, that "le mystère de cette politique cruelle est difficile à éclaircir."

26) G. Walter, op. cit., p. 34.

27) Edgar Quinet, La Révolution (Paris, 1865), I, 380.

on August 30 by prominent members of the Commune, "pour fixer ce qu'ils nommaient "un mode d'expédition"" of the prisoners? Maton de La-Varenne, who invented the whole story, did not find Billaud among the members of the "Committee", but he and one Beignout wandered around the Maison-Commune on that day and, while peeking through key-holes, came upon another meeting, attended by Marat, Danton, Manuel, Billaud, and Collot-d'Herbois. Marat proposed to have all prisoners assassinated in order to show the National Convention that the Paris Commune was a power to be reckoned with. The resolution was accepted unanimously. Some underworld characters were then called into the room and told that they had been selected to "liberate" France. After some drinking, they were promised 30 livres each for the murders.[28]

As a matter of fact, it is not even certain that Billaud proposed a resolution at the General Council meeting on September 2.[29] Such a move is, at any rate, not mentioned in its Procès-Verbaux. The minutes of the section du Faubourg-Saint-Denis speak of a person who arrived and reported "que la Commune avait fait demander à l'Assemblée nationale quatre commissaires etc."[30] But Billaud's

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28) Maton de La-Varenne, Histoire particulière des évènements qui ont eu lieu en France pendant les mois de Juin, Juillet, d'Août et de Septembre 1792 ... (Paris, 1806), p.285. The most obvious mistake is the reference to the National Convention, the elections for which did not begin until mid-September.

29) Neither in the one reprinted in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., pp.123-231, nor in the different set of records, Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de Paris (10 août 1792-1er. juin 1793), ed. Maurice Tourneaux (Paris, 1894).

30) Mortimer-Ternaux, op.cit., III, 479; reprinted in P.Caron, op.cit., p. 272.

name is not mentioned. Since a text of the resolution does not exist, it is impossible to know what the commissioners were actually supposed to do at the Abbaye. Recent historians have almost conclusively established that the September Massacres were a spontaneous manifestation of the Paris populace, a sudden hysterical outburst as a reaction to the bad news from the front.[31] In that case, neither the General Council of the Commune, nor one single individual prepared them or directed them, certainly not during the first day.

At 4 p.m., news arrived of the massacres in the Conciergerie.[32] The General Council decided to send other commissioners to the various prisons, "pour protéger les prisonniers qui y sont enfermés pour dettes, ainsi que pour des causes civiles."[33] On Manuel's suggestion, each section was invited to claim its own prisoners. It is possible that Billaud went later to the Abbaye, acting for the section du Théâtre-Français. At 4.30 p.m., the Minister of War (Servan) interrupted the meeting. He reminded the General Council that a conference had been arranged for 8 p.m. He and his associates would then "concerter toutes les opérations" of the commissioners sent by the Paris

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31) That is the basic thesis of P.Caron, op.cit., a most reliable study

32) "Procès-Verbaux," in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., p.187.

33) Ibid., p.188.

Commune into the Departments of France and to the armies (Billaud was one of them).[34] Around 5 p.m., the General Council adjourned.

After this meeting, did Billaud go to the Abbaye to encourage the assassins? The original version of this story follows:

> " Il était cinq heures du soir. Arrive Billaud-Varennes, substitut du procureur de la commune. Il avait son écharpe et le petit habit puce, et la perruque noire qu'on lui connait. Il marche sur les cadavres, fait au peuple une courte harangue, et finit ainsi: "Peuple, tu immoles tes ennemis, tu fais ton devoir." Cette oraison cannibale anime; les tueurs s'échauffent davantage; ils demandent à grands cris de nouvelles victimes .... ". [35]

The above paragraph comes from the pen of one Jean-Claude-Hipolite Méhée de Latouche, secretary of the General Council of the Paris Commune. He wrote his short pamphlet (under the pseudonym of Felhémési) in 1794, during the Thermidorian Reaction. His writings were commissioned by Billaud's enemies; consquently, all he wrote is inventions and lies. On September 2, Méhée was at no time near or in the Abbaye and could therefore not have witnessed the events he described.[36] It seems also strange that Billaud would have gone to the Abbaye, delivered the speech and returned to the Hôtel de Ville all within one hour. There is no reason why he should

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34) Ibid., p.190.

35) [Felhémési], "La Vérité toute entière sur les vrais auteurs de la journée du 2 septembre 1792" in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., p.257. Pamphlet reprinted in part in Buchez et Roux, eds., op.cit., XVIII, 156-180; and Georges Lenôtre, ed., Les Massacres de Septembre (Paris, 1916), pp.175-199.

36) On Méhée de Latouche, see Georges Lenôtre "Felhémési" in Vieilles Maisons, Vieux Papiers, 5ème. partie (Paris, 1924), pp.29-52.

have done so. True or not, this "short but ever-memorable harangue," as one historian put it,[37] has served better than any other incident to create the legend of Billaud-Varennes as a ferocious and bloodthirsty terrorist, intent upon killing helpless and innocent prisoners.[38] It was quoted innumerable times. It was elaborated upon and embellished.[39] Some historians have claimed that, even if Billaud did not deliver the speech, he nevertheless believed that the prisoners should be killed, and was thus as guilty as if he had personally committed the crime.[40]

Around 6 p.m., Billaud had returned to the Hôtel de Ville. Hue, who was interrogated at that time, described him and Robespierre as running around in great agitation.[41] The examination of the valet was probably interrupted, since he was not taken back to prison immediately, a coincidence which saved his life.[42] At 8 p.m., Billaud probably attended the conference of the commissioners with the Minister of War. Later in the evening, he returned to the General Council. He and Robespierre each made a speech,

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37) Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution (2nd.ed., London, 1842), II, 157.

38) From L.Prudhomme (1797) to J.Hérissay (1945), at least 22 historians referred to that incident.

39) Notably François de Barante, Histoire de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1851-1853), II, 253, and Théodore M.Barrau, Histoire de la Révolution Française (1789-1799) (5ème.éd., Paris, 1874), p.262.

40) J.Hérissay, op.cit., p.254: "S'il ne tient pas de tels propos, ils sont au moins vraisemblables dans la bouche du personnage...". Also G.Walter, op.cit., p.71

41) F.Hue, op.cit., p.382.

42) Ibid., p.384.

unfortunately not preserved. After a pessimistic description of the state of France,

> " Ils dénoncent au conseil général la conspiration en faveur du duc de Brunswick, qu'un parti puissant veut porter au trône des Français." 43)

The General Council thereupon ordered that the homes of Brissot and other Girondist leaders be searched. Only after the two addresses had been delivered, did the General Council learn from Manuel of the killings which had taken place at the Abbaye.

In the morning(of September 3), the General Council set out to assume control over the assassinations. The Feuille de Paris of September 4 mentioned that Billaud proposed the appointment of a committee of two, to draw up a list of all the prisoners. 44) The aim of the General Council was apparently now to prevent arbitrary actions on the part of the executioners. 45) It is possible that as a measure of control, Billaud was despatched to the Abbaye around noon. Of this second visit, there are two accounts. That of the abbé Sicard, famous teacher of deaf-mutes, who was one of the prisoners, was first published in Sicard and

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43) "Procès-Verbaux" in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., p.192. Also F.Braesch, op.cit., p.517; J.Hérissay, op.cit., p.261.

44) F.Braesch, op.cit., p.495.

45) Idem, n.1.

Jauffret's Annales religieuses, politiques et littéraires, in 1796.[46] The narrative of Antoine-Gabriel-Aimé Jourdan, former President of the district des Petits-Augustins of the section des Quatre-Nations, was written in his own defense on 1 Floréal year III (April 20, 1795).[47]

When the General Council had learned that the executioners in the Abbaye were plundering the corpses of their victims, it sent Billaud to put an end to such practices.

> " Il se rend dans la cour de l'Abbaye,[relates Sicard],et là,sur une estrade il parle à"ses ouvriers";
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> "Mes amis! mes bons amis! La Commune m'envoie vers vous pour vous représenter que vous déshonorez cette belle journée. On lui a dit que vous voliez ces coquins d'aristocrates,après en avoir fait justice.Laissez,laissez tous ces bijous, tout l'argent et tous les effets qu'ils ont sur eux,pour les frais du grand acte de justice que vous exercez.On aura soin de vous payer,comme on en est convenu avec vous.Soyez nobles,grands et généreux comme la profession que vous remplissez. Que tout dans ce grand jour soit digne du peuple dont la souveraineté est commise." [48]

Jourdan said, that all through the morning, participants in the massacres came to his office to demand payment. Finally, Billaud arrived, and, after a long speech justifying the killings,asked

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46) "Relation authentique du citoyen Sicard ... sur les dangers qu'il a courus les 2 et 3 septembre 1792 .... ",in Berville et Barrière, eds.,op.cit.,pp.65-107. Reprinted in Buchez et Roux,eds.,op.cit.,XVI: 72-102; Abbé Orse,ed.,Massacre des Prisonniers de l'Abbaye en 1792 racontés par des témoins oculaires(Paris,1853),pp.65-107.The latter is a"pirated" edition of Berville et Barrière,eds.,op.cit.

47) "Déclaration du citoyen Antoine-Gabriel-Aimé Jourdan",in Berville et Barrière,eds.,op.cit.,pp.103-119.Reprinted in Buchez eb Roux,eds. op.cit.,XVIII,215-223 and Abbé Orse,ed.,op.cit.,pp.103-119.

48) "Relation authentique..." in Berville et Barrière,eds.,op.cit., p.101.

Jourdan to give each of his "ouvriers" 24 livres. When the latter complained that he had no funds at his disposal, Billaud proposed that he address himself for this purpose to the Minister of the Interior (Roland).[49]

Although Caron doubts it,[50] it is possible that these two incidents may have occurred. The tone of intimacy between Billaud and the killers, which Sicard appears to disapprove of, was probably the only effective means to convert the latter to the official point of view. The mob might have killed Billaud on the spot, had he not pacified it by flattery and promises of reward. As to the question of payment, either the General Council promised the assassins remuneration beforehand, or Billaud conceived the idea on the spot, as an emergency measure. The latter seems more likely, since the Ministry sent Jourdan's request for 3 000 francs back to the Commune and the dispute over the payments continued for days.[51] Billaud's second visit to the Abbaye also became the subject of discussion. Georges Duval, an unreliable chronicler at best, says that he passed the prison while Billaud was making his speech. He was too far away to hear

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49) "Déclaration du citoyen ...", in Ibid., pp.113-114.

50) Op.cit., p.316. He does not believe any witness but Mlle.de Tourzel, who throws a favorable light on Billaud. The earliest contention that all these stories are pure invention, comes from an excellent work, J.-M. Davy, Les Conventionnels de l'Eure. Buzot, Duroy, Lindet à travers l'histoire (Evreux, 1876), I, 420-422.

51) The story is told in detail in G. Walter, op.cit., pp.87-89.

what was said, but the mob presented watches, jewelry and money taken from the corpses to Billaud.[52] C.-F.Beaulieu, author of the volume dealing with the events of 1792 in the Histoire de la Révolution de France .... Par Deux Amis de la Liberté, gives a slightly different version of the speech, one in which Billaud promises that the Commune, not the Ministry of the Interior, would pay.[53] Finally, Méhée's story, as fantastic as the previous one. A wholly different speech; the murder at this precise moment of one Rhulières (who did not exist at all); finally, in the morning(! of September 3, Billaud bringing before the meeting of the General Council a "worker" covered with blood, whom he introduced as "un brave homme, qui avait bien travaillé."[54] This flight of imagination is nothing compared to Antoine Fantin-Désodoard's account,who says in all seriousness that, by order of the Commune, Billaud and his friends added gunpowder to the wine and brandy given the assassins, so that they might become more bloodthirsty![55]

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52) Georges Duval,Souvenirs de la Terreur de 1788 à 1793(Paris,1841-1843),II,p.219.

53) [C.-F. Beaulieu],Histoire de la Révolution de France ... Par Deux Amis de la Liberté(Paris,1792-1803(An XI)),VIII,304-305.This volume was published in 1797.

54) "Vérité toute entière ...",in Berville et Barrière,eds.,op.cit., p.196,states that there was no Rhulières at the Abbaye,but one pers by that name at La Force.

55) Antoine Fantin-Désodoards,Histoire philosophique de la Révolutio de France(5ème.éd.,Angers,1807),II,259-260.Also "J.J.A.Roussel], Histoire Secrète du Tribunal Révolutionnaire ... Par M.de Proussina (Paris,1815),I,42,on Billaud releasing prisoners and prostitutes fr prisons to become "executioners" for him; using fanatic protestants to kill priests.

On the other hand, narratives exist of two prisoners in the Abbaye, who never saw Billaud at any time.[56] Two émigrés in London, who received usually reliable information through various channels, dealt extensively with the September Massacres in their writings, but neither so much as mentioned Billaud.[57]

One incident remains yet to be told: the rescue of Pauline de Tourzel from the prison of La Force. The date is uncertain (the night was either September 2-3, or 3-4); the girl's own words are also the only proof that Billaud was at all connected with this event.[58] The Journal du Soir of September 6 gave the credit for the escape to one Guiraut and, it was rumored that Tallien had also been busy behind the scenes.[59] A member of the Paris Commune, a shoemaker by name of Jean Hardy, guided Pauline de Tourzel from her cell and past the executioners into the street. Finally, after wandering through the streets, he left her standing in a dark alley and told her to wait for his return. He came back in a coach, accompanied by another man.

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56) "Un Evadé des Massacres de Septembre. Relation de l'abbé Jean-Louis Trubert", Eugène Griselle, ed., Le Correspondent, CCXL (1910), pp. 976-986, and Mémoires inédits de l'Internonce à Paris (Mgr. de Salamon) pendant la Révolution, ed. abbé Bridier (Paris, 1890).

57) Abbé Barruel, Histoire du Clergé pendant la Révolution Françoise (London, 1793) and Peltier, Histoire de la Révolution du Dix Août 1792 (2 vs., London, 1793). Caron feels the latter to be especially worthy of attention.

58) This is a letter by the young girl to her sister, dated September 1792, in which she told of her escape. But her memoirs, written in later years, Souvenirs de la Princesse de Tarente. 1789-1792, ed. [Anon.] (Nantes, 1897), do not mention the incident at all.

59) G. Walter, op. cit., p. 106 n. 3.

" L'inconnu se plaça sur le devant de la voiture et me demanda si je le connaissais.Je le regardai et lui dit: "Vous êtes, je crois, M.Billaud de Varennes qui m'avez interrogée à l'hôtel de ville." - "Il est vrai, dit-il, je vais vous conduire chez Danton et y prendre des ordres à votre sujet." Arrivés à la porte de Danton,ces messieurs descendirent de la voiture,montèrent chez lui,et revinrent peu après en me disant: "Vous voilà sauvée; il ne nous reste plus maintenant qu'à vous conduire dens un endroit où vous ne soyez pas connue; autrement il pourrait encore ne pas être sûr." 60)

Hardy may have consulted Billaud because he thought that the release of a prisoner was a matter for the Prosecutor's office (it was). But why did Billaud consult Danton before taking the next step? Was either of the two men under some obligation to the Tourzel family? The whole affair is of importance only in so far as it shows the good side of Billaud's character.

It appears that from the afternoon of September 3 on, the General Council of the Commune believed that the massacres had subsided. Thus, when the journalist and printer Duplain was brought before it (during the evening session of September 3) to answer charges of "anticivism", Billaud ordered his arrest and transfer to the Abbaye. 61) Had there been any danger for the prisoner, he probably would not have done so. From the lack of interest in the massacres displayed during the next days, it is obvious that the General Council had assumed control of the situation.

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60) Mémoires de Madame La Duchesse de Tourzel,II,300.All this is from the letter mentioned above,n.58,and reprinted here on pp.279-301.

61) "Procès-Verbaux ...",in Berville et Barrière,eds.,op.cit.,p.200.

Caron's conclusions that the role played by Billaud during these days was not of greatest importance, and that he supported vigorously the rest of his colleagues in the Commune to gain control over the executioners and limit the excesses to some extent, must be accepted.[62] Finally, this chapter should be closed with a reference to Billaud-Varennes' speech of February 10,1793, at the Jacobin Club.[63] The attack on the Girondists, which was the main purpose of the speech, will be referred to in a later connection. In no other work is there a clearer expression of public opinion in Paris on September 1,1792.[64] By February 1793, many had accepted the theory that the massacres had taken place as a measure of "public safety"; those who criticized them were, consequently, enemies of the state and traitors to the cause of the Revolution.

> " C'est le 1er.septembre,[said Billaud], que ... Verdun est pris, que les ennemis s'avancent sur Paris. Soudain la voix de la patrie se fait entendre, les magistrats ... font une proclamation, ... le peuple s'empresse de voler à l'ennemi; mais il songe que les prisons regorgen de conspirateurs; il sait que si les Prussiens s'avancent, c'est pour délivrer leurs complices et leurs agents secrets; il sait qu'il laisse des femmes, des enfants, et pour leur sûreté, il immole les premiers ennemis qu'il rencontre sous la main. ... Cette vengeance terrible arrêta le

62) P.Caron,op.cit.,pp.315-317.

63) Excerpts in A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,22-23.One column and two paragraphs in Journal des Débats et de Correspondance ... de la Société,no.354(February 12,1797),2-3.Excerpts also in Mortimer-Ternaux,op.cit.,III,615.

64) See the excellent commentary on this speech in P.Caron,op.cit., p.443.

roi de Prusse pendant six jours. La crainte de voir la famille royale tomber sous les coups d'un peuple justement irrité arrêta la marche des Prussiens. Il y a une trame liée aux évènements des 2 et 3 septembre ... c'est celle d'assouvir des vengeances particulières;c'est celle qui préparait la perte des patriotes en les représentant comme des provocateurs au meutre,... Un autre trait de lâmière,c'est que les âmes sensibles,qui appellent la sévérité des lois sur les auteurs des massacres du mois de septembre, sont ceux-là même qui voulaient épargner le tyran, qui avait conçu l'horrible projet de se baigner dans le sang des patriotes. Si vous voyez un crime dans un trabsport révolutionnaire, punissez les vainqueurs de Jemappes,punissez les héros qui ont sauvés la libertée; punissez enfin tout le peuple de Paris ..." 65)

3. Mission to Châlons-sur-Marne.

Even before the massacres had come to an end, Billaud-Varennes left the city on the first of his four missions. They are not among the most important events of his political career, but are nevertheless worth detailed consideration, since it was as a result of these missions that the transformation of Billaud, from a somewhat moderate federalist into a radical terrorist, took place. The events are of relatively small interest in themselves; yet Billaud's reaction to them is of considerable importance for his development. It is not easy to analyze his

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65) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,22-23.

missions, since they have not yet been correlated to the others undertaken at the same time.[66]

At the meeting of the Executive Council (Conseil exécutif provisoire) of August 28, Danton proposed that commissioners be sent to the armies to make reports on supplies, equipment and preparations for defense.[67] The Paris Commune and the Legislative Assembly appointed two separate sets of commissioners. Their functions were overlapping, a circumstance which would naturally lead to confusion. The decision of the General Council to send Billaud-Varennes, Brochet and Viola to Châlons-sur-Marne was made on August 28, but their departure probably delayed by the rapid advance of the Prussian armies. The appointments were submitted to the Legislative Assembly for ratification only on September 3 in the afternoon.[68] On September 4, the Executive Council approved this mission by special decree; next morning, the

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66) A collection of all the documents relative to the missions of September 1792 is in preparation(Les missions du Conseil exécutif provisoire et de la Commune de Paris dans l'est et dans le Nord (août-septembre 1792).It is sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Pierre Caron,La Première Terreur(1792):I.Les Missions du Conseil exécutif provisoire et de la Commune de Paris(Paris,1950),purposely omits some of these.Henri Libermann,Les Commissaires de l'Assemblée Législative et de la Convention Depuis la Révolution du 10 Août 1792, jusqu'en Avril 1793(Paris,1926)contains more information on the subject than any other work.Claude Perroud,"Quelques notes sur les missions de l'automne 1792",La Révolution Française,VL(1903),30-38.

67) H.Libermann,op.cit.,p.26.

68) "Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de Paris.10 août-10 septembre".in Berville et Barrière,eds.,Mémoires sur les Journées de Septembre 1792(Paris,1823),p.192.

General Council of the Commune reaffirmed its decision of August 28.[69] All these confirmations show that the authorities considered this mission to be one of special importance. Billaud's order states that, as a commissioner of the executive, he is being sent to Châlons-sur-Marne,

> " à l'effet d'y annoncer l'arrivée des soldats citoyens de la capitale, d'observer les dispositions faites pour l'établissement de l'armée qui doit s'y rassembler ... d'alimenter le civisme et l'amour de la liberté qui conduit des troupes à la défense de la liberté et de l'égalité,... et généralement d'y employer son zèle et ses talents à tous les objets d'utilité publique." [70]

Moreover, the General Council of the Commune gave Billaud special powers, of the kind later granted by the Committee of Public Safety to certain representatives. The order permitted him to use

> " tous les pouvoirs dont il croira avoir besoin, et avant tout ce que sa sagesse lui dictera dans l'importante mission dont il est chargé." [71]

In order to understand the exceptional circumstances, which made these powers necessary, a brief description of the situation in Châlons-sur-Marne in these early days of September 1792, must

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69) Reprint of order by General Council of September 5 in Ibid., pp.214-215. Executive Council order of September 4 in Alphonse Aulard, ed., Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut public (Paris, 1889-1933), I, 46-47 (hereafter referred to as A. Aulard, ed., Recueil). Reprinted in "Le Registre des Délibérations du Conseil Exécutif Provisoire (13 août-22 septembre 1792)", La Révolution Française, XIII (1887), 827

70) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, I, 46-47.

71) "Procès-Verbaux..." in Berville et Barrière, eds., op.cit., pp.214-215.

be given.[72]

Châlons-sur-Marne was, after the fall of Verdun, the only strong place between the Prussian armies and the capital of France. A not very wise decision of the Ministry of War had ordered that the city be made an assembly-point for troops rather than a strategic center in a theater of war. The troops in question were thousands of volunteers from all parts of the country, some of whom had come to Paris before July 14, to celebrate the national holiday in the capital. Neither equipped nor trained, they presented a grave problem of discipline. For lack of tents, they slept in the streets of the city; not being supplied with rations, they looted warehouses and stores. Despite repeated warnings by the municipality of Châlons, some 2 000 new men arrived every day.[73] All these men wanted only to fight the enemy, while the regular army officers, who were in command, would not decide to send untrained soldiers against the formidable Prussian might. Consequently, many of the volunteers returned home, or rioted, or went on sporadic raids in the country-side around

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72) The best account is in Arthur Chuquet, Les Guerres de la Révolution III. La Retraite de Brunswick (Paris, 1887), pp. 36-50. The only history of the city, L. Barbat, Histoire de la ville de Châlons-sur-Marne et de ses monuments (Châlons-sur-Marne, 1855) is dated and not wholly reliable. A. Liger, Campagnes des Français pendant la Révolution (Paris, an VI-1789), a contemporary military history written by an officer on the General Staff, does not mention the conditions in Châlons, although this volume (others were not published) deals exclusively with the campaigns of 1792.

73) 18 635 men between September 3 and 16, to be exact. See A. Chuquet, op. cit., p. 41. On the volunteers, Camille Rousset, Les Volontaires. 1791-1794 (2ème. éd., Paris, 1870), is excellent. Eugène Déprez, Les Volontaires nationaux (1791-1793) (Paris, 1908), emphasizes the administrative aspects to the exclusion of any other.

Châlons.[74] When the Parisian authorities finally made up their minds to do something about the situation, it had already become dangerous.

The Commander-in-Chief of all armies in Châlons was the dean of French generals, seventy year old Marshal Nicolas baron de Luckner.[75] Of Bavarian origin, he had been in French service since 1763, and a Marshal of France since 1791. His mind was that of an eighteenth century cavalryman. He had no fixed political opinions, vacillated between the Crown and the People, unable to give up his respect for a monarchy he had served for so many years, yet imbued with a sincere desire to obey the ruling faction of the moment. He spoke French very badly, which made contact with his soldiers difficult. The volunteers imitated his heavy accent and refused to carry out his orders.[76] Furthermore, Luckner had never

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74) See Mémoires du Maréchal Marmont, Duc de Raguse, de 1792 à 1841, ed. [Anon.], (Paris, 1857), I, 14. Marmont, then a cadet at the artillery school of Châlons, was once taken for a volunteer by a mob of townspeople and almost lynched. He had to fight his way back to quarters at sword's point.

75) No full-lenghth biography exists. But Heinrich Pfeiffer, Der Feldzug Luckners in Belgien im Juni 1792 (Leipzig, 1897), a thesis, is a very good source of information about the general.

76) The opinion of General Dumouriez, at any rate, as expressed in La Vie et les Mémoires du Général Dumouriez, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1823), III, 5.

been prominent as a tactician.[77] One contemporary, the consul of Parma in Paris, described him thus:

> " Luckner est bon pour commander des troupes légères, mais il ne vaut rien pour diriger une armée qui demande trop de soins, trop de prévoyance, trop de génie. D'ailleur, le Luckner de l'après-dîner n'est pas le Luckner du matin: la table amène un changement subit; le jour, il est tout pour la Nation; le soir, il ne jure que par le Roi." [78]

Another, more hostile, called him a drunkard, "an able partisan, but a despicable chief"... avaricious, and possessing "none of the attachments of a Frenchmen."[79] In August, the old Marshal had first come under suspicion. The Legislative Assembly had found it necessary to change commissioners at his headquarters several times.[80] Luckner's Chief of Staff had until then been Alexandre Berthier, the later Marshal of Napoleon, at the time an outspoken partisan of Lafayette. When the latter deserted on August 19, Berthier was dismissed.[81] The Marshal would have

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77) Colonel Ramsay Weston Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic (Oxford, 1926-1939), I, 69. Luckner is supposed to have answer to Dumouriez' explanation of the latter's plans for the invasion of Belgium: "Oui, moi tourne par la droite, tourne par la gauche, et march vite."

78) Correspondance du Bailli de Virien, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de Parme (1788-1793). eds. Vicomte de Grouchy et Antoine Guillois (Paris, [1903]), p. 375.

79) Alexander Stephens, The History of the Wars which Arose out of th French Revolution (London, 1803), I, 50.

80) Among them Kersaint et Bruat; see H. Libermann, op. cit., p. 63, Bonnal de Ganges, Les Représentants du Peuple en Mission près des Armées. 1791-1797. (Paris, 1898-1899), I, 107 n. 2, and Félix Schaedelin, Un Jacob Alsacien: Joseph Bruat, 1763-1807 (Strasbourg), 1932), pp. 123-132.

81) Col. H. W. Phipps, op. cit., II, 6.

suffered a similar fate, had not Antoine, the Mayor of Metz, personally guaranteed Luckner's loyalty to the Republic.[82] Luckner was dismissed from his command (the Armée du Centre) and called back to Paris on August 23. He made such a good impression there, that he was given the title of Generalissimo and appointed to head the newly created Armée de l'Intérieur at Châlons-sur-Marne.[83] Military men at the front were powerless to convince the authorities in Paris, that it was a serious mistake to give an important post, one in which it was essential to make decisions quickly, as well as face the brunt of the enemy attack, to such a poor strategist.

> " Il radote,[wrote General Custine to Marshal Biron on September 7],et sa nullité, le désordre qui règnera dans son armée, me fait faire d'amères réflexions sur le salut de la capitale." [84]

As Luckner's Chief of Staff, the Executive Council appointed Pierre-François Choderlos de Laclos,brigadier general of artillery, novelist, and member of the Jacobin Club.[85] He was to supervise

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82) Arthur Chuquet,Les Guerres de la Révolution:I,La Première Invasion Prussienne(Paris,1886),p.196 n.2.

83) The different changes in command of the armies,as well as their exact composition,are listed,more or less correctly,in C.Clerget, Tableaux des Armées Françaises pendant les Guerres de la Révolution (Paris,1905),an official publication of the French General Staff.

84) A.Chuquet,Retraite de Brunswick,p.39.

85) Two very good biographies of Laclos are Fernand Caussay,Laclos. 1741-1803(Paris,1905); and Emile Dard,Un Acteur Caché du Drame Révolutionnaire: Le Général Choderlos de Laclos(Paris,1905).

all the actions of the Marshal, censor his mail and sign all his orders. The author of Les Liaisons dangereuses soon became the old man's guide and indispensable companion. Laclos realized soon enough the difficulty of the situation. He proposed to evacuate Châlons and to move the assembly-point of the armies to Paris.[86] In fact, this would have been the only way to maintain the inefficient Marshal in office. He suggested that

> " le meilleur parti à prendre est à mettre le plus tôt possible M.le Maréchal en état de n'être pas pendu en arrivant à Paris et de l'y manier aussitôt pour le "consulter" et de l'y garder jusqu'à la fin de la campagne. Là, ses actions seront neutralisées et ses connaissances ne le seront point. Là, et là seulement, il pourra être utile sans être dangereux."[87]

The various commissioners arrived in Châlons at the same time as Laclos (September 6). They were Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, Broussonet, Nicolas de Beaupuy, and Crublier d'Obterre, sent by the Legislative Assembly; Billaud-Varennes, Brochet, and Viola, despatched by the Paris Commune, as well as Lacroix and Ronson, who had already been sent by the latter on August 29, to promote "Republicanism" in the department of the Marne (of which Châlons is the capital). Being confronted with the nine representatives,

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86) A.Chuquet, Retraite de Brunswick, p.37. Letter Laclos to Servan, dated September 13. The whole correspondence between the two men was first printed in L'Intermédiaire des Chercheurs et des Curieux, XVIII(1885), 573-575, 667-672.

87) F.Caussey, op.cit., p.245. Same letter as the above.

Luckner said nothing and left all responsibility to Laclos. We have a full and very detailed account of what happened in those days of September, since the publication of the Chief-of-Staff's correspondence with Servan, the Minister of War, Billaud's reports to the authorities, and Lacroix' letters to L. Prudhomme, publisher of the Révolutions de Paris, are also informative. All the representatives agreed that Luckner would have to be removed from the scene. Consequently, upon their insistence, General Labourdonnaye was appointed to Luckner's post and as commander of the Armée de l'Intérieur, on September 9. Between the 11th. and 21st. of the month, three generals and nine commissioners were active in Châlons. Billaud went to see Labourdonnaye soon after the General's arrival.

> " Je me suis expliqué franchement sur le compte du maréchal Luckner; il a parfaitement été de mon avis, convenant que c'est compromettre le sort de nos armées, que de lui en laisser la direction. Vous me répondrez que M.Laclos est auprès de lui en état de surveillance; mais outre que M.Laclos n'est pas lui-même un être en qui l'on puisse avoir une confiance aveugle, il sera toujours vrai que les ordres émanent de M.Luckner... . Je vous le répète; conserver cette machine étrangère où elle est placée, c'est se charger d'une responsabilité terrible ..... car il est impossible de voir cet homme, sans qu'il fasse pitié ... . Si vous voulez que je vous parle franchement, ce généralissime est un hors-d'oeuvre sous tous les rapports..." 88)

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88) Révolutions de Paris, XIII, (1792), no.166, 492-493. Letter Billaud-Varennes to Danton, dated September 11. The reference to Laclos suggests that the latter was an Orléanist sympathizer. On July 1, he had proposed at the Jacobin Club a Regency for the Dauphin, headed by the Duke of Orléans.

Discord broke out between Luckner and Billaud over an order designed to keep new arrivals away from the city. Although he had done so, Luckner denied ever having signed this decree.[89] Several incidents showed also the Marshal's inability to instill discipline in his troops.

On September 9, he ordered a battalion from the Aube to Meaux. A battalion from Paris thought that these men were deserting and attacked them. Headquarters not having interfered in the dispute, commissioner Lacroix had to step in and reconcile the factions.[90] On September 12, some volunteers stormed the prisons of Châlons, "dans le dessein de les évacuer comme à Paris." Luckner came upon the scene and was knocked off his horse. It took the nine commissioners and Labourdonnaye to prevent a massacre.[91] The Legislative Assembly now realized that it had to recall the Marshal. This was done on September 13, although Luckner did not leave Châlons until the 21st.

The municipality of that city also came under fire.

> " Nous avons trouvé,[wrote Billaud to the Commune], les corps administratifs: là,nous avons reconnu le principe de cette tiédeur générale;nous n'avons vu aucune de ces mesures vigoureuses propre à électriser le peuple .... Il entre dans notre

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89) Ibid.,494-495.

90) Ibid.,478. Letter Lacroix to Prudhomme,dated September 10.

91) Pierre Caron,Les Massacres de Septembre(Paris,1935),p.387. From reports sent by inhabitants of Châlons to the Legislative Assembly, on September 11 and 12 (not printed in Moniteur).

> projet de casser le directoire [of the department] et la municipalité, si nous n'obtenons la certitude que la majorité est dans les principes de la révolution." 92)

When this letter was read in the Legislative Assembly, Charlier, an inhabitant of Châlons, rose to defend the patriotism of its citizens, but declared that the city could not be defended. 93) Yet, when it came to adopt concrete measures, Billaud had to compromise with his less radical colleagues. The municipality remained untouched, but the Directory of the department was suspended. With sarcasm, he noted that

> " nous avons rejoint les commissaires de l'Assemblée nationale. Nous nous sommes surtout concerté avec l'un d'eux, M.Brousonnet, et nous avons senti tout l'avantage que peut produire pour la chose publique la réunion de divers membres des autorités constituées." 94)

As to the preparations for defense, Billaud was enthusiastic at first:

> " Tous les chemins sont des camps,[he wrote],toutes les auberges sont autant de casernes... Partout on s'enrôle avec un tel empressement,que ceux qui sont trop vieux ou trop jeunes pour marcher sous les drapeux de la liberté pleurent et se désespèrent."95

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92) Archives Parlementaires,XLIX,546. Moniteur(September 12,1792),XII 669. Letter Billaud-Varennes to Commune,dated September 9.

93) Ibid.,XIII,670.

94) Pierre Auguste Broussonet(1761-1807),a physician by profession,fl to Morocco after January 1793.Among the others,Brochet(b.1753),becam judge at the Revolutionary Tribunal,was deported after 3 nivôse year IX.Jean-Michel Lacroix(1749-1820),a Girondist,went into hiding in June 1793,Henry Criblier d'Opterre(1739-1799),was a professional soldier without political affiliations.Georges Bouchard,Un Organisat de la Victoire:Prieur de la Côte-d'Or(Paris,1946),p.109.Date of lett not given.

95) Moniteur,(September 9,1792),XIII,646.Letter Billaud-Varennes to Commune,dated September 7. This is the first report from the mission

But after his arrival in Châlons, he soon became less happy.

> " Nous avons commencé,[he wrote], par faire visite au maréchal Luckner. Nous n'avons obtenu de lui que des réponses insignifiantes. Il semble très peu au fait des détails d'administration... Nous avons demandé au Maréchal Luckner où en était la formation du camp de Châlons. Il nous a répondu que rien n'était encore commencé." 96)

It appeared necessary, first of all, to distribute the volunteers all over the towns of the region (but not to send them home, as Luckner had ordered). Billaud proposed to create four reserve camps, respectively à Soissons, Rheims, Troyes and a place not yet selected.[97] All volunteers who arrived without arms would be sent to one of these, "alors ces volontaires,[Billaud thought],n'auraient pas l'air ... de tourner le dos à l'ennemi;ce qui produit le plus mauvais effet."[98] Labourdonnaye would send daily 2 000 men from Châlons, as reinforcements for the other armies. Replacements for those who had departed would then be brought up from the four reserve camps as required.[99] It is interesting to read the answers to these suggestions by the Legislative Assembly. One member praised the state of training of the volunteers;[100] another

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96) Ibid., (September 12,1792),XIII,669. Archives Parlementaires, XLIX, 545. Letter Billaud-Varennes to Commune, dated September 9(Archives Nationales, DXL 17).

97) Révolutions de Paris, XIII(1792), no.166, 493. Letter Billaud-Varennes to Danton, Dated September 11.

98) Idem.

99) Ibid., 494.

100) C. Rousset, op. cit., p. 77.

made the whole matter a problem of morale:

> " Nous vous observons à cet égard, qu'il serait peut-être dangereux de ralentir, selon vos désirs, la marche des citoyens ... qui partent des diverses communes voisines. L'enthusiasme, vous le savez, ne dure pas toujours; il est passager par sa nature même, et le Français, susceptible d'ardeur, l'est aussi de découragement. Si nous ralentissons trop le mouvement donné, serions-nous sûres de la réveiller à volonté?" 101)

Consequently, men continued to pour into Châlons. Requests to Paris for flour and munitions were ignored.[102] 252 cannon balls were stopped on their way to Paris by the commissioners,[103] but with the enemy only ten miles from Châlons, they would have been of little help in a full-scale military action. At the end of the session of the Legislative Assembly, all commissioners were recalled. Chaos continued to reign in Châlons until October 21, when the assembly-point was moved from that city to Soissons. Although the enemy was nowhere near Châlons after September 20, the new commissioners, sent by the National Convention on September 24, were unable to organize and supply the volunteer

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101) Ibid., p.78. Letter dated September 13.

102) See the note in Billaud's hand, dated September 9, to Legislative Assembly (Archives Nationales, DXL 17). He said that if no supplies were forthcoming, "leur [the volunteers'] énergie serait dans peu paralysée." He also feared epidemics in the encampment, due to the lack of sanitary facilities.

103) Moniteur, (September 12, 1792), XIII, 670. Archives Parlementaires, XLIX, 546. Letter Billaud-Varennes to Commune, dated September 9.

troops.[104] The suggestions of the nine previous commissioners were never as much as taken under advisement, and the reports of their investigations ignored.

Billaud-Varennes had already left Châlons on September 13. He visited another army headquarters[105] and returned to Paris in time for the opening of the National Convention, on September 20. From Châlons, he went directly to Granpré, General Dumouriez' headquarters. He returned from there with a good impression. A letter dated September 23, found in Dumouriez' papers, reveals strong enthusiasm. Billaud addressed "mon cher général" in the most flattering terms and ended with "ménagez votre santé et croyez-moi votre ami pour la vie."[106] During his trial, Danton revealed that "Billaud m'a dit qu'il ne savait pas si Dumourier était un traître;"[107] and:

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104) According to Gustave Laurent, "La Mission des Conventionnels Prieur (de la Marne), Sillery et Carra après Valmy (24 Septembre - 1er Novembre 1792)," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, II, (1925), 538-570, Sillery and Carra were sent by the Executive Council to enter into secret negotiations with the King of Prussia. They sabotaged Prieur's sincere efforts to put Châlons into a proper state of defense.

105) See the order of the Executive Council, dated September 5 (Archives Nationales, BB 2 18). Billaud is requested "de prendre toutes communications que vous jugerez susceptibles de vous éclairer sur l'objet [of the campaign]."

106) C.A.Dauban, ed., Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869), p.362 n.1. This is the only full reprint of the latter, but it is mentioned by various other authors.

107) Notes de Topino-Lebrun, Juré au Tribunal Révolutionnaire de Paris sur le Procès de Danton et sur Fouquier-Tinville (Paris, 1875), p.21, ed. J.-F.-E. Chardoillet. Quoted also in Dr. Robinet, Danton Homme d'Etat (Paris, 1889) p.452.

" Billaud m'a paru fort embarassé sur le compte de Dumouriez. Il n'avait pas une opinion bien arrêtée sur ce fourbe adroit ... . Dumouriez,me disait Billaud,nous sert-il fidèlement ou est-ce un traître? Je n'ose le décider."" [108]

This is all the more strange, since among the leaders of the Terror, Billaud is probably the one who was most fanatic in his hatred of the generals. It is difficult to understand what could have produced such a favorable reaction at Dumouriez' headquarters in September 1792, particularly since no documents have turned up to clarify the issue.

There is a postlude to Billaud's trip. On September 22, he made a report before the National Convention, followed by denunciations, "appuyées de preuves", of Marshal Luckner. [109] The old soldier appeared before the Convention the next day, but was not accused by anyone. Protesting his innocence, the Marshal remained in Paris, without employment. Honorably retired on January 8,1793, with a pension of 36 000 livres annually, he was practically forgotten, when he was foolish enough to claim his pension at the end of the year. Appearing uninvited before the assembly, he was denounced by Charles de Hesse as "le vil courtisan et l'esclave titré d'un tyran conspirateur." [110] As a result,

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108) Dr.Robinet,Le Procès des Dantonistes(Paris,1879),p.154.

109) Moniteur,(September 24,1792),XIV,24.

110) Col. R.W.Phipps,op.cit.,I,117.

Luckner was arrested, tried, and executed on 15 nivôse year II (January 4,1794). Billaud appeared as a witness at the Marshal's trial, his only contact with the Revolutionary Tribunal throughout his political career. It is consequently all the more regrettable that a record of his testimony has not been preserved.[111]

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111) The Bulletin du Tribunal Révolutionnaire, an official reprint of the minutes of every trial, was not published between 9 frimaire (November 29,1793) and 30 ventôse year II (March 20,1794), for unknown reasons.

Part III

Chapter I

In the National Convention: September 20,1792-September 6,1793.

1. General Remarks.

Shortly after his return from his first mission, a transformation in Billaud's thinking took place. From an enthusiastic promoter of federalism, he developped into a no less ardent defender of extreme centralization. This change is difficult to understand. Since no personal correspondence, diaries or private papers exist, and since official records are not satisfactory, the historian cannot analyse correctly the motives for this sudden turn to the left. The contemporary writers also ignored Billaud;[1] he was not important enough for the enemies of the radical revolution to draw the brunt of their attacks; and since he avoided any publicity, he found few apologists. Of terrifying appearance, his morose and somber personality did not attract people. He might have been useful to a political party as an able assistant and an effective speechmaker. But his forbidding character prevented any but professional relationships.

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1) A reasonably close perusal of memoirs of nine of the leading Mahillants and Girondists (Barbaroux, Brissot de Warville, Buzot, Condorcet, Théodore de Lâmeth, Louvet de Couvray, Rabaut Saint-Etienne, Mme. Roland, Vergniaud)failed to turn up Billaud 's name even once.

It is strange that a man who had been Danton's assistant should have had so radically different a temperament. Under the circumstances, all that can be obtained is the picture of the man in his official capacity; as an orator, administrator, or as an author of an important work on economic theory.

There is difference of opinion even as to his ability as a speaker. Aulard, who was more interested in Billaud than any other historian, described the thirty-six year old (in 1793) Conventionnel as small in stature, yellow-skinned, with a narrow forehead and an overly large nose.[2] At that time, he replaced his small black wig by a large one of flaming yellow. It had the effect of giving him a wild appearance. Mme.Billaud told General Bertrand many years later that it frightened people off.[3] The speeches fit the appearance. From practically the first word, the violence of the language is detrimental to their appreciation. The whole vocabulary of revolutionary slogans and clichés is used without the least moderation. One historian asserted that Billaud's style, full of references not only to Antiquity, but also to the natural sciences, makes the speeches very hard to read and to understand.[4] He considered Billaud a man of action; he said that in his writing,"L'éloquence proprement dite y fait absolument défaut."[5]

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2) Alphonse Aulard,L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française:Les Orateurs de la Législative et de la Convention(Paris, 1885-1886),II,498.

3) Général B.Bertrand,"Billaud-Varennes à Cayenne",La Nouvelle Minerve II(1838),292.

4) Eugène Marion,Histoire Littéraire de la Convention Nationale (paris,1860),p.83.

5) Idem.

Aulard agreed that Billaud was a particularly bad speech-writer; "un écolier auprès de Saint-Just," as he put it.[6] He furthermore accused him of imitating Vergniaud, of all people.[7] Yet, Saint-Just's (or Vergniaud's) speeches seem no less pretentious and overblown. Such rhetoric was indeed common at the time, but to modern ears, used to a great deal more straightforward and clear talk, it must seem labored, confused, and empty.

2. The Early Days of the National Convention: September 20,1792 - March 14,1793.

While Billaud-Varennes was away from Paris, he was elected to the National Convention. His campaign was apparently conducted by friends who made speeches on his behalf or contacted influential section administrators. Surprisingly enough, the section du Théâtre-Français and Danton's machine are not conspicuous here. Yet, the latter was now in full control of the Commune, and its members exerted vast political influence. However, the very first suggestion of Billaud's candidacy came from the moderate Louvet de Couvray, who, on August 21, recommended in his newspaper, La Sentinelle,[8] Billaud as a capable member of the Commune. According to Braesch, Billaud ran on a platform modeled after his July 15 speech, which had asked for deportation of the King and universal

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6) A.Aulard,Eloquence,II,489.

7) Idem.

8) Paul Mautouchet,"Le Mouvement électoral à Paris en août-septembre 1792,"La Révolution Française,VIL(1903),155.This long article is the best account of the elections to the National Convention.

suffrage; a program acceptable even to the enemies of violent change.[9] The extremist Père Duchesne never so much as mentioned Billaud at any time. Support came, however, from Marat's side. The Ami du Peuple of August 30 featured a "Liste des hommes qui ont le mieux mérité de la patrie."[10] Billaud-Varennes' was the fourth name mentioned (just after Robespierre, Danton, and Panis), and was accompanied by the following remarks:

> " Il suffit de les nommer,ce sont là de vrais apôtres de la liberté; malheur à vous,s'ils ne sont pas les premiers objets de vos suffrages." [11]

The list itself was posted all over Paris for everyone to see. Of the twenty representatives from Paris elected to the National Convention by the Electoral Assembly of the department of Paris, Billaud had the fifth-highest number of votes,less than Robespierre, Danton, Collot-d'Herbois,and Manuel, but more than either Desmoulins and Marat.[12] The historian must note that, at this time, Louvet

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9) Frédéric Braesch,La Commune du Dix Août 1792(Paris,1911),p.584,n.3.

10) Reprinted in F.Chèvremont,Placards de Marat l'Ami du Peuple(Paris, 1877),p.7;the same author's Jean-Paul Marat.Esprit politique accompagné de sa vie scientifique,politique et privée(Paris,1880),II, 103;Charles Vellay,ed.,Les Pamphlets de Marat(Paris,1911),pp.309-312. Mentioned also in P.Mautouchet,loc.cit.,p.157.Nothing at all is known of the relationship between Marat and Billaud-Varennes.The good biographies of the former,Alfred Bougeart,Marat,L'Ami du Peuple(2 vs. Paris,1865),Gérard Walter,Marat(Paris,1933),and H.Gaston-Martin, J.-P.Marat."l'Oeil et l'Ami du Peuple"(Paris,1938),do not mention Billaud at all;Louis R.Gottschalk,Jean-Paul Marat(New York,1927),does so once, but in another connection.

11) F.Chèvremont,Placards,p.103.

12) Lord Acton's Lectures on the French Revolution,eds.,John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence(London,1910),p.248.According to records of the section du Théâtre-Français in Archives Nationales C II,Cart.180,the vote for Billaud in the Electoral Assembly of the department of Paris,was 472; 58 more than the majority required for election.

did not consider him too radical, nor did Marat think of him as a moderate. The latter is all the more surprising, since none of Billaud's pronouncements up to September 1792 so much as hinted that he agreed with the views of the Ami du Peuple.

During the period between September 20,1792 and September 6, 1793, Billaud-Varennes spoke forty-five times in the Convention and eight times in the Jacobin Club. His attendance in the latter fell off sharply. As President of the Society (February 20-March 6, 1793), he attended only eight meetings.[13] Even in the National Convention he advanced few original ideas until the Spring of 1793.

In his maiden speech, on September 22,1792, when the reorganization of the judiciary was under discussion, Billaud proposed the abolition of all courts of law, since they "n'ont servi qu'à perpétuer les divisions dans les familles; ils n'ont été que les suppôts de la tyrannie." He felt that experts should arbitrate each case on its merits. Interrupted in his speech and accused of wanting to throw the country into anarchy, he sat down and did not insist on continuing the discussion.[14] It must be remarked that the proposal to renew the existing authorities had been made by Couthon; and that Louvet de Couvray had asked that

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13) A.Aulard.,Société,V,33.

14) Moniteur(September 23,1792),XIV,14.Dated September 21,1792,there Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale,I,20,has only short mentio but gives correct date.

the Convention should start with the judiciary. Billaud only added his opinion to those of others.

Three days later, on September 24, Billaud joined the fight between the Girondists and the Mountain. This was really the first round of the conflict; the particular issue a Girondist proposition to create a special guard for the Convention, its members taken from each department. This brought the question of federalism into the open for the first time, and also led members of the assembly to align themselves with one faction or the other.

The official position of the Jacobin Club (where "active" constituents discussed public affairs) was anti-federalist.[15] The deputies from Paris were to a certain extent obliged to follow the wishes of the Society. Billaud himself had recently had unfavorable impressions of volunteers and was only too eager to object to the arrival of armed bands in the capital. Yet, it is doubtful that he had already bandoned his former beliefs and turned completely away from federalism. Oddly enough, he started his attack by blaming his opponents for the beginning of the war, although he himself had been one of the most ardent "warmongers" earlier in the year. On September 24, he demanded that the Convention sentence to death "quiquonque aura amené l'ennemi sur le territoire francais."[16] The suggestion found no response.

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15) This is implied in Alphonse Aulard, Histoire Politique de la Révolution Française (5ème. éd., Paris, 1913), p. 264.

16) Moniteur (September 26, 1792), XIV, 42.

That same evening, at the Jacobin Club, Billaud brought up the same subject again.

> " On vous représente,[he said], les hommes les plus purs comme ayant des intelligences avec l'ennemi, nous qui avons sans relâche combattu contre la guerre offensive. Et qui sont ceux qui nous accusent? Ce sont ces hommes qui ont attiré cette guerre offensive; ils nous accusent sans doute de leurs propres trahisons..." 17)

After these short remarks, Billaud did not speak again until October 10. 18) That night, he summarized the anti-federalist postion at the Jacobin Club.

> " On veut diviser la république en attachent les idées sur des démarcations de départements, je n'en reconnais plus de départements, je vois la république partout... On craint l'autorité dictatoriale; la convention ne sera-t-elle pas elle-même cette autorité lorsqu'elle sera environnée d'une garde... . On nous empêche d'élever la voix dans la convention; à quoi devons-nous nous attendre lorsqu'il y aura une force armée?" 19)

The Parisian deputies scored a victory, when the departmental guard was not formed. But the arrival of a large number of fédérés in Paris late in October gave confidence to the Girondists. They attempted again to restrict the powers of the Commune. Between

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17) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,IV,334.

18) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,IV,376,just mentions the speech without quotations.Excerpts in Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution,no.280(October 11,1792), III,4. There,dated October 8.

19) Idem.

Octoberr29 and November 5, Louvet de Couvray led an attack against Robespierre.[20] He proposed that Roland be given the power to crush the popular movement in Paris.[21] Billaud rose to request that "l'opinant soit rappelé à l'ordre, pour avoir proposé de transformer le vertueux Roland en un dictateur."[22] Robespierre himself refuted Louvet's charges in a speech before the Convention on November 4. In the evening of that day, Billaud addressed the Jacobin Club again, to warn the enemies of the Mountain. This speech, with its direct references to the Girondist leadership, is one of the best examples of his style, but of little interest otherwise.

> " Les calomnies contre la députation de Paris, [he said], tiennent au système du salut de Louis XVI; on veut fermer la bouche à ceux qui peuvent dévoiler les traîtres et faire connaître ceux qui, le 10 août, se levèrent respectueusement quand le ci-devant roi entra dans la salle... Non! nous allons parler; demain nous parlerons; mercredi nous enverrons Louis XVI à l'échafaud. La vie n'est rien quand on peut le sacrifier pour la patrie... Déjà la majorité de la Convention s'est rangée du côté de la Montagne, et la Montagne fera un effort qui écrasera les reptiles qui rampent à ses pieds..."[23]

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20) On Louvet de Couvray, a most interesting personality, there exists only a rather superficial biography, John Rivers, Louvet: Revolutionist and Romance-Writer (London, 1910. In hiding during the Terror, Louvet lived until 1797, but took little part in politics after his return to the Convention.

21) Moniteur (October 31, 1792), XIV, 343-344.

22) Moniteur (October 31, 1792), XIV, 344.

23) A. Aulard, ed., Société, IV, 458. Only a one-paragraph summary in Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, no. 295. (November 6, 1792), III, 4.

Between mid-November 1792 and mid-January 1793, the Convention was engaged chiefly in the trial of the ex-King. Billaud's contribution was extremely slight. In the early stages, on November 7, he asked that a sentence stating that the King "peut et DOIT être jugé" be added to the indictment. Also that the document be translated into all European languages for propaganda purposes. The amendment was accepted over Osselin's protests that it was "immoral".[24] A little later, on December 11, Billaud added to the charges against Louis XVI. He stated that the King had forced the Swiss Guard to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown on the morning of August 10; that he had ordered Mandat, Commander of the National Guard, to open fire on the people; that he had created a special bureau central of justices of the peace in order to plot counter-revolutionary measures on August 10; and that he had kept Pétion prisoner in the Tuileries during the night preceding the fall of the Monarchy.[25] On December 26, Billaud participated in riots in the National Convention. Of two demonstrations, one was directed against Defermon, the President of the assembly, the other against Pétion. Defermon, accused of having secured a secret interview with the ex-monarch a few hours before the session, kept calm, and finally admonished the

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24) Moniteur (November 9, 1792), XIV, 420.

25) Ibid. (December 13, 1792), XIV, 719.

representatives to behave like gentlemen.[26] As for the second incident, it has not been proved that Billaud ordered an usher to drag Pétion from the speaker's chair.[27] Both events were, at any rate, without consequences for the participants. In the second voice vote of the trial, on the question of the plebiscite, Billaud voted against it with a reference to Brutus.[28] In the third voice vote, he demanded the death penalty within twenty-four hours;[29] in the fourth, he was among those who rejected a stay of execution.[30] On January 15, before or during the discussion of the plebiscite, Billaud wrote out (and possibly made) a long speech.[31] It is one of the several hundred on the subject of the trial and certainly not one of the most revealing.

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26) Ibid.(December 28,1792),XIV,851,has just one short paragraph on the whole incident.For the details,see A.Kuscinski,Dictionnaire des Conventionnels(Paris,1916),p.185.

27) Ernest Henderson,Symbol and Satire in the French Revolution(New York,1912),p.317.But where did this invention originate?Not one of the memoirs of the prominent Girondists refers to it;nor any other contemporary work.

28) Moniteur(January 18,1793),XV,164.

29) Ibid.(January 20,1793),XV,198.

30) Ibid.(January 24,1793),XV,253.

31) Was that speech delivered?It is not even mentioned in the Moniteu or the Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale.It is not included i the two very large collections of speeches on the judgment of Louis XVI,ed.L.F.Jauffret,Histoire Impartielle du Procès de Louis XVI(8 vs. Paris,1792-1793); and Le Procès de Louis XVI ed.[Anon.](9 vs.Paris, An III-1795).It was only published in a small Recueil d'Opinions sur le jugement de Louis XVI(Paris,1793). Reprinted in Archives Parlementaires,LVII,128-131,as part of annex to the session of Convention of January 15,1793.

Billaud followed again the official policy of the Mountain. He rejected the interference of the primary assemblies in this matter. The speech is chiefly a repetition of Robespierre's address on the same subject before the Convention on December 28. Billaud now identified himself, if not with anti-Federalism as a political philosophy, then with the Jacobin interests of Paris. He had moved away from the moderate position he had held in September. But it is not known, whether this had come about through sober reflection or if Billaud had joined the Mountain party simply for political advantages. In the speech on the judgment of Louis XVI, his words reflected the ideas of the other radical speakers on the subject; he expressed no original thoughts and did not deviate from the party line.

> " Nous avons appris, [he said], qu'inviter une nation à délibérer sur le sort d'un monarque, c'est aiguiser les poignards de la guerre civile, c'est armer le royaliste contre l'ami de la liberté, c'est autoriser les esprits faibles à transiger sur les droits du peuple; c'est, en un mot, encourager les conspirateurs à replonger la nation dans les fers, à l'aide d'un de ces moments d'abattement et de stupeur amené par quelque scène sanglante et terrible." 32)

Then came the judicial argument. The Convention, in the case of Louis XVI, sits as a court and has to pass a sentence. A judicial sentence is never open to public criticism; "l'anarchie la plus complète commencerait au moment où chacun pourrait prétendre être

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32) Archives Parlementaires, LVII, 129.

en même temps et juge et justiciable."[33] Billaud then quoted Rousseau, the one authoritative source for the French revolutionaries. The philosopher from Geneva had said at one time that, when it was not practicable, the people should not be permitted to interfere in the administrative process.[34] If someone were able to declare that Louis is not guilty, remarked Billaud, then someone could also declare that the Republic is unconstitutional. That would be in the interests of the enemies of the Revolution.[35] Billaud ended his speech by demanding a vote on the plebiscite and, in case of its rejection, execution of the King's sentence within twenty-four hours.[36]

Around this time, Billaud spoke once in a matter regarding foreign policy. It is interesting to note that in December 1792, he was still in agreement with certain aspects of Girondist foreign policy. On December 19, Lebrun, the Girondist Foreign Minister, made a report before the Convention. In it, he distinguished between the British Government and the British people. He threatened to appeal to the latter to boycott the military and naval bills which had been passed by Parliament on December 13. Lebrun's arguments must have sounded convincing to many, since

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33) Idem.
34) Idem.
35) Ibid., LVII, 130.
36) Ibid., LVII, 131.

on December 31, Billaud rose to request that this plan be carried out, since the English people "ne désire pas mieux que de fraternisér avec nous."[37] On the issue of foreign policy, party lines were apparently not closely drawn. However, a majority of the Convention voted to postpone discussion on Billaud's proposal.[38]

Billaud's sudden accord with the Government's position was quickly forgotten. On January 5, Guadet started the only attack against Billaud by the Girondists.

> " Citoyens,[he said],il faut en finir une bonne fois. Le coryphée de ce parti prétendu fédéraliste... Pourrait-on se persuader que la calomnie et la méchanceté pussent être portées à cet excès! Le coryphée de ce parti,celui qui faisait le plus de bruit, imprimait, il y a un an, que le gouvernement fédératif était le meilleur gouvernement possible; qu'il n'y avait que des hommes de mauvaise foi ou des scélérats qui puissent prétendre que ce gouvernement ne fût pas le meilleur. J'entends parler de Billaud-Varennes." [39]

It was clever of Billaud's enemies that they struck at his most vulnerable spot. Indeed, he had been the chief defender of federalism in 1791-1792. But in January 1793, Billaud denied everything, as if his own writings had never existed. Since he did not rise to meet the challenge and engage in open discussion of the merits of federalism, his enemies were forced to drop the subject.[40]

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37) Moniteur(January 3,1793),XV,21.

38) Idem.

39) Ibid.(January 8,1793),XV,121.Quoted in Henri Wallon,La Révolution du 31 Mai et le Fédéralisme en 1793(Paris,1886),I,67.

40) Moniteur(January 8,1793),XV,121.

After the trial of the ex-King, Billaud was not active as a speaker for a while. He was writing his book Elémens du Républicanisme and participated only rarely in discussions in the Convention. He was completely silent between January 15 and February 6,1793. On that latter day, amendments to the decree (of February 2), reorganizing the Ministry of War, were under consideration. The Jacobin Pache had left the Ministry on February 4 and had been replaced by the ex-noble de Beurnonville, a friend of Dumouriez' and the Girondists. Once a member of Danton's "machine", he had altogether abandoned his former friends. The Mountain objected to an amendment (to the decree of February 2), which granted assistants of the Minister of War a salary of 10 000 livres. Barère, in the name of the Committee of General Defense, declared that unless the rewards were sufficient, capable men would not work for the Government; Billaud and Jeanbon Saint - André objected that such high salaries would lead persons to seek the position only for financial gain. But the Girondist majority in the Convention won a victory, since this amendment was accepted by voice vote.[41]

Four days later, on February 10, Billaud spoke at the Jacobin Club.[42] This address, chiefly an apology for the

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41) Ibid.(February 8,1793),XV,378-379.

42) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,22-23;Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution,no.354 (February 12,1793),2-3.Aulard gave the whole speech; in the Journal, the excerpts cover only one column and two paragraphs.

September Massacres, has been quoted previously. Billaud also charged that the Girondists wanted to impose the Prince of Wales as King upon the French people.[43] He followed a dual purpose. He connected the Girondists with treasonable activities; they were shown to be scoundrels, intent upon the elimination of the Paris patriots who, in September 1792, had saved France. By repeating a wide-spread rumor of Girondist ties with the British Government, federalism was shown to be undistinguishable from royalism. This speech was one of the most radical in Billaud's career. With the names of the Hébertists or Dantonists substituted for those of the Girondists, it could have been delivered a year later with the same effectiveness. The theme of " a conspiracy all around us, which we, the true Parisian patriots, must uncover", belongs more to the period of the Terror than to the Winter of 1793.

Billaud had now come to the conclusion that federalism was an evil, in fact, identical with treason. In any event, federalism as the Girondists saw it, with the city of Paris subordinate to the rest of France. On his next mission, in March and April 1793, Billaud came to the conclusion that federalism was also "unworkable". That mission really marks the transformation. Before it, federalism was merely a political theory to him. After the mission, Billaud found that the centralization of France was

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43) Idem.

a practical nessecity. In February, he followed only the theoretical concepts. The Girondists were federalists; he was against the Girondists; consequently, he looked for a rational argument against federalism. For the moment, he could convince himself that federalism was identical with Royalism; later, he concluded that it was more closely related to inefficiency and disorder.

But to return to the period before the mission. On March 10, when the organization of the new Revolutionary Tribunal was being discussed in the National Convention, Billaud proposed that its jurors be appointed by the "section de la rémublique".[44] What did he mean by that? It is hard to believe that Billaud would promote departmental (or even regional) representation on the new court. Barère, who supported him at the time, evidently thought so. Did Billaud mean to say that the jurors should be taken from the sections of Paris, as in the case of the Tribunal extraordinaire of August 10? Apparently, the majority of the Convention felt that this was his purpose. It showed such displeasure that he could not finish his remarks, and the assembly eventually decided by a large majority that nine men "pris dans tous les départements" would be appointed.[45]

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44) Moniteur (March 13, 1793), XV, 682.

45) Idem.

On the next day, Billaud attacked the Girondist Clavière,[46] when he submitted a motion that the Ministry of Finance (of which Clavière was the head) be abolished, "parce qu'il n'a pas la confiance du peuple". Supported by Cambon, the matter was sent to the Committee of Contributions for study, but finally, no action was taken.[47]

Two more incidents remain to be discussed. They occurred both on March 12. In the afternoon of that day, Fournier "l'Américain", an employee of the Paris Commune, petitioned the Convention to indict Gensonné, Guadet and Vergniaud. This was only two days after the spectacular victories of the Commune, which had then forced the assembly to adopt certain "emergency" measures (despatch of representatives on mission into the departments, formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal). This time, the Convention refused to be dominated. Marat, certainly no friend of the Girondists, was the first to denounce the Commune's interference. Upon Billaud's request, Fournier was arrested(but subsequently released).[48] On this occasion, Billaud supported

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46) Little has been written on either Lebrun or Clavière,although bot men exercised considerable influence in the Girondist Convention.On the latter,Edouard Chapuisat,"Etienne Clavière représentant et girondin",in Figures et Choses d'Autrefois(Paris,1920),pp.1-170,is a excellent account of the man's career,but undocumented.

47) Moniteur(March 14,1793),XV,690.

48) Moniteur(march 15,1793),XV,694.Billaud said on that occasion:"Cet homme se promenait dans Paris,tandis que des patriotes gémissaient dans les prisons". This statement is really irrelevant to the questi of Fournier's petition.

the established authorities against the Commune and the Jacobin and Cordeliers Clubs. And that same evening, he defended General Dumouriez in the Jacobin Club.[49] On March 10, Danton had similarly spoken in favor of the Girondist General, which has led several historians to assume that Dumouriez, Danton and the Paris Commune conspired to take over the government.[50] There is little concrete evidence to support this theory, nor is it clear, what Billaud's part may have been in the conspiracy. He had been charmed by the General in September, 1792; why should he now believe that Dumouriez was a traitor? He even refused to believe rumors that the General was going to desert and proclaimed that

> " demander le décret d'accusation contre lui, c'est vouloir plonger le poignard dans le sein des vingt-cinq mille hommes qu'il commande." [51]

When Dumouriez went over to the enemy on April 4, Billaud was no less surprised than many other politicians in Paris. His dislike for the officers of the Old Regime was intensified as a result.

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49) Practically the whole speech is in Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, no.372 (March 14, 1793), IV, 3. Only two paragraphs in A. Aulard, ed., Société, V, 86.

50) Notably Albert Mathiez, in La Révolution Française (Paris, 1922-1927), II, 184. For the connection between Danton and Dumouriez, see also Daniel Guérin, La Lutte des Classes sous la Première République (1793-1797) (3ème. éd. Paris, 1946), I, 378-379; and Richard Munthe Brace, "General Dumouriez and the Girondists", American Historical Review, LVI (1951), 493-509.

51) Journal des Débats ..., no.372 (March 14, 1793), IV, 3.

3. Mission to Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine; March 14 - May 3, 1793.

Billaud's second mission was his most important one. On it, he displayed his administrative abilities, showing a certain competence in the handling of the defeated rebels. The mission also speeded his adoption of more radical views; upon his return, he aligned himself with the Mountain for good.

The departments of Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine, part of Brittany, had risen in rebellion against the National Convention in late 1792, under the leadership of the marquis de La Rouërie.[52] These partisan efforts ended when the marquis died, on January 30, 1793. The peasant groups disbanded and their members returned to their homes. But Royalism was not dead in this region. The rebellion in the Vendée, in March 1793, gave disgruntled elements in the adjoining departments an occasion for the renewal of armed hostilities. Here, as everywhere in Western France, the Law of the *levée en masse* of February 24, 1793 (drafting young men into the armies), led to the outbreak of the rebellion.[53] Up to that time,

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52) This affair is told in great detail by a decendant of the marquis G. Lenôtre, *Le Marquis de La Rouërie et la Conjuration Bretonne. 1790-1793* (Paris, 1927). Also Léon Dubreuil, "Les Origines de la Chouannerie dans le département des Côtes-du-Nord", *La Révolution Française*, LXVIII (1915), 128-155, 225-243, 348-365, 455-562, 526-550, which goes even further back (to 1787).

53) The law is reprinted in French in *Moniteur* (February 26, 1793), XV, 55-552. In English, Mohn Hall Stewart, ed., *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York, 1951), pp. 402-408 (excerpts only). The drafting of horses for the armies, an important part of the law, became the particular grievance of the Breton peasants.

this region had barely been touched by revolutionary propaganda. The Law of February 24 was passed, since, due to lack of enthusiasm for the Revolution in some parts of France, voluntary enlistments had decreased and the armies were below the necessary strenghth.[54] In Ille-et-Vilaine, the Royalists soon had the upper hand. On March 16, Sauveur, the District Administrator, was captured by a mob, tortured and killed.[55] Lasource proclaimed in the National Convention two days later, that "dans le moment actuel, plusieurs communes ... éprouvent les mouvements les plus désastreux.[56] As early as March 9, the assembly despatched forty-one commissioners into the insurgent departments.[57] Billaud-Varennes and Joseph-Marie-François Sevestre were among these, assigned to Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine. The latter, an official of the Estates of

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54) On the rebellion, four excellent works; A.Duchatellier, Histoire de la Révolution dans les Départements de l'Ancienne Bretagne (5 vs. Paris, 1836); Emile Gabory, La Révolution et la Vendée (3 vs. Paris, 1925-1928); J.Geslin de Bourgogne et A.de Barthelemy, Etudes sur la Révolution en Bretagne, principalement dans les Côtes-du-Nord (Paris, 1868); René Kerviler, La Bretagne pendant la Révolution (Rennes, 1912). Out of 24 works on the rebellions in the West, only 10 mention these outbreaks of March 1793 in Brittany.

55) A.Duchatellier, op.cit., II, 278 ff.

56) Moniteur (March 18, 1793), XV, 732.

57) Law reprinted in French in Moniteur (April 11, 1793), XVI, 93; A.Aulard, ed., Recueil, II, 298-300; J.M.Thompson, ed., French Revolution Documents 1789-94 (Oxford, 1933), pp. 228-229. In English, J.S.Hall, ed., op.cit., pp. 425-426 (excerpts).

Brittany before the Revolution, was considered a moderate.[58] The aim of the mission was not to supervise the crushing of the rebellion; this was left to the military. But the commissioners were to see that the provisions of the Law of February 24 were carried out. They had also to reorganize the local administrations, so that future rebellions might be prevented. Billaud's and Sevestre's order of mission stated that

> " Les commi/ssaires de la Convention nationale pourront exiger de toutes les autorités constituées les comptes de leur administration. Ils auront le droit de prendre toutes les mesures qui leur paraîtront nécessaires pour établir l'ordre partout où il serait troublé, de suspendre provisoirement de leurs fonctions, et même de faire mettre en état d'arrestation ceux qu'ils trouveraient suspects, de requérir au besoin la force armée ..." [59]

It has been argued that the armies had "pacified" the Côtes-du-Nord by the time the commissioners arrived.[60] Yet, the incidents which took place in that area throughout March and April would rather tend to indicate the continuation of military operations against the rebels.

It is difficult to follow Billaud and Sevestre on their mission, since they were travelling practically the whole time from one small town to the next.[61] They arrived at Mortain on March 19.

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58) He later became a moderate Thermidorian and a member of the Committee of General Security(15 germinal year III).See Auguste Kuscinski,Dictionnaire des Conventionnels(Paris,1916),p.564.

59) A.Aulard,ed.,Recueil,II,300.Art.8 of Law of March 9,1793.

60) Léon Dubreuil,Histoire des Insurrections de l'Ouest(Paris,1929-1930),I,310;"leur mission n'avait plus d'objet".The leader there was Le Bras des Forges,called Boishardy,a peasant.

61) For the dates,E.Gabory,op.cit.,is the most reliable work.The commissioners appointed on March 9, left Paris only five days later.

On the 23rd., they met three of the commissioners in other departments, in order to draw up plans to coordinate their actions. Three days later, Billaud and Sevestre took part in the attack on Redon by the armed forces. On April 10, they passed into Côtes-du-Nord. Recalled on April 30, they submitted a written report to the Committee of Public Safety on May 3rd.

The two men were in danger from the very beginning. On March 19, when Billaud and Sevestre had just arrived in Mortain (Ille-et-Vilaine), 2 000 peasants attacked the town. It appears that, after fiery speeches by the two representatives, only 300 national guardsmen were sufficient to force the insurgents to retreat.[62] Rennes, the capital of the department, had already been relieved in the pitched battle of Pocé; Fougères alone remained directly threatened. On the road from Mortain to Fougères, during the night of March 19-20, the coach with the two commissioners was stopped by an angry mob. With the assistance of Rossard, Major of the village of Laudéan, and one Le Tanneur des Villettes, Billaud and Sevestre disguised themselves and, managed to proceed on their way after two unsuccessful attempts.[63] The

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62) Ibid., III, 24.

63) Théodore Lemas, Un District breton pendant les guerres de l'Ouest et de la Chouannerie (1793-1800) (Paris, 1844), pp. 27-29. Also R. Kerviler op. cit., pp. 185-186. According to Le Tanneur des Villettes, "la présomption de leur [Billaud's and Sevestre's] caractère occasionait de la fermentation."

two local officials used this incident as their chief point of defense only a few weeks later.[64] After their escape, Billaud and Sevestre arrived in Fougères at 2 a.m., woke the district administrators, gave them full powers (in writing) to requisition troops and confiscate horses and arms; then left for Rennes after a short rest.[65] The letter of the five commissioners to the Convention of March 23 from that city is a direct accusation of the Girondist Ministers.[66] It is a description of the situation in the Western departments. The suspicion arises that the representatives exaggerated the bad state of affairs, either to throw an unfavorable light on the Girondists, or because they felt that a distorted picture would arouse more popular support for the "emergency" measures, which they considered necessary.

> " Comment peut-il se faire, [they wrote], que la guerre civile soit allumée dans ces départements... sans que le conseil exécutif ait pris les moyens de réprimer les rebelles? Ce n'est pas un soulèvement: presque tous les habitants des campagnes marchent en ordre contre les villes et les dévastent ... Ce serait vous abuser que de vous dissimuler le danger: il est cinq départements couverts d'hommes armés, ... les routes sont

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64) Both men were forced by the rebels to join them; captured soon after, tried and sentenced to death.

65) Th. Lemas, op. cit., p. 29.

66) Reprinted in A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, II, 468-471. R. Kerviler, op. cit., pp. 173-180; Henri Wallon, Les Représentants du Peuple en Mission et la justice révolutionnaire dans les départements en l'an II (1793-1794) (Paris, 1889-1890), II, 6-9. Excerpts in Moniteur (March 27), 1793), XV, 796. Letter of the commissioners in Morbihan, Finistère, Côtes-du-Nord, Ille-et-Vilaine, Mayenne, Loire-Inférieure to Convention, dated March 2 Signed Guermeur, Sevestre, Le Mailliard, Billaud-Varennes. The fifth commissioner, Fouché, did not sign.

> interceptés, vos commissaires sont arrêtés dans leur mission; plusieurs, après avoir couru de grands dangers, se sont rendus ici ... Vos commissaires vous préviennent que, s'étant fait rendre compte de la conspiration par le principal agent employé pour la découvrir, ils ont appris que le conseil exécutif en était instruit depuis trois mois, sans avoir rien fait pour la réprimer ... " 67)

The letter ends with a demand for 4 000 - 5 000 more troops. On March 26, the armies relieved Redon; then cleared the whole left bank of the Vilaine of rebel bands. For all practical purposes, the revolt in Ille-et-Vilaine was crushed early in April. The credit for these military operations went to General Beysser, whom Billaud praised highly in his report of May 3rd. 68) Although General Turreau, Beysser's colleague, felt that "this was another who enjoyed the momentary reputation of being a great general", 68) the latter had certain abilities which made him popular with the defeated peasants. In particular, he prevented pillaging by his troops. 70)

However, it became the task of the civilian commissioners to reorganize the "pacified" territory. The local officials were scared of new outbreaks, or had no forces at their disposal to set

67) Moniteur (March 27, 1793), XV, 796. Same letter as above.

68) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, III, 313.

69) Louis-Marie Turreau, Memoirs for the History of the War of La Vendée (London, 1796), p. 94. English translation of a manuscript written in prison.

70) E. Gabory, op. cit., III, 24.

up a machinery of administration, in places where it had been destroyed during the rebellion. Prisons were overcrowded, yet the judges unwilling to try captured peasants for fear of reprisals, if the Royalists should once again assume control.[71] The commissioners found "à peine trente patriotes" in Redon, but a convent still in operation in that city.[72] Since unreconciled peasants refused to ship food to the towns, the prospect of famine raised problems of supply.[73] Worst of all, there was a wide-spread feeling among local Republicans, that the provisions of the Law of February 24 should not be executed, since no uniforms and weapons were available for those who were to be drafted.[74]

Billaud and Sevestre sought expert advice on public opinion in this part of France. General Canclaux, Commander-in-Chief of all the armies in the West, told them that the questions of religion and the Monarchy were the main factors of unrest; that the Law of February 24 had only been used as a pretext for starting a rebellion. The prime objectives of the Government should be to

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71) J.Geslin de Bourgogne et A.de Barthelemy, op.cit., p.57.

72) Mortimer-Ternaux, Histoire de la Terreur 1792-1794 (2ème.éd. Paris, 1863-1881), VII, 505. Letter Billaud-Varennes and Sevestre to Convention, dated March 29.

73) Legros, La Révolution Telle Qu'Elle Est, ou correspondance inédite du Comité de Salut Public avec les généraux et les représentans du peuple ... (Paris, 1837), I, 111. Letter Billaud-Varennes and Sevestre to Committee of Public Safety, dated April 16.

74) Ibid., I, 112. Same letter as above.

separate the Breton Royalists from those of the Vendée, to isolate the two provinces from each other,[75] and to reconcile the Church with the Republic.

> " Il est facile,[he wrote],de s'entendre avec les prêtres,de leur dire de retourner dans leurs paroisses,où ils ne seront plus persécutés,et de persuader aux jeunes gens qu'ils ne partiront pour la frontière que lorsqu'ils en témoigneront le désir." [76]

Billaud and Sevestre heeded this advice, and took a moderate position. They neither spared the unreconciled elements of the population, nor made all-out attempts to convert them to the cause of the Republic. In Saint-Brieuc (Côtes-du-Nord), popular priests were put on trial and sentenced to deportation,upon the special request of the two representatives.[77] The district administrators in that city were also publicly commended for their patriotism and zeal.[78] On April 13 and May 22, fourteen nobles and priests(who had led the rebellion in Ille-et-Vilaine disguised as peasants)were shot, after being sentenced to death by the regular courts of the district.[79] The surviving conspirators of November-December 1792, assistants of La Rouërie, were also arrested and sent to Paris

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75) Aurélien de Courson,Du Caractère de la Guerre Civile en Bretagne durant la Période Révolutionnaire(Paris,1846),p.24.Letter Canclaux to Billaud-Varennes and Sevestre,dated April 3.

76) Ibid.,p.23.

77) J.Geslin de Bourgogne et A.de Barthelemy,op.cit.,pp.58-59.Letter Billaud-Varennes to Convention,wrongly dated May 5.

78) Léon Dubreuil,La Révolution dans le Département des Côtes-du-Nord (Paris,1909),p.136 n.2.Official account of reception of representatives in Saint-Brieuc,April 14,1793.

79) L.Dubreuil,Histoire des Insurrections,I,311.

under guard, to be tried before the Revolutionary Tribunal.[80] Finally, the representatives of the Convention ordered all châteaux destroyed as a symbolic gesture.[81] At the same time, they engaged in the dissemination of revolutionary propaganda.[82] On April 23, Billaud and Sevestre reported that "le travail du recrûtement est achevé, qu'ils n'ont vu que de vrais républicains et que l'esprit est bon."[83]

They also made efforts at conciliation. In fact, one of the Royalist historians of the rebellion insisted that Billaud and Sevestre sabotaged acts of personal revenge by Republican troops.[84] There is also the public appeal of March 29, which was posted all over the two departments. It called upon the inhabitants of the countryside to return to their homes without fear of reprisals, since they had only been the "aveugles instrumens" of bloodthirsty priests and criminals.[85] This policy of moderation

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80) C.F.Beaulieu, Essais historiques sur les causes et les effets de la Révolution de France (Paris, An XI-1803), I, 227.

81) Decree reprinted in J.Geslin de Bourgogne et A.de Barthelemy, op. cit., p.232.

82) See the fiery letter of Billaud-Varennes and Sevestre to the "Amis de l'égalité formant le club de Rennes", dated March 27, reprinted in A.Duchatellier, op.cit., II, 324-326.

83) A.Aulard, ed., Recueil, III, 421. Proclamation of Committee of Public Safety on mission to Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine, dated April 24.

84) J.Crétineau-Joly, Histoire de la Vendée Militaire (3ème.éd. Paris [1841]), III, 122. The author said that Billaud and Sevestre led, during a military engagement, a group of national guardmen away from the enem He blamed their successors (Guerineur and Le Maillard) for the policy of repression of Summer 1793.

85) J.Geslin de Bourgogne et A.de Barthelemy, op.cit., pp.231-232.

is quite understandable. The aim of Billaud's and Sevestre's mission was to "pacify" the departments. But this could only be achieved, if the majority of the population were won over to the cause of the Revolution. Moreover, Billaud assumed that the enemies of the Republic were in Paris rather than in Brittany; in the National Convention rather than in the castles of Côtes-du-Nord. He and his partner realized that little would be gained from the elimination of minor officials in the departments, if the political leaders in the capital remained at liberty. It is not even certain that Billaud and Sevestre were responsible for the creation of Revolutionary Tribunals and Commissions in these two departments.[86] Even the Criminal Tribunal at Rennes was so lenient that it had to be replaced by a Military Commission in brumaire year II.[87]

Billaud returned from this trip with one lasting impression: that the rebellion had not been discouraged in Paris,

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86) A.Duchetellier, op.cit., II, 335, says they set up the Criminal Tribunal at Rennes. H.Wallon, op.cit., II, 10, credits them with the one at Lamballe. John B.Sirich, The Revolutionary Committees in the Departments of France, 1793-1794 (Cambridge, 1943), p.26, holds them responsible for the Revolutionary Committee at Laval, which included twelve members of the Municipal Council and ten of the local Popular Society. Charles Berriat Saint-Prix, La Justice Révolutionnaire. Août 1792-Prairial an III (2ème. éd. Paris, 1870), I, 216, is not certain about Billaud's contribution to the creation of these courts.

87) Idem. In Rennes, both the Tribunal and the vastly more cruel Militar Commissions of a later date, sentenced during the whole period of their existence only 87 persons to death, fined 80, and acquitted 331. H.Wallon, op.cit., II, 10, reported that in Lamballe, as many as 21 death sentences were passed between April 10 and May 10, 1793, but that author is not always reliable. For the Military Commissions, see Théodore Lemas, Les Commissions militaires revolutionnaires dans l'Ille-et-Vilaine en 1793-1794 (Paris, [1893]). This book fails to mention either Billaud or Sevestre at any time, although all the documents leading to the creation of the Criminal Tribunal at Rennes are reprinted in it.

and that the (Girondist) Government had failed to crush it promptly, by leaving the dissemination of Republican propaganda to (sometimes unreliable) local authorities. This impression seems not entirely correct. But it became the basis of Billaud's anti-federalist arguments.

These were first stated in unmistakable terms in the report on the mission, submitted to the Committee of Public Safety on May 3. It contains few facts, but high praise of General Beysser, and violent attacks on the Ministers. The Girondists responded by not reading the report on the floor of the Convention and by not permitting newspapers to print it.[88] The Mountain gained much prestige by denouncing this restriction of freedom of the press. As for Billaud, he had acquired a reputation for honesty, integrity, and energy. The violence of his opposition to the Government marks the first steps away from Danton's tutelage. As he drifted more and more to the left, he rejected all moderation and temporizing. Billaud's radical attitude was the result of his disillusionment with the Government, which, he felt, was intent

88) Alphonse de Beauchamp, Histoire de la Guerre de la Vendée et des Chouans (3ème. éd. Paris, 1809), I, 91. The report is indeed not mentioned in the Moniteur, Ibid., I, 90, gives some excerpts. The 11-page report is actually no more than a collection of platitudes. A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, II, 313, agrees that it contains "peu de faits".

upon the destruction of the Republic. As for the mission, even his enemies were forced to admit that he had successfully accomplished his task. Months later, on October 4, 1793, Basire paid him tribute in the Convention, stating that the "neutralization" of the two departments "a sauvé la patrie des dangers les plus pressants qu'ait encore encourus la Révolution." 84)

4. Against Federalism and the Paris Commune: May 4 - July 31, 1793.

After his return, Billaud's opposition to the Girondist Ministers and their friends in the National Convention became more pronounced. He felt that the time had come to call to account those who had been lax in the conduct of the war and responsible for the initial successes of the Western insurgents. He advocated now an intensification of the war effort, as well as the complete subordination of the nation's economic life to the needs of defense. He believed that the crisis required emergency measures, a disregard of special interests and the sacrifice of personal liberties. He was one of the first members of the Convention to recommend the establishment of a regime of Terror. But such all-out efforts could only be directed efficiently by the central authority, in this case, the National Convention in Paris. The

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89) Ch.-L.Chassin, La Préparation de la Guerre de Vendée 1789-1793 (Paris, 1892), III, 249.

departmental administration in Ille-et-Vilaine had been unable to crush even a small local rebellion and could not by itself remove the counter-revolutionaries among its own members. Federalism with its provincial jealousies and regional interest, was obviously not practical in dealing with the enemies of the Republic. Billaud never stated whether he continued to believe that federalism was the ideal system for peace-time or whether he would also have advocated centralization under changed circumstances.

While he was away on mission, he missed the last attempt of the Girondists to gain power, culminating in Marat's indictment and acquittal (April 13-24), and the beginning of the so-called popular movement in Paris, which resulted in the first Maximum on grain(May 4). Even after his return, Billaud took no part in the agitation. Yet in a letter written by Billaud and Sevestre from Rennes on March 22, he warned that

> " Il est donc temps de chercher sérieusement qui sont les vrais traîtres qui nous environnent. Il est temps de les voir enfin où ils sont réellement, quand les instruments aveugles de leurs machinations nous les indiquent si évidemment." 90)

And,on April 7, he remarked:

> " Oui, il est de grands coupables: et ceux-là sont les hommes qui ont voulu sauver le tyran; ce sont les mêmes connues pour être intimement liés avec cet infame Dumouriez,...ce sont ceux qui ont eu tant de conférences avec lui,pendant son dernier séjour à Paris ... ." 91)

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90) Moniteur(March 26,1793),XV,791.Letter Sevestre and Billaud to Convention,dated March 22.

91) Archives Nationales,CII,430-31.Cart.25.Letter Billaud-Varennes and Sevestre to Committee of Public Safety.

And after his return, on May 13, he attacked the Executive Council for having neglected to take measures against the rebellion in the Vendée.[92] His remarks on that occasion showed again his non-partisan attitude, since they were made in support of the Girondist Génissieux, who had taken the Ministers to task in the first place. It is strange, in fact, that he did not participate at all in the events of May 31-June 2. It almost seems as if he did not wish to identify himself with the actions of the Paris Commune. He attacked the Girondists only on May 29, before the crisis had even begun. On that day, in the Jacobin Club, he indicated, though not by name, the "trente meneurs qui forment le plan de conjuration."[93] He also called upon the Club to communicate directly with the provinces, since the newspapers were all "sold" to the Girondist faction.[94] He then submitted a wordy plan of propagandist activity. It is best summarized in the Jacobin Club's official record:

> " Ici l'orateur lit ce plan, dont la longueur finit par détruire l'intérêt. Au bout d'une heure d'attention on demande l'ordre du jour.
>
> L'orateur se résume en ces termes:" ...Je ne tiens pas à conserver la parole, cependant comme à la fin de mon travail j'indique des mesures de salut public, je regrette de n'avoir pu en achever la lecture."[95]

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92) Moniteur (May 15, 1793), XVI, 383.

93) A. Aulard, ed., Société, V, 213.

94) Journal des Débats et de la Correspondance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, no. 423 (May 31, 1793), IV, 4. The remarks of the session of May 29 are all included there.

95) Idem.

Again, on the evening of May 31, Billaud came to the Society to complain that Lebrun and Clavière, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance respectively, were not included among the suspended Girondists.[96] In the Convention, during these dramatic days, he kept complete silence. Only on June 2, when the crisis was practically over, he spoke some thirty-odd words in support of Barère's decree, requesting a voice vote for the indictment of twenty-nine Girondist deputies.[97] Billaud said:

> " La Convention n'a pas le droit de provoquer la suspension d'aucun de ses membres. S'ils sont coupables, il faut les renvoyer devant les tribunaux; s'ils sont innocents, il faut se taire sur des mesures toujours dangereuses à provoquer."[98]

At this point, he expressed the majority opinion of the assembly. The national representatives were held to be "untouchable", only subject to removal by the majority vote of the assembly. The right of the primary assemblies (or sections of Paris) to bring them to justice was specifically denied. To speak in terms of the class struggle, Billaud joined now the lower bourgeoisie in its efforts to check the proletarian movement, with whose assistance it had been victorious on June 1. If these premises are adopted, Billaud, as well as Robespierre, Danton, and other leaders of the Mountain

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96) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,217.

97) Moniteur(June 5,1793),XVI,553.

98) Idem.

"betrayed" their constituents, the people of Paris, and turned the days of May 31 - June 2 to their own profit.[99]

The exact relationship between Billaud-Varennes and the popular movement in Paris requires careful investigation. Several historians have held that Billaud was a servant of the Commune, an Hébertist or even an enragé, in any event, a spokesman for the Parisian working class.[100] It has practically become a standard opinion, not challenged until recently, that the enragés Billaud-Varennes and Collot-d'Herbois, after several unsuccessful attempts, took over the Convention on September 5, 1793, and then forced their way into the Committee of Public Safety. Collot's position cannot be discussed here; his connections with the Commune are more clearly defined than Billaud's. But Billaud hardly showed himself an extreme Hébertist by his speech and behavior at any time before September 5, and on that date only at certain moments. One issue should be clarified first: There was a vast difference of opinion between the Père Duchesne and the enragés leaders of the Paris Commune, Varlet and Roux. (Mathiez and Guérin have proved that beyond doubt.) At his most radical, Billaud did not turn farther to the left than Hébert. But even that is doubtful. Not a bit of

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99) One of the chief assertions in D.Guérin,La Lutte des Classes sous la Première République(1793-1797)(3ème.éd.Paris,1946),I,115-126.

100) For instance E.N.Curtis,H.Duprê,R.R.Palmer,P.Rohden,H.Wendel,etc. whose works are considered very reliable.Ralph Korngold,Robespierre and the Fourth Estate(New York,1941),p.258,speaks of Billaud as an Hébertist outside the Hébertist party.All these writers did not examine the evidence in detail.

evidence has come to light, showing a tie between Billaud and any member of the municipality of Paris. On the other hand, on a number of occasions, Billaud opposed the Paris Commune and its spokesmen. Nothing in his experience and environment had prepared him to become a champion of the proletariat. In theory, he remained always a defender of private property.[101] He never attempted to deny his affiliations with the bourgeoisie. Moreover, an advocate of national unity (such as Billaud), would hardly look with more sympathy upon the special class interests of the Parisian workers than he would upon the special class interests of the businessmen. However, all this did not prevent him on occasion from promoting certain points of the enragé program. Once Jacques Roux, Varlet and his followers were crushed as a political force (by early July, 1793), there was no reason why their platform should not be appropriated by the Mountain. After all, the economic crisis was acute and the Convention was forced to do something about it. Consequently, Billaud proposed decrees which were to some extent sympathetic to the wishes of the lower classes. But his chief aim was to win a war. Aulard came close to the truth when he said: "Collot-d'Herbois et Billaud-Varennes passaient pour partisans de la violence, et les Hébertistes affectaient de les ménager."[102] Billaud favored the enactment of laws which would please

101) Witness the whole argument of his Elémens du Républicanisme (see below pp. 178-190).

102) A. Aulard, Histoire Politique, p. 461.

Hébert and his followers; not because he was in political alliance with the Père Duchesne, but because he felt that these measures were necessary for the survival of the Republic. Guérin realized this clearly when he called Collot "proche de l'Hébertisme", but Billaud only "partisan de la Terreur".[103]

After June 2, the situation was slightly changed. The Girondists, who fled into the departments and incited the local authorities to rebellion, became counter-revolutionaries. The Mountain had to fight the federalist insurrection in the provinces on the one hand, the demands of the enragés and their followers in Paris on the other. Something had also to be done with the armies. Enragé agitation led the Convention to eliminate the weak links in the chain of command. The Mountain realized that, in order to produce an effective fighting force, some changes were necessary. A centralized state demands the subordination of the military forces to the directing authority in the state. Since 1793, French Governments have tried to maintain a large degree of civilian control over the nation's armed forces. Only two studies deal in some detail with the civilian-military relationship during the Revolution.[104] The conflict between the War Ministry in Paris

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103) D.Guérin, op.cit., I, 257.

104) Henri Libermann, La Défense Nationale à la Fin de 1792. Servan et Pache (1 août 1792-2 février 1793) (Paris, 1927), and Colonel Ramsay Weston Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic (Oxford, 1926-1939), I, 11-41. The problem is completely ignored in three equally good books: Charles Louis Chassin, L'Armée et la Révolution (Paris, 1867); Ernest d'Hauterive, L'Armée et la Révolution. 1789-1794 (Paris, 1894); Albert Mathiez, La Victoire de l'an II (Paris, 1916). Pierre Caron, ed., La Défense Nationale de 1792 à 1795 (Paris, 1912), is a valuable collection of documents.

(under the pressure of clubs and the Commune, but solely responsible to the National Convention), and the headquarters of the various armies became more and more intense throughout 1793. For nearly a whole year, the Minister of War was Jean-Baptiste Bouchotte, a good Jacobin and a personal friend of Robespierre, Billaud and Marat.[105] His opponents were the army commanders, many of them ex-nobles or friends of the Girondists. There was good reason to assume that they were not wholehearted supporters of the regime.[106] Most had been officers in the armies before the Revolution. They were accustomed to make their own decisions. As the centralization became more and more rigid, and the authorities in Paris attempted to supervise their activities and to give them orders, they complained that they could not conduct the operations of their armies with the necessary flexibility. They objected particularly to the advice of the representatives of the Convention. The point of view of the Mountain (who controlled the Ministry of War), was expressed in Billaud's speech at the Jacobin Club on June 9, one of the most important in his career.[107] He found that in the armies, only

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105) See Général Herlaut, Le Colonel Bouchotte, Ministre de la Guerre en l'An II (Paris, 1946), II, 227-260.

106) An excellent study of the generals is Lieutenant-Colonel L. Hartmann, Les Officiers de l'Armée Royale et de la Révolution (Paris, 1910). Col. R.W. Phipps, op. cit., is even more useful, since it embodies the latest research.

107) Discours de Billaud-Varennes, député à la Convention nationale sur des mesures de salut public indiquées par les circonstances. Reprinted partly in A. Aulard, ed., Société, V, 242-243; and Georges Michon, "La Justice militaire sous la Révolution", Annales Révolutionnaires, XIV (192 1922), 106-107. This 79-page long article was later made into a book, La Justice militaire sous la Révolution (Paris, 1922). Large excerpts from speech in Journal des Débats et de la Correspomdance de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, no. 430 (June 11, 1793), V, 1-2.

soldiers and subordinate officers were held responsible for mistakes, while generals could commit one blunder after another. He did not make clear, whether he wanted the generals to proceed with more caution or with more vigor. At first, he pictured them as irresponsible and bloodthirsty killers.

> " Et nous sanctionnons,[he said], un code pénal militaire,pour laisser despotiser l'armée par des monstres qui paraissent avoir conspiré sa défaite, puisque trop souvent ils ne la conduisent au combat que pour la faire massacrer ... " 108)

He felt that the generals should be held responsible for their failures. And since human life is involved in their case, they should be punished to the full extent of the law.

> " Il est temps,[he concluded],que la glaive de la loi punisse avec plus de sévérité et moins de retard le hommes qui par l'élévation de leur grade,doublent l gravité de leurs attentats. La Convention doit rendre tout commandant en chef responsable sur sa tête,non des évènements d'une bataille,mais des défaites qui seraient le résultat d'une impéritie démontrée. Celui qui n'est pas capable a une présomption criminelle quand il accepte une mission qui dépasse ses forces. Sans doute la guerre exige qu'on donne souvent quelque chose au hasard. Mais quand un général n'a pas pris toutes les mesures nécessaires pour assurer l'entreprise,ou quand, contre le voeux exprimé de l'armée,il s'est engagé dans une action,dont le non succès était prévu d'avance,alors il doit compte du sang qu'il a fait couler;et sous ce rapport,il y a si près de la trahison à l'ignorance,qu'elles sont également repréhensibles et méritent la même punition..."109)

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108) G.Michon,loc.cit.,p.106.

109) Ibid.,pp.106-107; A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,242-243.

The chief argument seems to be that the generals should plan everything carefully, before rushing into combat, and take the offensive only, if success on the battlefield can be assured. Billaud ruled out all coincidence, once a military operation has started. Yet, by the same token, too long hesitation (as in Houchard's case) would give the enemy an opportunity to strike first. Billaud advanced also the idea that the general in the field would consult the representatives on mission. These "experts" would remain in contact with Paris and would have an overall view of the entire front, campaign, etc. while the commander in the field would only know his small sector. Guérin may have overemphasized the role of the representatives as opponents of the generals; on many occasions, collaboration between the two was close.[110] Few officers, if any, were eliminated on recommendation of the representatives for wanting to enforce discipline in their armies. But there was a certain amount of imposition from above. The commander in the field might not have been actually restricted in his plans, but he certainly was not as free as he had been formerly. As a result, he felt hostile toward the Republic, while the Minister of War assumed that only closer supervision of the generals would prevent a betrayal of the Republic.

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110) D.Guérin, op.cit., I, 206-212.

For some reason, Billaud was considered an expert on military affairs. As such, he was appointed to the Military Committee of the National Convention (on June 14,1793). This body had up to 42 members at one time.[111] Its task was to pass on all requests for advancement, promotions and pensions in the armed forces, as well as on inventions and patents of a military nature.[112] It seems that only matters involving a principle or setting a precedent were actually decided in the Committee; thousands of ordinary applications were sent back to subordinate services (probably the headquarters of the different armies) for approval or rejection.[113] It is not known, how many sessions Billaud attended, what his influence in the Committee was or for which decisions he was responsible. In the National Convention, he became the chief spokesman of the Mountain on military matters, defending the party's view in its struggle with General Custine. But he also spoke occasionally on purely political matters.

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111) Pierre Caron, Les Papiers des Comités Militaires de la Constituante de la Législative et de la Convention (1789-An IV) (Paris, 1912), pp.XV-XVI. Until the middle of August, the membership was only 20. The Committee asked for an increase, was granted a membership of 42 on August 27. Reorganized on September 26, the number remained fixed at 23 until fructidor an IV. Important members were Boissy d'Anglas, Bourdon de l'Oise, Courtois and Camille Lecointre, Dubois-Crancé, Desmoulins. During Billaud's period of service, the Presidents were François Aubry, a moderate, who remained in prison from 12 vendémiaire year II until long after Thermidor, and François-Martin Poultier, a Jacobin, who later turned Thermidorian.

112) P.Caron, op.cit., p.XXIV.

113) Idem.

During the month of June, the new Constitution was an important subject of discussion in the assembly. On the day on which Hérault de Séchelles' project was submitted to the Convention (June 9), Billaud made a speech dealing with taxation.[114] Most likely, he wished to assure the Parisian working class that the Mountain was defending its interests. It was an attempt to win over the followers of the enragés, who agitated against the Constitution. Billaud proposed: 1. That every day laborer, whose yearly income would not exceed 4 000 livres, be exempt from all direct or indirect contribution to the government. 2. He would have to register with his municipality to obtain the exemption. 3. He who would fraudulently do so, would be fined three times the amount of his ordinary tax contribution. 4. The assemblies of the communes or sections of the municipalities would investigate the financial situation of all those who registered. 5. The process would be repeated annually.[115] The Moniteur reported that the project was applauded vigorously.[116] It was then sent to the Committee of Public Safety for study and eventual incorporation into the Constitutional Act. But art.10 of this document (the Constitution of 1793), stated specifically that "No citizen is exempt from the honorable obligation to contribute to public expenses."[117]

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114) Moniteur(June 11,1793),XVI,602.Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale,XIII,156,mentions the speech as"un rapport très-intéressant," but does not quote from it.

115) Moniteur(June 11,1793),XVI,602.

116) Idem.

117) James Hall Stewart,ed.,A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution(New York,1951),p.466.

It is possible that opposition of the Plain to this and other radical measures was responsible for many changes in the original constitutional projects. On June 23, after Hérault de Séchelles had offered his "Declaration of the Rights of Man," its members abstained from voting on this amendment. Billaud ose to request a voice vote, since, he said,

> " Il faut que le peuple connaisse les hommes qui veulent son bonheur et ceux qui semblent déjà protester contre le chef-d'oeuvre de la philantropie." 118)

His demand was rejected. However, the Declaration was adopted and became the preamble to the Constitution of 1793. 119)

Billaud took his revenge on the Plain two days later (June 25), when the deputy Bernard des Sablons asked for a leave of absence to look after family matters. When Billaud protested that the deputies of the Right wanted only to kindle the flame of civil war in the departments, it was not granted. 120)

In the meantime, the alliance between the enragés and the Mountain had come to an end. It may seem somewhat far-fetched to connect the case of Charles-Alexis Alexandre with the popular movement in Paris, but the suspicion arises that his nomination

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118) Moniteur (June 26, 1793), XVI, 728.

119) J.H. Stewart, ed., op. cit., pp. 455-458.

120) Moniteur (June 27, 1793), XVI, 741.

was meant to be another concession to the Parisian extremists.[121] Bouchotte, the Jacobin Minister of War, wished to resign. General Alexandre was one of the heroes of June 2 and August 10,1792. Before engaging in his military career, he had been a stock-broker; one historian insists, however, that this was only a hobby.[122] On June 21, Hérault de Séchelles, speaking for the Committee of Public Safety, proposed Alexandre for the position of Minister of War. Upon Thuriot's request, confirmation was postponed and a further investigation ordered. But on the next day (June 22), Barère brought up the General's name again. Alexandre had already been confirmed, when an unknown member remarked that the General had still been a practicing stock-broker on August 10. Over Fabre d'Eglantine's protest, Billaud rose and, in the name of the Military Committee, stated that "si Alexandre a été courtier, il est absurde de le faire ministre de la guerre."[123] The nomination was promptly revoked, and Bouchotte was persuaded to remain in his position. It is possible that some outside pressure

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121) The incident has been described in detail various times: ed. Jacques Godechot, Fragments des Mémoires de Charles-Alexis Alexandre sur sa Mission aux Armées du Nord et de Sambre-et-Meuse (Paris, 1937), p.17; Arthur Chuquet, "Alexandre, l'éphémère ministre," in Etudes d'Histoire, 6ème. série (Paris, [1920]), pp.49-62; Colonel Herlaut, "Les Nominations du Général Beauharnais et du Commissaire Alexandre au Ministère de la Guerre," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XII (1935), 13-37. The debates in the Convention are in Moniteur (June 23, 24, 1793), XVI, 712, 720; short summaries in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XIV, 194.

122) A. Chuquet, op. cit., p.51.

123) Moniteur (June 24, 1793), XVI, 720.

caused the rejection of a good patriote like Alexander. To the enragés, a businessmanwould certainly have been unacceptable, particularly in a position where they distrusted even the most radical Jacobins.

The extreme left felt apparently strong enough to force its program upon the assembly. Jacques Roux, their spokesman, led a deputation of the Cordelier Club and the sections des Gravilliers and Bonne-Nouvelle to the National Convention on June 25[124]. He had obviously miscalculated his step. The Convention not only disliked dictation from the outside, but Roux' words and manners were so offensive that members of his own delegation turned against him.[125] He drew a picture of widows of the war dead, cruelly exploited by an indifferent middle-class Government.[126] He then launched an attack upon private property.[127] Finally, he asked for a decree against speculation, the expulsion of ex-nobles from the armies and moderates from the Convention, as well as the arrest of their relatives as hostages.[128] His language was insulting,

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124) Accounts of the incident are in Albert Mathiez, La Vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur (Paris, 1934), pp.215-223; and D. Guérin, op.cit., I, 232-233. The latter is only a very short summary.

125) For parts of the speech, see A. Mathiez, Vie chère, pp.216-221. It is not reprinted in the Moniteur.

126) Ibid., p.216.

127) Idem.

128) Ibid., p.217.

his invective foolishly directed against the Mountain, and his threat that "Les sans-culottes avec leurs piques feront exécuter vos décrets" sounded like the preparation for another May 31.[129] Thuriot was led to remark that

> " Cobourg n'aurait pas tenu un autre language;s'il avait de l'or à verser,il ne pourrait mieux choisir pour son agent que l'orateur que vous venez d'entendre." [130]

Collot-d'Herbois, almost an enragé himself, stated that "la vérité est plus forte que tant de calomnies", and denounced the member of the Commune for violations of the laws of justice and equality.[131] Finally, Billaud:

> " Cet homme est d'autant plus suspect,[he said],qu'il s'est transporté dans plusieurs sections et au club des Cordeliers pour y décrier la constitution;les patriotes indignés lui ont demandé s'il l'avait lue, il a été obligé d'avouer qu'il ne la connaissait pas." [132]

A proposal was made to arrest Roux, but eventually he was permitted to retire.[133] Mathiez and Guérin,who deplored this whole incident as the selfish work of a few men in the assembly,[134] discounted the possibility that the methods employed by Roux made the defeat of the proletariat inevitable. This demonstration marks the decline of the

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129) Idem.
130) Moniteur(june 28,1793),XVI,748.
131) Idem.
132) Idem.
133) Ibid.,XVI,749.
134) A.Mathiez,Vie chère,p.223; and D.Guérin,op.cit.,I,231.

enragés as a political power. The Mountain could now take over their program, and realize certain parts of it for the benefit of both the working class, as well as the lower bourgeoisie.

In a move against "inefficiency" in the armies, Billaud denounced (on July 10), General Westermann, who had just been defeated in the Vendée. Since he was Danton's intimate friend, no action was taken at the time.[135] But the accusation shows that Billaud had drifted far away from his former friends.

He also attacked General Beysser, whom he had formerly praised so highly.[136] The General had quarrelled with the administration of the Loire-Inférieure, been arrested, set free and publicly exonerated. Billaud charged on July 18, that Beysser's friends had bribed the authorities into releasing him, and called him "non seulement un traître, mais encore un lâche."[137] This blast caused the suspension of the General, but he was arrested and executed only nine months later (24 germinal year II-April 13, 1794). Finally, Billaud asked for an investigation of General Kellermann, the victor of Valmy, since the latter had refused to recognize the authority of representatives Dubois-Crancé and Albitte.[138]

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135) Moniteur (July 12, 1793), XVII, 91.

136) Moniteur (July 20, 1793), XVII, 167.

137) Idem.

138) Moniteur (July 31, 1793), XVII, 268. Session of July 29.

With its enemies temporarily held in check, it seemed by mid-July, 1793, that the Mountain would be free to engage in the political and economic reorganization of France. But reforms could only be pushed through after the open insurrections against the Convention were crushed. Throughout June and early July, the Parisian authorities had disregarded the federalist threat and concentrated their energies against the popular movement in the capital and the unreliable commanders at the front. But once aware of the peril surrounding them, the Mountain wasted no effort to enlist support for its cause. Billaud's great anti-Girondist speech in the Convention on July 15, was the call to arms. An appeal to assist the assembly in its tasks, it was also a statement of party policy, indicating some of the proposed emergency measures.[139]

Billaud began by stating that conspirators are rarely known to the public and that it is difficult to discover them.[140] The most effective way to do so is by a comparison of their writings at different periods. As members of the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies, the Girondist leaders were revolutionaries and worked for the people; in the Convention, these same men joined the enemies of the Republic and became traitors.

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139) "Discours de Billaud-Varennes sur les trente-deux membres décrétés d'arrestation dans la journée du 2 juin". Complete in Moniteu (July 24,25,26,27,1793), XVII, 198-201, 206-208, 225-232. Just mentioned i Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XVI, 184.

140) Moniteur (July 24, 1793), XVII, 199.

" Or lisez les journeaux,[he said],qui rendent compte des séances des deux assemblées antérieures, et rapprochez Buzot et Pétion constituants,de Buzot et Pétion conventionnels .... et l'étrange disparité de leurs principes deviendra la première preuve de leur changement,de leur duplicité et de leur trahison." 141)

Eighteen specific accusations follow, many of them quite fantastic. For instance, that the arrest and surrender to the Austrians of the Minister of War de Beurnonville was planned by Dumouriez and Beurnonville himself, in return for a cabinet post in the General's Government, to be established after his successful coup d'état (no.5). 142) Or that Pétion had signed a treaty with Pitt, in which he promised to open the Scheldt, so that England might have a reason to declare war on France(no.6). 143) Also that the Girondists had a secret meeting with the defense lawyers of King Louis XVI, to arrange for an acquittal (no.11); 144) and that Guadet "directed" the assassinations of Marat and Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau(no.16). 145) There are also general charges of federalism(n o.10),and of counter-revolutionary activity(no.13),both without detailed evidence. The"triumvirat royaliste" of Gensonné, Guadet and Vergniaud; Brissot, Roland, Lebrun, Clavière, Pétion, Barbaroux and Salles were all found to have been engaged in attempts to overthrow the National

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141) Idem.

142) Ibid.,XVII,200.

143) Idem.

144) Moniteur(July 25,1793),XVII,207.

145) Moniteur(July 26,1793),XVII,225.

Convention, in concert with the ex-King, Dumouriez and the British Government. Billaud introduced many letters and pamphlets written by the Girondists and he quoted from their speeches. He gave a convincing picture of efforts to undermine the war effort and incite the departments to rebellion (Guadet, Vergniaud and Fonfrède had threatened the Convention with just that in May,1793). However, the connection between the Girondists and King Louis XVI was not established beyond doubt. The speech probably made a great impression, if only because of the violence of its language. Rarely has invective been employed in more adroit fashion. The final sentences are a call for strong measures. They foreshadow the Terror in their lack of pity:

> " Cependant,[said Billaud],plus ce forfait est atroce, plus il est irrésistible;frappez-les donc,ces hommes pervers,ces mandataires infidèles! Vous devez ce grand acte de justice à la vengance nationale. Vous le devez à la sûreté de l'Etat,qui exige qu'on étouffe cette conjuration dans le sang même des conjurés!" 146)

Billaud continued to denounce the Girondists and their sympathizers. On July 16, the assembly took steps against Sonthonax and Polverel,two "créatures et agents de Brissot,de Clavière,etc." 147) As Commissioners in Saint-Domingue since the Spring of 1792, they

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146) Moniteur(July 27,1793),XVII,232.

147) Ibid.(July 17,1793),XVII,143.

had established a personal dictatorship on the island.[148] When complaints reached the Convention, Billaud moved that the two men be indicted. Although it was decreed, Sonthonax, who returned to France, was not molested, and lived until 1813. And as secretary of the National Convention (June 27-July 11), he signed an order (on July 17) to raze Buzot's house in Evreux. A column bearing the inscription "Ici fut l'asile du scélérat Buzot, qui, représentant du peuple, conspira la perte de la République française", was to be put up in its place.[149]

On July 18, the patriotism of Billaud's hometown, La Rochelle, was questioned. Billaud was a deputy from Paris and not from the Charente-Inférieure. Events in La Rochelle had no direct bearing on his career.[150] Still, he knew several representatives from that department to the Convention quite intimately (notably Niou and Ruamps). In La Rochelle, he enjoyed the reputation of a "favorite son", a hometown boy who had made good in the capital. Joseph-Augustin Crassous de Medeuil, President of the local Jacobin Club, political boss of the city, and later himself a deputy to the Convention, was probably Billaud-Varennes protégé.[151] But when the

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148) Their story has recently been told in some detail in Henri Blet, Histoire de la Colonisation Française (Paris, 1946-1950), II, 21-23.

149) See Alexandre Tuetey, ed., Repertoire Général des Sources Manuscrites de l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française (Paris, 1890-1914), VIII, 512.

150) The one book dealing with all aspects of the subject is Philippe David, Un Port de l'Océan pendant la Révolution: La Rochelle et son district. 1791-1795 (La Rochelle, 1938).

151) Ibid., pp. 62, 79. Billaud's brother Benjamin was also an active member of the society; as witness his signature on an anti-federalist petition sent to the Convention on December 28, 1792.

Convention wanted to decree an honorable mention for the departmental administration of the Charente-Inférieure, Billaud rose to demand instead a complete investigation of revolutionary feeling and propaganda in La Rochelle.[152] Both requests were granted by the assembly. As a matter of fact, the city was very quiet throughout the Revolution, its trade having sensibly declined during the decade before 1789.[153] There is no evidence to suggest that Billaud organized an anti-Robespierrist faction in the local Jacobin Club just before Thermidor.[154]

5. Mission to Nord and Pas-de-Calais: August 1 - 27, 1793.

The quarrel between General Custine and Bouchotte lasted throughout the Summer. Actually, the trouble between the General and the authorities in Paris had started as early as May. Up to that time, Adam-Philippe, comte de Custine,[155] was considered a sincere Republican. But when the Mountain gained control, he became automatically suspect, as an ex-noble. A strict disciplinari

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152) *Moniteur* (July 20, 1793), XVII, 165.

153) P. David, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

154) *Ibid.*, p. 230. But very little is actually known, since the records of the Club are lost. L. de Cardenal, *La Province pendant la Révolution. Histoire des Clubs Jacobins* (1789-1795) (Paris, 1929), a very inclusive book, does not mention the La Rochelle society at all.

155) No biography of Custine exists. Général Herlaut, "La Querelle de de Bouchotte et de Custine," *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, XIII (1936), 385-434, is valuable, but rather too unfavorable to the General. A good description of Custine's character is in Col. R.W. Phipps, *op. cit.*, I, 185-187.

he was disliked by the volunteers in his army. Due to very uncautious maneuvering, he had suffered defeat in battle, and his forces had been driven back with heavy losses. The Convention and the War Ministry had as yet no knowledge of Custine's extensive correspondence with émigrés and foreign diplomats, since these compromising letters were only published in 1794 by his aide-de-camp, Baraguay d'Hilliers.[156] Billaud submitted evidence to the Jacobin Club as early as on June 9, in the form of remarks by Custine, which held the Minister of War (Bouchotte) responsible for his defeats.

> " Je demande,[Billaud asked],si nous devons suffrir qu'on livre ainsi nos soldats à la boucherie et qu'on mette dans de pareilles mains le sort de la République!"[157]

Custine's unwillingness to defend his actions, his overbearing manner, and his quarrel with the volunteers over the enforcement of discipline in his army, made him a target for further attacks. The extremists in Paris felt that the "Royalist" commander should be removed. The Mountain had to protect the Minister of War,

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156) Baraguay d'Hilliers,ed.,Mémoires du Général Custine.Rédigés par Un de ses Aides-de-Camp(2 vs.Hamburg and Frankfurt,1794). It is not known why these were published outside France,but they were originally designed as Revolutionary propaganda,to show Custine's relations with the enemy.Baraguay d'Hilliers became later one of Napoleon(s famous generals and the conqueror of Venice in 1797. Custine's other aide-de-camp,Gay de Vernon,in his Mémoires sur les Opérations Militaires des Généraux en Chef Custine et Houchard,pendant les Années 1792 et 1793(Paris,1844),attempted to "whitewash" the General.

157) A.Aulard,ed.,Société,V,243.On May 13,when Custine was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armées du Nord et des Ardennes,the vote in the Convention was unanimous,except for that of Billaud,who declared that he was forced to abstain.

a good party man. But there was not enough legal evidence to convict Custine of counter-revolutionary activities. Threatened with riots and demonstrations, the Mountain had to give in to the demands of the radicals.[158] The General was recalled to Paris on July 12 and arrested ten days later. When no further steps had been taken on July 29, Billaud protested.

> " [The indictment, he said], ne peut que mettre de la longueur dans le procès d'un homme qui devrait déjà ne plus exister. Il faut le renvoyer au tribunal révolutionnaire, afin qu'on le juge cette semaine, toute affaire cessante, et que dimanche ce traître ne voie plus le jour (On applaudit)." [159]

To make the charges stick, it was decided to send Billaud on mission to the Armée du Nord. He was to seize Custine's papers in the General's headquarters and to send other suspect officers to Paris under guard. The order of mission was issued on July 29 by the Committee of Public Safety and confirmed by the Convention on August 1; it specified that Billaud and his companion on this trip, Joseph Niou, a naval negineer and expert on matters of fortification, were to be sent to

> " Saint-Omer, Dunkerque, Lille, Boulogne, Arras et Cambrai, pour y faire toutes les recherches nécesssaires, mettre en état d'arrestation toutes les personnes suspectes et faire apposer les scellés sur leurs papiers qu'ils feront apporter à Paris." [160]

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158) A vivid description of the whole conflict between Custine and the authorities, clarifying the position of the various leftist groups, is in D. Guérin, op. cit., I, 215-219.

159) Moniteur (July 31, 1793), XVII, 268. Custine was only executed on August 27.

160) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, V, 413.

It is difficult to understand, why a specialist like Niou was needed for this mission, since it appears to have been merely a punitive expedition. The selection of Billaud is easily explained. Not only had he been the first to denounce Custine in the Convention, but his violent attitude was a guarantee that the mission would be carried out with thoroughness.

The treatment accorded the General had apparently had repercussions among the soldiers. General Kilmaine, who commanded the Armée du Nord between July 16 (the date of Custine's recall) and August 10, could not withstand the enemy's attacks. Dissatisfaction in certain regiments of the line endangered the whole northern frontier.[161] The two representatives deplored the shortage of weapons and military equipment, and found fault with department administrators "qui peuvent être bons patriotes, mais qui nous parûrent très-mécontens."[162] They also had to express regret over the fact that certain battalions had abandoned their positions without notifying their officers. They put a stop to such practices immediately. After addressing the troops, Billaud and Niou joined Generals Leclerc and Jourdan in an engagement, in which some lost ground was retaken.[163] It is not recorded that

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161) Moniteur (August 30, 1793), XVII, 516. Letter Representatives in Pas-de-Calais and Nord to Convention, undated (probably August 25).

162) La Révolution Telle Qu'Elle Est, ou Correspondance inédite du Comité de salut public avec les généraux et les représentans du peuple..., ed. Legros (Paris, 1837), II, 154. Letter Representatives in Pas-de-Calais to Committee of Public Safety, dated August 11.

163) Moniteur (August 30, 1793), XVII, 516. Same letter to Convention as quoted above.

morale among the soldiers improved, but the representatives seemed satisfied. They considered the shortage of war materials, and especially of horses a great danger. Douai and Cambrai, they believed, could only be held by 20 000 reinforcements, and

> " à Paris, sous les yeux de la Convention, combien existe-t-il de sybarites qui emploient une multitude de chevaux à traîner leur stupide existence!" 164)

They also complained that too many members of the Convention were sent on missions, preventing the local authorities from doing their jobs.

> " Le choix [of representatives] n'en est pas toujours excellent... Le sort de la république est attaché à cette mesure. Quand on livre à des hommes le salut de l'état, c'est le compromettre que de les prendre au hasard; il ne suffit pas d'avoir et du patriotisme et de la bonne volonté, il faut des moyens, il faut de la vigueur, il faut des vues politiques, il faut être à la fois soldat, général et législateur ..." 165)

As for the primary object of their mission, Billaud and Niou showed great zeal and determination, giving the inhabitants of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais a foretaste of the Terror. Aulard believes that the two representatives received instructions on particular cases by later mail, since they referred to "le plan de conjuration" in one of their letters. 166) They ordered the

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164) Legros, ed., op. cit., II, 157. Same letter to Convention as quoted above.

165) Ibid., II, 158.

166) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, V, 482. Letter Niou and Billaud-Varennes to Committee of Public Safety, dated August 5.

arrests of all the "conspirators"(ca.40 persons) in Saint-Omer, Dunkerque and Calais,[167] as well as the suspension and arrest of General O'Moran,[168] and the closing of the collège anglais in Saint-Omer and the confiscation of its records.[169]

Finally, on August 9, Billaud and Niou reached the headquarters of the Armée du Nord, at Vitry. The newly appointed Commander-in-Chief, General Houchard, arrived shortly after the two representatives. Since the hour was late, he went straight to bed. When he woke up, he found that twenty-two of his officers had been put under arrest.[170] This was Custine's old staff, taken over intact by Kilmaine. The latter had already left for his new post; for days, these headquarters had been without a commanding general. Custine's "secretary" had also departed, taking important papers with him.[171] He could not be found. Billaud was particularly

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167) Ibid., V, 482-483.

168) Ibid., V, 483. The actual arrest took place on August 11; the general was tried only in nivôse year II.

169) Legros, ed., op. cit., II, 153. Same letter as quoted above.

170) Gay de Vernon, op. cit., p. 230. The whole story is retold by the two representatives from their point of view in Legros, ed., op. cit., II, 155-156 (same letter as quoted above). Also Col. R.W. Phipps, op. cit., I, 211, and Albert Sorel, L'Europe et la Révolution Française (Paris, 1891-1904), III, 536. Gay de Vernon was one of two staff officers not arrested.

171) Legros, ed., op. cit., II, 156. The "secretary" was Baraguay d'Hilliers; he published the papers in question later. See above, p. 159, n. 156.

incensed that the records of army operations were kept in the kitchen of the headquarters building, since that was the only large room of the house.[172] General Kouchard was without a staff, records or directives. Billaud refused to give up the documents seized in the kitchen. He even sent some to the Committee of Public Safety, as a proof of negligence in the high command.[173] After a day of speech-making, the two representatives left,[174] favorably impressed with the new Commander-in-Chief. Kouchard, on the other hand, had been scared. No politician, he felt increasingly insecure; Billaud's attitude had completely unnerved him. As a result, he hesitated too long before engaging the enemy, lost a battle, was arrested, and suffered his predecessor's fate. While he remained in command until September 23, his correspondence reveals that he felt his impending doom since he took over the command, on August 10.

It is interesting to consider for a moment the expenditures of the two representatives on this mission.[175] They were accompanied by an English-speaking secretary. They were granted 8 000 livres for the trip, but they only spent 4 062 livres and returned 3 938. This feat of economy would seem remarkable, had it not been

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172) Gay de Vernon, op.cit., p.230.

173) Idem.

174) Legrns, ed., op.cit., II, 156.

175) Copie de l'Etat de Dépense Faite par les Citoyens Niou et Billaud-Varennes ... (Paris, Floréal, an III).

surpassed on Billaud's fourth mission (in pluviôse year II).[176] The case may not have been so unique after all in the "Republic of Virtue". The Treasury might have overestimated the costs and given the representatives vastly more than they needed. Of the 4 062 livres spent, 1 841, the largest sum, went for postal charges; next came disbursements for living quarters, etc. (1 052 livres); the lowest amount being paid for "office charges" (189 livres).[177]

Billaud gave a long report on the mission before the Convention, on August 22.[178] It was again a detailed picture of corruption and treason. In Lille, he said, the authorities permitted the enemy to burn grain; in Cambrai, the administrators fled from the city after rumors that a British army was approaching.[179] The good patriots have to fight alone everywhere. Proper guidance should come from the Committee of Public Safety in Paris; but it does not.[180] The Committee is consequently negligent in its duty. The speech ended with a proposal for emergency measures. For Billaud-Varennes, August 29 was a preparation for September 4, and for the inauguration of the Terror.

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176) Where, out of 6 000 livres, only 2 455 were spent. See, for that, Compte Rendu par J.N.Billaud (Paris, ventôse, an III), p.3.

177) Copie de l'Etat, pp.1-2.

178) Moniteur (August 31, 1793), XVII, 526-527. It was never printed separately.

179) Ibid., XVII, 526.

180) Idem.

6. The Economic Crisis and the Terror: August 28 - September 6, 1793.

Billaud's third mission completed his transformation into an extreme radical. Less than a year before, he had been known as a moderate. Although he had demanded a more energetic conduct of the war even then, he had agreed with the Girondists on several political issues. As a member of the Dantonist "machine", he did not participate in the early party conflicts; as the "High Priest of federalism", he defended vigorously the theories, which he had first enunciated himself. But on his mission to Châlons-sur-Marne in September 1792, doubts had arisen in Billaud's mind. And in the early days of the National Convention, he had been pulled into the struggle between the Girondists and the Mountain. He had attempted to remain neutral, but his constituents, in the Paris Commune and the Jacobin Club, had forced him to take a stand in their favor. Consequently, he abandoned his former beliefs, although he continued to vote occasionally with the moderates. Sent to Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine in March 1793, to quell a local rebellion, Billaud decided that federalism was, after all, unworkable. He attacked the authorities in Paris for negligence and inefficiency. It so happened that the government was then in the hands of the Girondists. Consequently, he blamed the Girondists for the rebellions in the Western departments. When the defeated

leaders of that party joined the insurgents after June 2,1793, he felt that the true patriots were surrounded by traitors everywhere. Billaud became an ardent defender of centralization, since he felt that only a central authority could give France the strenghth to face the European coalition and destroy the internal enemies of the Revolution. His program became identical with that of the Mountain party. But he still remained non-partisan; attacking the administration of the Mountain for the same reasons for which he had denounced the administration of the Girondists. He was a patriot rather than a party man. For the benefit of his country, he promoted extreme measures. Billaud probably did not want to establish a dictatorship, but only a temporary "emergency" government. He believed that, in order to retain liberty and equality, certain freedoms had to be abolished. In his opinion, democratic practices were not practical when the life of the nation was at stake. Extraordinary efforts, such as were required in August 1793, could only be made under pressure from above. To Billaud, the "Terror" was necessary for the winning of the war.

Public opinion worked in his favor. The economic crisis was serious indeed. The Left agitated against food shortages and hoarding in the cities; the enragés, Hébert, and even less radical elements in the Paris Commune, felt that a strong central government should solve the problem of distribution. Their opposition to the Committee of Public Safety (dominated by the Mountain) hampered the war effort. The supply of the cities was

in the hands of businessmen, whose chief aim was evidently to make a profit. They hoarded the goods in order to demand (and obtain) famine-prices. The leaders of the Mountain were between two fires; on the one hand, the people of Paris, who believed that the authorities should put a stop to such practices; on the other, certain members of the party (notably among Danton's friends), who were themselves engaged in these commercial activities, and were opposed to governmental control of commerce and industry. Even Hébert's followers proclaimed loudly that they respected private property. The middle class (to which most persons in public life belonged) believed that they had fought hard in 1789 for free trade and open markets; that no state had the right to deprive them of what they considered their principal reason for support of the Revolution. This did not prevent men like Hébert or Collot-d'Herbois from using the enragé program for their own purposes, or to pose as defenders of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. With the support of the popular movement in the capital, they imposed certain measures upon the assembly. Billaud, who was no less ambitious then the other politicians, undoubtedly saw that he could gain prestige as a champion of the lower classes. He and other leaders of the Mountain made a mistake in assuming that the businessmen would obey the laws passed by the National Convention, and continue to supply the cities, even after their profits were cut. When this did not happen, the Committee of Public Safety

had to buy the food in the country, pay for its transportation to the cities and sell it on the open market. Moreover, these methods alienated many good patriots and resulted in a violent split within the Mountain party itself. And the famine conditions continued to prevail throughout 1793, 1794 and 1795, due to opposition to the policies of the Committee of Public Safety.

Already in mid-Summer, Billaud and Collot-d'Herbois collaborated in the planning and sponsoring of a law against speculation. The Decree against Profiteering (Loi sur l'Accaparement) of July 26,1793,[161] forced merchants to declare and sell their stock at public auctions. The law incorporated only the minimum demands of the radicals; its chief aim being to obtain the cooperation of the businessmen. Only three articles foreshadow the Terror. Nos.VIII and IX both prescribed the death penalty and confiscation of property for violation of the Law.[162] Art.XII marked the beginning of the personal espionnage system of the Terror, by encouraging informers to report contraventions to the Decree. If the violation was then punished,

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161) Law reprinted in French in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale,XVII,274-275;Moniteur(July 29,1793),XVII,247-248; J.M. Thompson,ed.,French Revolution.Documents.1789-94(Oxford,1933),pp.252-255. In English,J.H.Stewart,ed.,op.cit.,pp.469-472.A summary with stimulating comment is in Albert Mathiez,Révolution Française,III,26

162) J.H.Stewart,ed.,op.cit.,p.471.

a third of the profits from the forced sale of his property would be given to his denunciator, and another third to "indigent citizens of the munipality in the precincts of which the items reported are found."[183]

Opposition to the Law made its enforcement impossible. The courts simply refused to convict the influential members of the communities, who were caught in speculations. On August 29, Billaud warned the National Convention that

> " Vous avez tous été témoins des maux qu'a occasionnés dans la république l'inexécution des décrets de la Convention. Je demande, afin qu'une pareille négligence (je pourrais dire trahison) ne soit pas renouvelée, qu'il soit créé une commission chargée de surveiller le pouvoir exécutif dans l'exécution des lois, et que, dans le cas où il y aurait des coupables, leurs têtes tombent sur l'échafaud." [184]

By implication, he accused Robespierre and other leaders of the Mountain of treason. When, on September 1, the new civil code was examined, he was led to remark:

> " Je ne conçois pas comment la convention peut s'occuper d'une loi particulière lorsqu'il est question de frapper les contre-révolutionnaires, ce ne sont pas des lois qu'il nous faut, mais du courage, des armes, des soldats, mais la levée entière du peuple français." [185]

Early in this month, he saw his opportunity. He believed that he could, at the same time, mobilize all the forces in the French

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183) Ibid., pp.471-472.

184) Moniteur (August 31, 1793), XVII, 527.

185) Ibid., (September 3, 1793), XVII, 552.

state against the enemies of the Revolution, and defend the interests of the lower classes, and thus put an end to agitation from the left. He was sincere in his belief that, once its economic difficulties solved, the proletariat would support the Mountain in its efforts to win the war. The motives behind Billaud's actions on September 4 and 5 are difficult to grasp,[186] but it appears from the official accounts that the incidents were planned and the demonstrations carefully staged to produce the desired impression upon lukewarm patriots and members of the commercial middle class in the National Convention.[187]

The session of the Convention on September 4 started with delegates from all forty-eight sections of Paris presenting a petition, also signed by the Mayor (Pache) and other municipal officers. It requested the formation of a Revolutionary Army (Armée révolutionnaire), which would travel through the departments, confiscate food for Paris, and at the same time, judge speculators

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186) The best interpretations are in A. Mathiez, Vie chère, a viewpoint sympathetic to the Commune, and Antoine Hadengue, Les Gardes Rouges de l'An II. L'Armée Révolutionnaire et le Parti Hébertiste (Paris, 1930), by a writer hostile to the Revolution.

187) There are several complete accounts: Moniteur (September 6, 7, 8, 1793), XVII, 576, 581-595; Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XX, 74-122; Buchez et Roux, eds., Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française (Paris, 1834-1838), XXIX, 34-56. Antoine Hadengue, op. cit., pp. 23-36. Henri Wallon, La Terreur (2ème. éd., Paris, 1881), I, 224-232. The article by Edmond Soreau, "Les Ouvriers aux Journées des 4 et 5 septembre 1793," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XXIV (1937), 436-447, does not deal with the National Convention.

and "conspirators" without recourse to the local courts. Billaud rose and spoke briefly in support of this petition.[188] Shortly thereafter, he seconded Jeanbon Saint-André in a demand for the abolition of a decree which forbade house-searches during the night.[189] The petition of the Commune was disregarded by the assembly; Saint-André's request heeded and nocturnal domestic visits declared legal. The day passed without further developments.

In the morning of September 5, Chaumette, the Public Prosecutor, came to speak before the Convention. His address pointed to the political consequences of unrest in the capital due to the lack of food. Three deputies, Moïse Bayle, Raffron, and Dussaulx, reacted immediately by proposing that the Champs-Elysées and Tuileries be turned into communal vegetable gardens. Billaud's turn came. For the next hours, he dominated the assembly.

> " En profitant de l'énergie du peuple,[he began], nous allons enfin exterminer les ennemis de la révolution.Nous ne manquerons ni de subsistance,ni d'enclos pour les faire croître;ce qui est plus important,et ce que nous devons espérer,c'est que tous les malveillants disparaissent de la surface de la terre.... Et moi aussi,je convertis en motion les mesures proposées;mais elles ne sont pas suffisantes. Le moment d'agir est venu,le temps des délibérations est passé.Il faut qu'aujourd'hui même tous vos ennemis soient mis en état d'arrestation.. .."(On applaudit).[190]

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188) Moniteur(September 6,1793),XVII,576.

189) Idem.

190) Ibid.(September 7,1793),XVII,581.

He then demanded 1. That the Minister of War submit instantly a plan for the formation of the Revolutionary Army, since "il faut que par une commotion rapide, le feu du patriotisme circule dans tous les coeurs; il faut que la nation se lève."[191] 2. That a committee be formed to supervise the execution of all laws, an agency with power over the Executive Council and the Committee of Public Safety.[192] 3. That all officials guilty of negligence be executed.[193] Billaud then repeated twice within the next five minutes that the Revolutionary Army was necessary. Amidst great enthusiasme, everyone of his proposals was accepted.[194] When, after a short pause, he continued to address the Convention, he turned again to the law permitting nocturnal domestic visits.

> " Ma proposition est de faire mettre en arrestation tous les contre-révolutionnaires. Il faut que nous allions chercher nos ennemis dans leurs tannières. A peine la nuit et le jour suffiront-ils pour les arrêter ..." [195]

He proposed that either the gates of Paris should be closed or all passports be declared invalid,"alors aucun aristocrate n'échappera."[196]

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191) Idem. Barère, in his rather unreliable memoirs, blamed Danton for the Revolutionary Army. He did not mention Billaud as its sponsor. See Mémoires de B.Barère eds.H.Carbot et David d'Angers(Paris,1842), II,370.

192) Ibid.,XVII,582.

193) Idem.

194) Ibid.,XVII,583.

195) Ibid.,XVII,584.

196) Ibid.,XVII,585.

During another intermission, several deputations appeared on the scene (one from the Jacobin Club), to make statements of a patriotic character. After that, direct accusations: Billaud requested again the indictment of Lebrun and Clavière.[197] In a final show of revolutionary zeal, the Convention elected him its President by a vote of 149 out of 217. The session was then adjourned.

The close observer of the scene notices a very strange behavior on the part of the deputies. Billaud's words whipped the assembly into a state of frenzy. His abilities as an orator were obviously very great. But what was all the exitement about? The same subjects were discussed over and over again; the matter of house-searches even after it had been made into a law the day before. The food situation, the only problem of real importance, was not once mentioned after Chaumette's report in the morning.[198]

Several interpretations are possible. One is that, as a leader in the popular movement, Billaud forced the Convention to accede to the radicals' demands by threatening it with the recurrence of a new May 31. But there is not the slightest evidence for such an assumption. The assembly would not have supported unanimously a spokesman for a pressure-group on

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197) Moniteur (September 8, 1793), XVII, 593.

198) The most trustworthy chronicler of the assembly, Levasseur de la Sarthe, was away on mission at the time. The account in the generally reliable Durand de Maillane, Histoire de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1825), pp. 152-169, is very confusing. He did not properly understand himself what went on around him.

September 5; it had rejected the popular movement on several previous occasions and might have done so again. Also, the social and economic program of the Père Duchesne was not presented to the Convention. Only measures of supervision and police were discussed. The basis of economic life and class relationships was not even examined. As the spokesman for a group advocating social reform, Billaud would most likely have introduced the program of that group. But he did not do so.

The second interpretation is that Billaud led a concerted action by the Mountain to establish its predominance in the state.[199] Robespierre and his friends must have been certain that Billaud would be able to convince the deputies of other parties of the necessity for the emergency measures which were passed. They were the first step toward the establishment of the regime of the Terror. To act in the name of the people was simply a clever political maneuver. The enthusiasm of the deputies of the Mountain gives the impression that they had been prepared beforehand to engage in demonstrations.

Finally, Billaud's appointment to the Committee of Public Safety as a result of these events, suggests a "pay-off" for services rendered to the Mountain. On the other hand, the fact remains that, in his remarks of September 5, Billaud had dealt

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199) Basically, that is the argument in D. Guérin, op. cit., According to that author, Billaud and the Mountain engaged together in a "conspiracy" to divert the popular movement into channels which would not threaten the interests of the bourgeoisie.

a blow at the Committee of Public Safety. The new agency, which he said was needed to supervise all administrative functions, would have taken over most of its functions. Billaud had criticized the Committee. But if he became one of its members, he might not only stop his attacks, but defend the Committee against outsiders. He might then also prevent the formation of the new agency. Prieur de la Côte d'Or told Carnot's son many years later:

> " Cependant il y avait dans la Convention des députés qui ne cessaient de nous critiquer, parce qu'ils ignoraient comment les choses se passaient dans notre intérieur ... ils déblatéraient ... contre tous nos actes. Nous nous dîmes: il n'y a qu'un moyen de les faire taire, c'est de nous les adjoindre. Ce sont d'ailleurs des hommes capables, qui sauront fort bien se rendre utiles. Nous appelâmes donc Billaud et Collot, sans leur cacher le motif qui nous déterminait: "Venez voir ce que nous faisons et travaillez avec nous." Cela réussit ..." 200)

Barère claimed that Billaud was chosen as an expert on "supervision", since he always wanted to "supervise" the Convention. 201) Collot d'Herbois who was more radical than Billaud, did not speak once on September 5, but was also appointed to the Committee of Public Safety the next day.

To return to the facts, right at the beginning of the session of September 6, Barère rose to demand that three new members

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200) [Hippolyte Carnot], Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils (Paris, 1861), I, 346. Very similar statements in Prieur's "Révélations sur le Comité de salut public ...", written after 1830, and reprinted in Georges Bouchard, Un Organisateur de la Victoire. Prieur de la Côte d'Or (Paris, 1946), pp. 435-436.

201) Mémoires de B. Barère, II, 404.

be added to the Committee of Public Safety, members

> " qui seraient chargés spécialement de surveiller l'exécution ministérielle. En effet, s'il y a quelque chose qui mérite de la surveillance, c'est l'exécution; car c'est en défaut d'exécution que vient tout le mal ...." 202)

Everything developped according to plan. Billaud became an ardent defender of the Committee of Public Safety. He had now advanced to a position in which he was nationally known. He was free to put his ideas into practice and demonstrate the full extent of his administrative abilities.

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202) Idem. Later in the day, both Granet and Danton refused to become members of the Committee.

Chapter II.

Elémens du Républicanisme:
An Economic Theory for the Republic of Virtue.

Early in 1793, Billaud wrote another book. Several historians consider Elémens du Républicanisme one of the most important works of political theory produced in eighteenth century France. Originally, three volumes were planned, but the author's preoccupation with other matters permitted him only to finish the first one.[1] The prospectus stated that the work would be ready for publication on February 15,1793. It would be sold on subscription, for 36 sous (1 livre 16 sous) an issue.[2] But the first advertisement, by the printer Devaux, appeared only in the Moniteur of 12 frimaire year II (December 2,1793).[3] It listed the volume at 30 sous in Paris and 40 sous outside of the capital.[4]

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1) An extremely rare book, this volume has been reprinted in its entirety in Archives Parlementaires, LXVII, 220-246. The completeness of this reprint has been ascertained by direct comparison with what is believed to be the only copy of the original work existant in the United States, at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

2) Archives Parlementaires, LXVII, 221. The reprint is here given as an annex to the session of the Convention of June 24,1793. This was done, because the new Constitution was promulgated on that day, and the Elémens were supposed to serve as a constitutional project.

3) Moniteur (12 frimaire an II (December 2,1793), XVIII, 557. The printer given in the "prospectus" is Patris. The change may have delayed publication for a time.

4) Idem.

In the introduction, Billaud states his purpose:

> " Cet ouvrage est une profession de foi politique ... Il n'est pas inutile que l'homme public présente lui-même la pierre de touche de sa conduite. Quiconque a mis ses sentimens en évidence, ne peut déroyer impunément. Une honte éternelle l'attend à la plus légère déviation, et certes, ce n'est pas un frein impuissant que la crainte de se couvrir à jamais d'opprobre." 5)

He then remarks that he started out "à consacrer tous mes soins à la défense des droits du peuple," as early as 1787, and that, after Louis XVI's flight to Varennes, he entered politics as a full-time occupation. Billaud expresses also the hope that his reflexions would form the basis for a "Constitution." 6)

The first two parts, "De l'homme," and "Résultats d'une civilisation mal combinée," are of very little interest. They are only restatements of Rousseau's philosophy. Primitive man is virtuous; his simple life precludes temptations and vices. 7) When Frenchmen abandoned this state of happiness, they fell victims to corruption in their attempts to gain riches. 8) Billaud distinguishes between "citoyens" and "individus"; those who work for the benefit of the whole, and those who work only for themselves.

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5) Archives Parlementaires, LXVII, 221.

6) Idem.

7) Ibid., LXVII, 223-224, 227.

8) Ibid., LXVII, 224.

> " en un mot,ce [the "individuals"] sont des êtres qui cherchent à rompre l'équilibre de l'égalité,pour accroître leur bien-être personnel en usurpant celui des autres. L'Etat finit donc par être peuplé d'individus,dès qu'une fois il existe un ordre de choses qui sépare l'intérêt de gouvernement de celui de la nation ..." 9)

In such a situation, a country becomes ripe for revolution. But the ignorance of the people postpones the day of liberation; only when the average person gains a minimum of political understanding is he able to throw off the shackles of slavery. 10) This part of the work ends with a condemnation of the old regime. 11) In these pages, no original ideas are stated; they are only restatements of Rousseau's praise of the simple life, followed by commonplace remarks using all the revolutionary slogans of the time.

Of interest is only part III, "De la propriété." It starts immediately with the attack on the economic system. Special ability to produce certain materials, Billaud thinks, led men to give up their primitive existence. This was the beginning of all the evils of civilized society.

> " Si tant de découvertes,[he says], et de chefs d'oeuvres ont procuré tant d'aisance,d'agrément,de facilités et de délices,par quelle masse de peines, d'amertumes et de soucis,la vie du plus grand nombre n'a-t-elle pas été endolorie,depuis cette fatale invention? Car,tandis que l'esprit de l'homme plane dans les nues,partout,ou presque partout,son individu est foulé aux pieds du despotisme, de la vanité et de l'ambition ..." 12)

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9) Idem.
10) Ibid.,XXVII,228.
11) Ibid.,LXVII,229.
12) Idem.

In other words, the higher the degree of civilization, the greater the despotism of the upper classes. This theory did not originate with Billaud; it was one of the chief philosophical concepts of the time.[13] It is a modified version of the idea of progress: if society remains in its present state, it cannot progress; in case of a social revolution, progress is assured. Billaud points to the fact that the French Government of 1793 has not improved the standard of living of the common man, despite a "successful" revolution.[14] He insists this is because of the poor organization of the institutions. Property being "le pivot des associations civiles," its unequal repartition is the chief origin of all disequilibrium in society.[15]

A long discussion of capitalism, luxury, greed and cupidity follows. In language which marks a high point in overloaded rhetoric and pretentiousness, "les riches sont terriblement maltraités" as one observer notes.[16] Capitalists are called either wastrels or manipulators; Billaud states that when they save their money, it becomes useless accumulation, and if they spend it, their purpose for doing so is only to oppress those less fortunate. Morals become corrupted, in any event.

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13) Particularly of the writer who called himself Morelly. See Maxime Leroy, Histoire des Idées Sociales en France: I. De Montesquieu à Robespierre (5ème. éd., Paris, 1946), pp. 243-245.

14) Archives Parlementaires, LXVII, 230.

15) Ibid., LXVII, 231.

16) André Lichtenberger, Le Socialisme et la Révolution Française (Paris, 1899), p. 121.

" Car tandis que les fortunes individuelles se dissipent,les moeurs se vicient,et le caractère national se perd,ou plutôt se convertit en goût prédominant pour les futilités ... Toutes les mains s'empressent de servir les raffinements de la volupté,parce que c'est à de pareilles occupations que sont attachés les plus forts salaires.Bientôt les bras manquent à la culture pénible des arts mécaniques et des terres ...." 17)

Under these circumstances, the great empires collapse. Silland then draws a rather naive picture of famous Greeks and Romans, who died poor but honest. He also draws a parallel between the luxuries and vices of Rome in decline and the artificial and pretentious manners of eighteenth century Frenchmen. 18) After the capitalists, the author directs his wrath against women, whom he depicts as flighty and empty-headed creatures, only interested in ornaments and make-up.

" Ah! comment arriver à cette pureté républicaine, [he complains], si le mauvais exemple des pères et mères familiarise les enfants avec la dépravation, à la sortie,pour ainsi dire,du berceau.

Que les femmes reprennent les tâches qui leur sont propres ... Les femmes,une fois rendues à cette décence,à cette honnêteté qu'elles ne perdent que dans la vie dissipée,rentreraient dans tous leurs droits,en ne voulant plus recevoir que des hommages dignes d'elles ..." 19)

This paragraph was written by a happily married man. From this and other instances, the reader could never guess that a political revolution, accompanied by large-scale social upheaval,had taken place.

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17) Archives Parlementaires,LXVII,232.

18) Ibid.,LXVII,234-235.

19) Ibid.,LXVII,236.

If great wealth leads to moral decline, the remedy would seem to be to redistribute property on a more equal basis. This is the responsibility of the state. Billaud sees the Government engaging in a vast public-works program; the building of public schools, hospitals, and ports, as well as the construction of beautiful streets, the provision of clean water supply, public baths, and theaters for patriotic festivities.[20] It is interesting to note that Billaud also wants the state to "protect" free trade. In refutation to a widely-held eighteenth century concept, he finds that poverty is not necessary, and that, if hunger alone drives men to work, they neither find pride in their achievements, nor do they become useful members of their communities.[21]

> " Sans doute,[he says],l'homme réduit à la condition d'une bête de somme,et contraint de travailler sans relâche avec la certitude de ne jamais recueillir la plus légère portion du fruit de son labeur,refuserait peut-être de se donner tant de peine si la faim ne devenait pas pour lui un stimulant .... Mais rétablissez l'équilibre;et quelque difficiles que soient les tâches de la société,il se trouvera toujours des gens de bonne volonté pour les remplir .... Encore une fois,il ne faut n'avoir jamais réfléchi sur les effets désastreux de la pauvreté pour s'être permis de la présumer nécessaire ..." [22]

This discussion serves as an introduction to the most important section of the book. The plan for the redistribution of

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20) Ibid.,LXVII,236.

21) Ibid.,LXVII,236-238.From here on,large excerpts from the book may be found in Michel Bouchet,L'Assistance publique em France pendant la Révolution(Paris,1908),pp.431-434,and Jean Jaurès,Histoire Socialiste (1789-1900)(Paris,[1901-1904]),IV,1502-1511.

22) Archives Parlementaires,LXVII,237.

wealth prevents the Elémens from being merely a lenghthy political tract, like many others of the period. It is an extremely radical plan, yet Billaud advises particularly not to rush reforms, but to introduce them gradually. A violent overthrow of society would only increase the misery of the people and make the work of the legislator difficult, if not impossible.

> " Le réformateur d'un empire,[he said],a plus qu'une Constitution à tracer. Il doit la combiner d'une manière qu'elle assure le retour de la félicité générale,sans néanmoins produire un bouleversement subit et convulsif qui rendrait ses efforts inutiles,en compromettant l'existence de tout le monde .... " 23)

This sounds like an assumption that the Revolution had not benefitted the French people in any way. Billaud contends that restrictive legislation against the upper classes would accentuate the problem instead of solving it, since "tout règlement prohibitif devient un aiguillon, une amorce qui, doublant le prix de la chose prohibée, accélère la transgression." 24) Land reforms are criminal attempts to delude people, 25) but Billaud nowhere explains this statement. It is certain from all which has been said up to this point,that he still follows the tradition of the eighteenth century. He certainly considers private property sacred and free economic development imperative. And his plan of reform does not propose to abolish private ownership. 26) To begin with, he feels

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23) Ibid.,LXVII,239.

24) Idem.

25) Idem.

26) Ibid.,LXVII,240.A good summary of the plan is in the three works mentioned above,and Peter Kropotkin,The Great French Revolution.1789-1793 (ed.New York.1927).II.486-487.501.

that the government should determine by law the maximum number of acres of land or amount of cash a"family" unit might own, the latter being defined as a man and his five children.[27] When this man dies, his property would be equally devided (if it is not larger than the law permits)[28] among his five children. If he has only three, the two extra shares would be taken over by the government and distributed to those who own no property. If he has more than five children, he must divide his land in such a way that each receives an equal share.[29] If a man owns no land, but cash or stocks, the same principle applies. The maximum amount any one "family" may own is 20 000 - 25 000 livres.[30] The five children would then divide the 25 000 livres, each receiving the sum of 5 000 livres. But

> " un père possesseur de 100 000 francs n'a que trois enfants; hé bien! il reste à sa mort 40 000 francs à partager entre des enfants tirés de la classe des indigents [since each of his three children gets 20 000 francs at his death;all divisions being made according to the "family" unit rule]. S'il en a quatre,ce n'est plus que 20 000 francs. Mais lorsque avec une fortune plus étendue,sa famille surpassera la quantité d'individus déterminée par la loi;dans ce cas,... le surplus restant,après chaque portion de ses enfants prélevée,rentrera dans la succession nationale.Enfin,à l'égard du citoyen qui mourra sans

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27) Archives Parlementaires,LXVII,240,243.

28) Ibid.,LXVII,244.

29) Idem.

30) Idem. Billaud used both livres and francs without distinction as to kind and value.

> avoir d'enfants, tous ses biens seront dévolus aux héritiers de la patrie .... " 31)

The state administers and regulates the distribution of these shares of property. Each indigent person would have a legal right to some land or cash; Billaud thought that individual sums should be small, since

> " ce n'est pas une fortune qu'il faut d'emblée à celui qui commence, puisque, dans cette hypothèse, au lieu d'enflammer son zèle, on provoquerait sa paresse, c'est-à-dire sa perversion. Mais ce sont les avances indispensables pour commencer l'exercice d'une profession et mille écus donneraient une multiplicité de lots, qui, étendant à l'infini la division des fortunes, restitueraient au travail .... une foule de nécessiteux qui se languissent dans l'oisiveté .... que faute d'avoir eu, dès le principe, de quoi faire valoir leurs talents paralysés ...." 32)

In practice, the division of land would eventually lead to the creation of a network of small farms, alike in size. It is more doubtful if the granting of funds by the methods described above would really eliminate unemployment. The whole scheme presupposes that the recipient would know what to do with the sums drawn, or have a special ability to start a business or develpp a skill. Billaud also interjects his customary observations into the discussion of his plan; in this case his opinions on testaments and inheritance (they should both be suppressed).[33] Finally, Billaud coins a slogan and then explains its meaning. It must be quoted in detail, since

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31) Idem.

32) Idem.

33) Ibid., LXVII, 242-244.

it presents the chief argument of his whole book:

> " Point de citoyen dispensé de se pourvoir d'une profession;point de citoyen dans l'impossiblité de se procurer un métier!...Pour réduire ce principe à son véritable sens,il faut dire que la propriété est sacrée d'individu à individu de même qu'il serait aussi souverainement illégal qu'inhumain d'immoler un particulier,uniquement pour faire le bien-être d'un autre citoyen.Mais ce droit n'est point et ne peut pas être sacré sous le rapport de l'utilité commune,attaquée par quelques réclamations communes. Soutenir la thèse contraire,ce serait demander l'extinction d'un droit antérieur à tous les autres droits des associations politiques,celui de la volonté et de la prospérité générale....ce serait par conséquent condamner à jamais la plus grande portion du genre humain à ne plus pouvoir échapper à cette position douloureuse et désespérante que réalisent la misère et l'avilissement....S'il existait dans l'Etat un homme qui portât au fond de son coeur une immoralité aussi profonde et des sentiments si contraires à tout esprit de sociabilité celui-là ne serait pas seulement indigne d'en partager les bienfaits,mais affamé du bonheur et du sang de ses semblables,ce serait faire un acte d'humanité que d'exterminer cet anthropophage." 34)

With this last sentense, the books ends. As stated before, two more volumes were originally planned. One was to continue the economic survey; the third to discuss political activities. 35) It is possible that Principes Régénérateurs du Système Social,published in pluviôse year III embodies some of the arguments, which had originally been reserved for the earlier book.

It is not known,whether Elémens du Républicanisme was widely read, or why it is so rare. In fact, it is ignored

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34) Ibid.,LXVII,246.

35) Ibid.,LXVII,221.

by all but leftist historians. Yet, Lichtenberger called it the only large-scale radical work written before 1796, which is worth quoting.[36] Jaurès could hardly restrain his enthusiasm. But were the contemporaries, for instance Babeuf and Saint-Simon, influenced? The former's newspapers, Journal de la Liberté de la Presse, and Le Tribun du Peuple, referred not once to Billaud's writings. The primitive communism of the Egaux was far removed from the respect for private property of the Elémens du Républicanisme, and Babeuf and his followers came from an altogether different environment.[37] It would probably be rather far-fetched to say that Billaud inspired certain Saint-Simonians, who also proposed the abolition of inheritances and the transformation of the social system in a manner not unlike that described by him.[38] The International Working Men's Association discussed Billaud's plan at its Congress in Basle, Switzerland, in 1869.[39] Kropotkin thought that Billaud

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36) A.Lichtenberger, op.cit., p.121.

37) This apparently also the conclusion of Maxime Leroy, Histoire des Idées sociales en France: II. De Babeuf à Tocqueville (2ème.éd., Paris, 1950), pp.55-91. The author mentions as the sources of Babeuf's thought only Rousseau and Hébert. A.Lichtenberger, op.cit., pp.221, 224 quotes Babeuf as saying that Billaud was a mere imitator of Morelly.

38) J.P.Mayer, Political Thought in France, from the Revolution to the Fourth Republic (2nd.ed. London, 1949), p.42, seems to imply that Blanqui held ideas which, upon closer examination, resemble Billaud's. But the author never mentions Elémens du Républicanisme.

39) P.Kropotkin, op.cit., II, 486.

> " seemed to understand better than the other Montagnards, the need of profound changes in a communistic direction. He understood at one time that a social revolution ought to have been going abreast with the political revolution. But he, too, had not the courage to enter the ranks for this cause." 40)

Maybe so, maybe not. The majority of historians is certainly not inclined to regard Billaud as such a radical. In fact, some suggested that he, though advanced for his time, was only a link in the great tradition of revolutionary theorists, somewhere between Rousseau and the nineteenth century. 41) Another author of high reputation, after quoting from the book, concluded that "ainsi parlait Rousseau." 42) The cautious Jaurès called Billaud's system a "collectivisme individualiste," insofar as all the people have a "mortgage" or personal stake in the government's operations, while at the same time, the economy remains free from state supervision. 43) He remarked that it was far in advance of revolutionary thought in 1793, "le plus suprême effort du socialisme avant qu'il se transforme en communisme." 44) That may well be true, since Billaud was one of the few prominent men of 1792-1794, to advocate such a large-scale social transformation. What makes the Elémens interesting to the

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40) Ibid., II, 501.

41) M. Bouchet, op. cit., p. 434.

42) Maxime Leroy, Histoire des Idées sociales en France: I. De Montesquieu à Robespierre (Paris, 1946), p. 327.

43) J. Jaurès, op. cit., IV, 1510.

44) Ibid., IV, 1510-1511.

student of the French Revolution is that its ideas apply to peacetime conditions, unlike the various other schemes of salvation promoted during the Terror. Condorcet's Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain, the only other well-known work of political theory written between 1792 and 1794, offers no concrete solutions to the problems of the time. To the Jacobins of 1793, Billaud's plans must have seemed rather unimportant, to be discussed in a remote future, but not now,[45] just as the nineteenth century radicals thought that they were hopelessly inadequate to produce a change in the social order. But it can hardly be forgotten that Billaud attempted as early as 1793, to prepare the way for a revolutionary settlement and a permanent organization of society. While his plans could not be applied at the time, they promised a more secure future to many Frenchmen. Billaud might have believed that the lower classes would more eagerly support the war effort and more graciously endure the restriction of their freedom, if they could look forward to the prospect of a good life after the crisis had passed.

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45) See M.Bouchet, op.cit., p.34: "Quand Billaud-Varennes préconise la mainmise du corps social sur une part des grandes successions, il reste isolé ..."