

PART IV.

Chapter I.

The Administration of the Terror.

1. The Question of Responsibilities.

With his entrance into the Committee of Public Safety, Billaud became one bureaucrat among ten. With his nine colleagues, he sat most of the time in one room, reading or writing. There was some control over his public statements; he was of necessity forced to cooperate, to get their advice or approval. He could no more defend the interests of certain groups, but had to act solely as a spokesman for the central authorities (The interests of the Mountain and those of the central authorities being identical, conflicts did not arise in this respect). He could make important decisions, but he had also to follow the wishes of his colleagues to some extent.

Most of the work of the Committee of Public Safety was administrative in nature. It consisted in correspondence, decrees (arrêtés) of local or individual interest, and dissemination of propaganda. The Committee planned and proposed many laws of wider scope, but it was up to the National Convention to put them into effect. Officially, the Committee was subordinate to the assembly, and there is no evidence that any of its members challenged that

view. Most of its work dealt with administrative procedure. The Convention would leave to the Committee all responsibility for the execution of the decrees which it had passed. The latter thus enjoyed wide discretion. In the emergency, it exercised powers which had originally not been conferred upon it. But in general, most of the Committee's work was routine in character and trivial in scope. It could easily have been done by subordinate agencies. Historians have so far neglected these administrative tasks. Yet, they should be investigated, since they give an interesting picture of the centralization of the French state. They also show how the war effort was organized and what caused the strains in the system which eventually led to its breakdown.

First, the administrative decrees. It does not seem very difficult to fix the number for which Billaud was responsible. J.M.Thompson, who divided the arrêtés of the Committee among their authors, charged Billaud with 34 for the time between September 6, 1793, and the end of January, 1794 (12 pluviôse year II¹⁾). It would be interesting to know how he obtained this figure, since, in Aulard's collection of the decrees, 75 can be found for this period. R.R.Palmer, even more sceptical, counted the arrêtés during the month of prairial year II (May 20-June 18, 1794), and

1)

J.M.Thompson, "L'Organisation du Travail du Comité de Salut Public," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, X(1933), 454-460.

did not credit Billaud-Vareannes with a single one (out of 608).²⁾
 It may be assumed that he considered the "authorship" of a measure only established, if the writer and the man who signed the document first were identical. In that case, Billaud would only be the "author" of 18 decrees for the whole period of the Terror. However, this literal interpretation does not seem necessary. The first signatory of any measure knew what he was signing. Even if the text of the arrêtés were written by someone else, he assumed a certain degree of responsibility for it.³⁾ "Authorship" is indeed difficult to establish, since one person in the Committee hardly ever worked alone on a project. The pattern of collaboration is explained in the following table. Two arrêtés, signed by Billaud alone, should be added to the list.

2)

R.R. Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled. The Committee of Public Safety during the Terror (Princeton, 1941), p. 402. Despite many monographs, this book is the only recent attempt to deal with the Committee as a whole. But an older study, J. Gros, Le Comité de Salut Public de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1893), is more useful, since it deals with all aspects of the Committee's work, not only with the political problems it had to face.

3)

The best example is the decree ordering Danton's arrest. Billaud was the leader in the movement to bring his former friend to trial. It was he who insisted that Danton be arrested, he who had personal grievances. Yet the arrêté itself was written by Amar of the Committee of General Security, who had no part at all in the events leading up to the indictment. Who then was its "author"? Similarly, what part did Prieur de la Côte-d'Or play in Houchard's arrest? Yet, he wrote the order. Logic indicates that the first signature on a decree denotes responsibility for it.

Table I.

Number of signatures.

	Second signature to Billaud's first	Writer of decree but first signature Billaud's	Billaud's signature second	Billaud's signature third
Barère	42	11	203	116
Carnot	37	6	66	47
Collet-d'Herbois	28	5	55	30
Couthon	3	0	13	10
Hérault de Séchelles	2	1	1	2
Lindet	30	11	20	17
Prieur de la Côte-d'Or	27	18	25	28
Prieur de la Marne	0	0	0	1
Robespierre	21	4	29	15
Jeanbon Saint-André	0	1	15	15
Saint-Just	8	1	5	2
Tallien (after Thermidor)	0	0	0	1
Treillard (after Thermidor)	0	0	2	4
Amar	0	1	0	0
Du Barran	0	0	2	2
Lacoste	1	1	0	1
Lavicomterie	1	0	0	0
Vadier	1	0	0	0
Voulland	0	1	3	1
		4)		
Total	201	51	439	292

One point should be emphasized: The second signature on a decree was only a formality; it did not even indicate that the signer had read the document, to which he affixed his name. During the investigation of Barère, Billaud, and Collet, on 6 germinal year III (March 26, 1795), Carnot explained to the Convention that the second signatures were

" une formalité prescrite par la loi, mais absolument insignifiante par rapport à celui qui étoit tenu de la remplir ... elles ne sont précisément et n'ont jamais été que de simples "vus", une opération purement mécanique, qui ne prouvent rien, qui

4) These figures are incomplete, since Aulard rarely mentioned the writer of an arrêté. In a number of instances (when it was meant to be widely distributed), a decree was printed. Aulard then referred to this, not the manuscript copy.

n'attestent rien, sinon que le rapporteur, c'est à dire le premier signataire ... s'est acquitté de la formalité prescrite de soumettre la pièce en question à l'examen du comité." 5)

An examination of table I reveals the degree of collaboration. Only the 203 decrees which bear Billaud's signature as the first one are of interest. It would appear, that Billaud was frequently Barère's assistant. The two men were supposed to collaborate, in any event. It is surprising that Collet-d'Herbois is not represented more often. Prieur de la Marne was absent from Paris most of the time; all of the second signatures to Jeanbon Saint-André's first concern preparations for the invasion of the Channel Islands. Hérault de Séchelles resigned from the Committee on December 31, 1793, and had been on a mission before that date. Nearly all the arrêtés involving Saint-Just date from messidor and thermidor year II (June-July, 1794); he had also been away before that date. At the high point of the Terror, during early 1794, collaboration with Lindet seems to have been less close than previously. Billaud considered himself an expert on military affairs; consequently, he imposed his advice upon Carnot and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or. Couthon signed the fewest decrees of any Committee member (Prieur de la Marne excepted). His relations with Billaud were negligible in all respects. Similarly, the latter's contacts, purely accidental, with the six members of the

5)

Opinion de Carnot, Représentant du peuple Sur l'accusation proposé contre Billaud-Varennnes, Collet-d'Herbois, Barère et Vadier ... ([Paris, an III]), p.3. The whole speech is also reprinted in Moniteur (7 germinal an III-March 27, 1795), XXIV, 49-53, and H.N. Rioust, Carnot (Gand, 1817), pp.46-52.

Committee of General Security. Unlike Collet, Billaud did not participate in the Committee's activities after Thermidor, and the 7 second and third signatures to Tallien's and Treilhard's first are of no importance at all. Billaud himself was absent on a mission between 1 and 19 ventôse year II (February 19-March 9, 1794). As a matter of fact, Thompson's conclusion that there was no true division of work in the Committee seems to be correct. ⁶⁾ As for attendance, Prieur de la Côte-d'Or remembered later that "ils [Billaud and Collet] ne s'absentaient qu'une fois par la nécessité de paraître à la Convention et aux Jacobins." ⁷⁾

The time factor is also of interest. Table II shows the distribution of the first signatures over the months, and their division by subject matter.

Table II	Billaud's signature first	Economics	Police	Missions Army, etc.	Miscell- aneous
September 6-21, 1793	6		1	5	
1 ^{er} mois an II	6		1		2
Brumaire an II	12	4		8	1
Frimaire an II	9	6		2	1
Nivôse an II	22	22	4	4	2
Pluviôse an II	11	14	1	8	8
Ventôse an II	5	3	2		
Germinal an II	15	3	9	2	1
Floréal an II	31	4	7	14	6
Prairial an II	18	1	8	7	2
Messidor an II	19		8	5	6
Thermidor an II	16	3	8	3	2
Fructidor an II	2		2		
Total	203	60	51	61	31

6) J.M. Thompson, loc. cit., p. 458.

7) "Révélations sur le Comité de salut public ..." reprinted in Georges Souchard, Un Organisateur de la Victoire: Prieur de la Côte-d'Or (Paris, 1946), p. 437.

These figures point out Billaud's preoccupations at various times. Before the end of brumaire, he was working on plans for the revolutionary government; in germinal, he prepared his report on the state of France (1 floréal). In ventôse, he was away on mission for 19 days; consequently, he neglected his work in the Committee during three short periods. But there is no known reason why he should have become less prominent after prairial. The second and third signatures increase at that time, but the number of first signatures falls off sharply.

The other columns indicate that in the beginning, Billaud's interest was in economic and military affairs, and that he concentrated on police matters after ventôse. He later denied any connection with the bureau de police générale, formed in the Committee in germinal. But how else can his sudden interest in arrests and releases from prison be explained?

All these figures are revealing, but a word of caution is in order. Billaud was engaged in various non-administrative tasks in the Committee. He was the architect and theoretician of the Revolutionary Government, as well as the chief planner in Paris of the invasion of the Channel Islands. He admitted himself that he devoted much time to the latter, even after the operation had been postponed indefinitely. He was also responsible for the correspondence with the representatives on mission. Billaud said that he neglected this

8)

Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Varenes sur les Evénements du 9 Thermidor, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris, 1910), p. 41 n.l.

9)
 aspect of his work after ventôse. There are no possibilities to challenge this statement. Aulard reprinted many letters from the Committee in his collection, but he failed to add signatures in most instances. The correspondence of certain representatives, like Carrier, Le Bon and Maignet, has also been published¹⁰⁾, but the large number of letters dispatched daily by the Committee remains widely scattered in manuscript form. Aulard makes it possible to determine Billaud's "authorship" in only 33 cases, none of which is dated later than prairial. These letters are, if possible, even more trivial than the arrêtés of the Committee. Mostly they are orders of recall or words of praise and encouragement.

Before an examination of the administrative decrees for which Billaud might be held responsible, it is necessary to point out that he had little time to attend sessions of the Convention or Jacobin Club. He spoke in the assembly only twenty-one times between September 6, 1793, and 8 thermidor year II (26 July, 1794);¹¹⁾ and participated just five times in debates of the Jacobin Club

9)

Idem.

10)

René Belin, ed., Un Représentant en Mission dans ses Rapports avec la Convention et le Comité de Salut Public: Maignet (Amber, 1921); Correspondence of Jean-Baptiste Carrier, ed. E. H. Carrler (London, 1920); Emile Le Bon, ed., Joseph Le Bon dans sa Vie Privée et dans sa Carrière Politique (Paris, 1861).

11)

Gaston Dodu, Le Parlementarisme et les Parlementaires sous la Révolution (1789-1799) (Paris, 1911), p. 226, says that during the period of his Presidency of the Convention, September 5-19, Billaud did not miss a single meeting. But the Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XX, XXI, lists him among those present only on September 11 (XX, 241). He did not address the Convention once between 26 prairial and 8 thermidor.

12)
 during this same period. Yet, he must have kept busy all day and all night. He spoke himself of

" un travail de 15 heures par jour; une responsabilité effrayante ... je ne crois pas qu'on puisse imaginer une existence plus fatigante, plus dure, ni plus insupportable." 13)

As for his spare time,

" Il en est peu, [he said], qui mènent une vie plus retirée que nous. A peine connaissons-nous un très petit nombre de nos collègues; et il n'en est pas deux avec lesquels je sois intimement lié ... Je ne reçois chez moi que 5 ou 6 personnes, et je ne sors ordinairement que pour venir à la Convention. Ce n'est pas que j'attache un grand mérite à ce genre d'existence, lorsque toujours mon goût dominant fut la solitude." 14)

Eventually, Billaud broke down from the strain. The testimony of Saint-Just (in his speech of 9 thermidor) and the far less reliable account of Vilate, (Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor) show him behaving very odd indeed. The symptoms of a nervous disorder are discernible. Saint-Just complained that

" lorsqu'on délibère, il ferme les yeux et feint de dormir, comme si son attention avait d'autres objets. A sa conduite taciturne a succédé l'inquiétude depuis quelques jours ... Il devenait hardi dans les moments où, ayant excité les passions, on paraissait

12)

Gérard Walter, Histoire des Jacobins (Paris, 1946), p. 336, contends that Billaud had not attended meetings for four months previous to 8 thermidor. But A. Anlard, ed., Société, V, 282, says that he was present on 23 floréal and 9 prairial.

13)

Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Varenes, ed., Ch. Vellay, p. 45.

14)

Ibid., p. 15. An almost identical statement, made later in Réponse de J.M. Billaud ... Aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse, an III), p. 27.

écouter ses conseils; mais son dernier mot expira toujours sur ses lèvres; il hésitait, il s'irritait, il corrigeait ensuite ce qu'il avait dit hier ... La vérité n'a point ce caractère, ni cette politique ..." 15)

Vilate described a man who had lost his mind, but his interest was chiefly to throw an unfavorable light on Billaud. 16) It is strange that of all the members of the Committee, only Billaud should have succumbed to the pressure of the office.

2. The Administrative Decrees.

An investigation of the arrêtés signed by Billaud in the first place throws considerable light on his personality. Yet, it must be said that he rarely assumed sole responsibility for a measure. Particularly in matters dealing with the armies or finance, he received invaluable assistance from the "specialists" Lindet, Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, and Carnot. 17) Any mistake would be theirs as much as Billaud's. The fact that the centralization of France could succeed in fair measure is ample proof that the

15)

Oeuvres Complètes de Saint-Just, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris, 1908), II, 481-482.

16)

Vilate, "Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor, in Mémoires sur les Journées de Thermidor, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1825), pp. 200, 204, 230; the remarks particularly p. 230: "Sa figure ... montre les symptômes d'un esprit aliéné."

17)

Among the most useful biographies of these men are J.N. Davy, Les Conventionnels de l'Eure: Buzot, Duroy, Lindet à travers l'histoire (2 vs., Evreux, 1876); Armand Montier, Robert Lindet (Paris, 1899); for Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, G. Bouchard, op. cit.; and for Carnot, Hippolyte Carnot, Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils (2 vs., Paris, 1861); Huntley Dupré, Lazare Carnot, Republican Patriot (Oxford, Ohio, 1940); and M.N. Rioust, op. cit., the best on that man.

teams in the Committee of Public Safety worked smoothly, at least for a time.

24 (out of 203) decrees are of the most trivial kind. No comments are necessary on the order to equip the castle of Meudon with a lightning-rod;¹⁸⁾ the request to give citizen Lavallée, employed in the printing shop of the Committee of Public Safety, office space in the Commission de l'Instruction publique;¹⁹⁾ the long decree on the care and conservation of furniture in public buildings;²⁰⁾ the requisition order for a four-seat coach, to be used by members of the Executive Council;²¹⁾ the establishment of a uniform letterhead for correspondence between the Committee and other authorities;²²⁾ etc. 60 arrêtés dealing with economic affairs can only be fitted into a detailed analysis of the economics of the Terror, not within the scope of this study. Similarly, it should be remembered that most of this legislation was suited only to the emergency. It was only meant to solve temporary difficulties, not to create a permanent organization of society.

18)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XV, 109. Dated 24 messidor an II-July 12, 1794. Carnot's handwriting; second signature Saint-Just.

19)

Ibid., XIII, 513. Dated 7 messidor an II-June 25, 1794. Robespierre second signature.

20)

Ibid., XIII, 792-793. Dated 9 prairial an II-May 28, 1794, Barère second.

21)

Ibid., XI, 83. Dated 24 pluviôse an II-February 12, 1794. Prieur's handwriting and second signature.

22)

Ibid., X, 462. Dated 7 pluviôse an II-January 26, 1794. Collot second.

Just as during the Summer of 1793, Billaud continued to interest himself in the food supply of the cities. The first economic decree from his hand is a grant of 1 million livres to the Paris Commune for grain purchases (12 brumaire an II-November 2, 1793).²³⁾ Hébertist agitation and the prospect of a harsh famine led to two more grants during December and January of 2 million livres each (26 frimaire, 17 nivôse - December 16, January 6 respectively).²⁴⁾ Although the situation seems to have improved but little after that, the Commune received no further aid from the central authorities. Instead, the powers of the Commission des subsistances, which was responsible for all supplies, were increased. First, it received the permission to correspond with departmental authorities (3 nivôse-December 23);²⁵⁾ later, manufacturers and food-growers were allowed to sell directly to the Commission, without special license from the Committee of Public Safety (7 nivôse-December 27).²⁶⁾ Similarly, local administrations could requisition in extreme emergencies (which were left undefined) (18 nivôse-January 7, 1794).²⁷⁾ Yet, when

23)

Ibid., VIII, 175. Billaud's writing and first signature; Carnot second.

24)

Ibid., IX, 434; X, 83. In both; Barère second signature.

25)

Ibid., IX, 601. Lindet's handwriting and only other signature. This was a violation of the Law of 14 frimaire, the arrêté states specifically.

26)

Ibid., IX, 690. Lindet second.

27)

Ibid., 100. Lindet second.

Fouché and Javogues, on mission in the Allier, had allowed the district commissioners to buy grain for the cities (instead of the various municipal authorities), the Committee of Public Safety declared this order invalid, meaning "unconstitutional" (4 nivôse-December 24).²⁸⁾ Of course, the arrêté might simply have expressed irritation at the independent behavior of the two representatives. After foreign trade had been properly organized, the Commission des subsistances was permitted to make its own trade agreements with foreign firms (22 pluviôse-February 10).²⁹⁾ In these instances, the Committee actually gave up some authority. This was probably done for the sake of efficiency, but it is strange nevertheless that such ardent centralizers as Billaud (and even Lindet and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or) should so readily have delegated their powers.

From the end of 1793 on, the question of foreign trade became increasingly important. France had to obtain raw materials for its war production. The most important task was to establish arms manufactures; provide them with raw materials, and supply the military with the finished products. But the low value of the assignat made foreign governments reluctant to trade with France.

.....
28)

Ibid., IX, 619. Lindet second.

29)

Ibid., XI, 42. Lindet's writing; Prieur second signature.

On 21 pluviôse (February 9), the Committee fixed the exchange-value of the livre on the international market in such a way that it remained static, and could never rise or fall. ³⁰⁾ In view of the inflation in France itself, the currency must still have appeared unsound to foreigners, but the decree permitted traders in other countries to calculate what they would obtain for their goods. Already before this attempt at stabilization, foreign trade increased. 10 of Billaud's 22 economic arrêtés in nivôse were grants of export licenses. ³¹⁾ For optical instruments, fans, and "patriotic" literature, Swiss dealers provided needles, salt and copper. On 25 pluviôse (February 13), Delanare and La Michellerie were sent to the United States of America as purchasing agents. ³²⁾ And on 20 ventôse (March 10), an American captain residing in Bordeaux (not mentioned by name) received the permission to leave for the United States with a cargo of liquor and wine, after promising that he would return to France within the next seven months with a shipload of grain, coffee and sugar. ³³⁾ The Committee became the chief purchasing agent.

30)

Ibid., XI, 5-6. Lindet's handwriting and second signature. The one well-known study of prices and money, René Stourm, Les Finances de l'Ancien Régime et de la Révolution (2 vs. Paris, 1885), does not consider the subject in such a way that a clear picture of the situation emerges.

31)

1 on 29 frimaire (December 19); 5 on 4 nivôse (December 24); 4 on 13 nivôse (January 2, 1794). See A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, IX, 516, 620-623; X, 2-3. Barère and Robespierre second signatures on 1 each; the rest by Lindet.

32)

Ibid., XI, 164. Lindet second.

33)

Ibid., XI, 631. Carnot second.

Private initiative in this respect was not encouraged, probably because it was feared that uncontrolled trade would lead to speculation. Thus, on 3 prairial (May 22), the Committee decided that persons in Bordeaux who had subscribed for a purchase of 100 000 bushels of wheat by the Commune of the city, were not responsible as a group for its delivery, but that each subscriber could demand a refund for his share from the municipal authorities.³⁴⁾

Turning to war production in France, Billaud was co-author of the long decree on arms manufacture of 22 brumaire (November 12); the model for all those to follow.³⁵⁾ Its twenty-three articles dealt in detail with the disposal of funds, the location of factories, the inspection of workshops, etc. The chief credit for the law should probably go to Carnot, who signed second, although the subject fell actually within Prieur's specialty. Billaud alone could hardly have drawn up these elaborate plans. Only two articles are of importance in the general picture: no.1, which leaves the accounting to the Ministry of War, but the administration to the Committee of Public Safety;³⁶⁾ and no.15, ordering that all inventions and discoveries be examined

34)

Ibid., XII, 760. Barère second.

35)

Ibid., VIII, 359-362. Carnot second. The economic historian can consult for a most detailed discussion of the whole subject of war production, Camille Richard, Le Comité de Salut Public et les Fabrications de Guerre sous la Terreur (Paris, 1921). The author mentions also (p. 745) an inspection trip by Billaud and Carnot to the atelier des Capucins on 23 frimaire year II (December 13, 1793).

36)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, VIII, 360.

by "une réunion d'hommes intelligents," appointed by learned societies, academies, etc. ³⁷⁾ Only a few days after (27 brumaire-November 17), the very curious arrêté was passed ordering the Ministers of Finance and the Interior to do some research in the budgets and memoirs of Turgot and Terray, as well as the statistics of the Commission des subsistances, in order to find new ways to increase the revenue of the state. ³⁸⁾ Was this a return to the financial methods of the Old Regime? The historian who held that the government of the Terror was not basically different from that of King Louis XVI, ³⁹⁾ might, after all, not have been so far wrong. In general, Billaud and his colleagues favored the private businessman who would invest his own capital. Persons with claims against the Government were promptly satisfied. ⁴⁰⁾ Manufacturers who excelled in production were given special privileges; ⁴¹⁾ others exempted from certain taxes. ⁴²⁾ When the Compagnie d'Afrique was

37)

Ibid., VIII, 361

38)

Ibid., VIII, 484. Prieur second.

39)

Daniel Guérin, La Lutte des Classes sous la Première République (1793-1797) (3ème. éd. Paris, 1946), II, 9-11. The author particularly emphasizes the similarities between the National Agents of the Terror and the Intendants of the Old Regime.

40)

See the case of Captain Ohman's claims against the Commission des Subsistances, of 27 pluviôse (February 15), in A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 164. Lindet second signature.

41)

See the case of cloth manufacturer Richard, 20 germinal (April 9), in ibid., XII, 485-486. Lindet second.

42)

See the case of leather goods manufacturer Lignièrès et fils, 24 nivôse (January 13), in ibid., X, 221-222. Prieur second.

liquidated and its capital taken over by the Commission des Subsistances, the stockholders were promised compensation and their dividends up to 19 pluviôse, the date of liquidation (23 pluviôse-February 11) paid.⁴³⁾ On the other hand, prices, wages, and profits were subject to strict regulations, and inspection of workshops frequent and thorough.⁴⁴⁾

Some of the arrêtés dealing with police matter (like the order of Danton's arrest or the order to find the leaders in the "Conspiracy of the Prisons"), are of great importance in the history of the Revolution. They have their proper place in the political picture and will be discussed as a part of it. Here, only two decrees need be mentioned, which point to the intensification of the regime of the Terror. First, that of 25 ventôse (March 15), authorizing Fouquier-Tinville to employ spies (surveillants) "pour connaître et déjouer les complots des ennemis du peuple."⁴⁵⁾ Second, the decree on theaters of 18 prairial (June 6), introducing censorship of all plays.⁴⁶⁾ For that, the Commission de l'instruction publique shared responsibility (in Paris) with the police administration (in the provinces). Finally, various regulations intended to speed

43)

Ibid., XI, 638-639. Carnot second.

44)

On inspection, see arrêté of 30 frimaire (December 20), 15 pluviôse (February 3), 6 floréal (April 25) in ibid., IX, 539-540, X, 637-638, XIII, 54-55. Signed in second place twice by Barère, once by Prieur.

45)

Ibid., XI, 715. Barère's handwriting and second signature.

46)

Ibid., XIII, 169-170. Barère second. For interesting comments, see Paul d'Estrée, Le Théâtre sous la Terreur (Théâtre de la Peur) 1793-1794 (Paris, 1913) and Henri Welschinger, Le Théâtre de la Révolution, 1789-1799 (Paris, 1880).

up police work as well as orders of arrest, release and dismissal from government positions. Out of 27 arrêtés, 15 deprived persons of their freedom; while 12 cleared suspects of charges against them (5 after 9 thereafter).

The development of the centralized state is most clearly visible from the decrees dealing with missions, the armies, etc. A large number of these are orders for representatives on mission or appointments of officers. On October 7 (16e. jour du 1er. mois), before the official introduction of the Terror, the Committee recalled all representatives on mission, except Jullien in the Maritimes departments and Bruns in the Gironde. ⁴⁷⁾ The reason was to check the loyalty of all deputies who were sent to the provinces. In the armies, the Committee did not start this process of "purification" until 30 nivôse (January 19), when the Minister of War was ordered to submit a list of all officers, with information aiming to

" éclairer le Comité sur le mérite de ces officiers et la confiance qu'il est de la prudence de leur accorder." 48)

Not much after that, on 7 pluviôse (January 26), the Committee issued a warning to all the local authorities in the nation. It declared that it knew of every single act of every subordinate agency of the government. It promised new measures to deal with

47)

A. Anlard, ed., Recueil, VII, 278. Hérault de Séchelles' handwriting, Collet-d'Herbois second signature.

48)

Ibid., X, 316. Carnot's writing and second signature.

the enemies of the state, as well as punishment for traitors and rewards for patriots.⁴⁹⁾ This arrêté was a simple recognition, in general terms, of the fact that all policy decisions were made in Paris. Thus, for instance, the two decrees dealing with the organization of the navy (21 floréal, 1 prairial-May 10, 20, respectively).⁵⁰⁾ Jeanbon Saint-André, the naval expert of the Committee, was apparently not consulted in this matter. Yet, the laws prescribe the specific number of ships to be built, their type of armament, their stations in peacetime, etc. These are all technical questions of great complexity. Yet, Barère, Billaud, and Collet, the authors of the arrêtés, seem to have had sound ideas on the subject. Billaud was also interested in all phases of army life. To mention but a few examples, he was responsible for artillery instructors being sent to each army (3 pluviôse-January 22);⁵¹⁾ for a grant to one Antoine Carny to engage in experiments to manufacture gunpowder (8 pluviôse-January 27);⁵²⁾ for the establishment of a service d'étapes for couriers (13 floréal-May 2);⁵³⁾ for new recruits in the navy being sent on a ship for

49)

Ibid., X, 463. Barère second.

50)

Ibid., XIII, 406, 619-620 respectively. Barère and Collet second respectively.

51)

Ibid., X, 376. Carnot's writing and second signature.

52)

Ibid., X, 476-477. Prieur's writing and second signature. See the very similar arrêté of 13 floréal (May 2) in the matter of one chemist Barthélemy, here called "artiste", in ibid., XIII, 208.

53)

Ibid., XIII, 209-210. Carnot second.

two to three months, in order to gain practical experience (25 floréal-May 14);⁵⁴⁾ for the free distribution of the Journal universel and the Journal des hommes libres to soldiers at the front (28 floréal-May 17);⁵⁵⁾ for the conversion into military hospitals of former castles in the Vendée (11, 14 prairial-May 30, June 2);⁵⁶⁾ finally, for the admission of veterans to the Invalides (1 messidor-June 19).⁵⁷⁾

Several arrêtés do not fall into any of the categories discussed above. Listed in the "Miscellaneous" column of Table II, all but one are extremely unimportant. The exception is the only decree in which Billaud concerned himself with foreign policy (20e. jour du 1er. mois-October 11). It ordered the Foreign Minister to engage in negotiations with neutral powers. The Ottoman Empire was singled out for particular attention, and the French Minister in Constantinople was granted a fund of 4 million livres for presents (!), in case the Porte should declare war against Austria and attack the Hapsburg Empire from the rear.⁵⁸⁾

It is necessary to arrive at a conclusion. It becomes obvious that no clear pattern of Billaud's activities can be established,

54)

Ibid., XIII, 514. Collet second.

55)

Ibid., XIII, 570-571. Only other signature Barère's.

56)

Ibid., XIV, 24, 83. Only other signatures those of Barère and Carnot, once second and once third, respectively.

57)

Ibid., XIV, 395. Only other signature Barère's.

58)

Ibid., VII, 360. The only signature is that of Billaud.

unless that of great diversification. He participated in the making of the laws, dealing with a great many subjects. In itself, this has little meaning. It has value only if a similar analysis of the decrees issued by the other members of the Committee is made. In that case, the historians would get a complete picture and could assess more adequately Billaud's place in the Committee as a whole. But such an analysis is far beyond the scope of this study.

Chapter II

The Politics of the Terror.

1. Establishment of the Revolutionary Government:

September 6, 1793 - 14 frimaire year II
(December 4, 1793).

In the history of the French Revolution, September 5, 1793, is not one of the important days. The Terror, though not officially established till October 10, had been in preparation since July. No important constitutional change occurred on September 5; but the manifestations of September 5 permitted the Mountain to assume power. The Dantonist faction, which alone could have provided a more moderate leadership than the Committee of Public Safety, remained inactive for the moment. During the Autumn of 1793, it moved slowly toward the right, while Hébert and his friends in the Paris Commune formed a leftist opposition. But in early September, the Mountain's bid for leadership had been accepted by a majority of the French people. It was now the Mountain's task to solve the crisis in its various aspects; to defeat the enemy on the battlefields, liberate the French territory held by the rebels, and stabilize the national economy. In these matters, the Committee of Public Safety proceeded very slowly.

In fact, the Mountain established a new administration only after some leading Royalists, Girondists, and generals had been removed from the scene, in November, 1793 (Vergniaud and his associates were executed on October 30). In the National Convention,

Billaud demanded the indictment of Philippe Egalité, the former duc d'Orléans, "un homme qu'on a oublié, malgré les faits nombreux qui déposent contre lui."¹⁾ He was also instrumental in bringing the ex-Queen to trial.

"Une femme, [he said], la honte de l'humanité et de son sexe, la veuve Capet, doit enfin expier ses forfaits sur l'échafaud. Déjà on publie partout qu'elle ... a été jugée secrètement, et que le tribunal révolutionnaire l'a blanchie; comme si une femme qui a fait couler le sang de plusieurs milliers de Français pouvait être absoute par un jury français!"²⁾

Marie-Antoinette's feelings about the Revolution were hardly open to question; but Egalité had at one time been considered a radical. Various persons in high positions seem to have taken an interest in the Duke. Mrs. Elliott, an English friend of his, was arrested and, according to her own account, interrogated by Barrère, Billaud, Merlin de Douai and Robespierre.³⁾ Merlin's presence seems strange, since he had at one time been among the chief partisans of Egalité.⁴⁾ Danton, who had once thought that the Duke might become Regent of France, did nothing either to save his friend. Another of Billaud's victims was General Houchard. There was no question that he was

1) Moniteur (October 5, 1793), XVIII, 37. Session of October 3.

2) Ibid., XVIII, 39. Same session. Marie-Antoinette was executed on October 16.

3) Grace Dalrymple Elliott, Journal of My Life During the French Revolution (London, 1859), p. 158.

4) On Merlin de Douai, see the good section in Georges Lèpreux, Nos Représentants pendant la Révolution (1789-1799) (Lille, 1898), pp. 177-200. This is a collection of biographies of deputies from the department of the Nord.

unfit for his position of commander of the Armée du Nord, but his treasonable intentions were never proved. He had just been defeated in battle through his own fault, and (a worse mistake) had quarrelled with the representative on mission, Levasseur de la Sarthe. Yet, these errors did not call for the death penalty under the old forms of judicial procedure. Billaud demanded consequently the repeal of a law, which made it impossible to indict generals without previous consent of the Convention. It was also he, who signed first Houchard's order of arrest. In another instance, he called General Kellermann, victor of Valmy and "Savior" of the Republic,

" cet homme qui étant de fois trahi la patrie, et qui remporte maintenant des victoires afin de détourner l'attention de la Convention sur sa conduite passée." 8)

On the other hand, Billaud asked the Convention to send an official letter of praise to Jourdan, Houchard's successor. And he, like

5)

A good description of Houchard's character is in Colonel Ramsay Weston Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic (Oxford, 1926-1939), I, 210. See also Baron Gay de Vernon, Mémoires sur les Opérations Militaires des Généraux en Chef Custine et Houchard pendant les Années 1792 et 1793 (Paris, 1844), and volume II of the Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe). Ex-Conventionnel (Paris, 1832), for opposing views on the General.

6)

Moniteur (5 brumaire an II-October 26, 1793), XVIII, 216. Session of 3 brumaire (October 24).

7)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., Recueil, VI, 577. Dated September 20. Prieur's writing; Robespierre's signature second. Houchard is accused of having "empêché l'armée du Nord de profiter de sa victoire." Houchard was executed on 25 brumaire (November 15).

8)

Ibid. (17e. jour du 1er. mois an II-October 8, 1793), XVIII, 163. Session of 15e. jour (October 6).

9)

Ibid. (30e. jour du 1er. mois an II-October 21, 1793), XVIII, 166. Session of 28e. jour (October 19).

the rest of the Mountain, expressed his full confidence in General
 10) Rossignol. Even good Republicans agreed that the latter, a
 goldsmith by trade before the Revolution, was not experienced
 11) enough to lead an army. But at the time, it seemed more important
 to have a reliable Jacobin in a position of command than a military
 expert. However, Billaud soon regretted his step and he was the
 first to sign the order of Rossignol's dismissal on 8 floréal
 12) (April 27).

All these matters, the liquidation of Royalists and
 Girondists, the changes in the high command, etc., were symptoms
 of transformation, the prelude to the establishment of an emergency
 administration. This "Revolutionary Government (Gouvernement
 révolutionnaire)", led to a situation of "Terror", at any rate for
 the enemies of the regime. There are no indications that the
 leaders of the Mountain intended to put that label on their efforts
 to save France and the Revolution. The decree proposed by
 Saint-Just on October 10, 1793, and adopted by the Convention, stated

 10)

In the General's nomination order, dated 21 brumaire year II
 (November 11, 1793), in A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, VIII, 336. The first
 signature is that of Billaud; the writing and second signature
 Prieur's.

11)

See Louis-Marie Turreau, Memoirs for the History of the Wars of La
 Vendée (London, 1796), p. 101 n.1. An even better description is in Col. R.
 W. Phipps, op. cit., II, 22.

12)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XIII, 94. Barère's handwriting and second
 signature.

only that "Le gouvernement provisoire de la France sera révolutionnaire jusqu'à la paix."¹³⁾ The wish to return as soon as conditions permitted, to the democratic procedures laid down in the Constitution of June 1793, was implied. However, the circumstances remained unfavorable, and the intensified efforts of the authorities led to severe restrictions of personal freedom and, in practice, to the domination of the machinery of government by the Committee of Public Safety. That this was not intended is quite clear. The individual members of that body declared again and again that the National Convention was the chief authority in the state, to which all others were subject. Many deputies undoubtedly joined in the conspiracy against Robespierre because they believed that he wanted the Committee to assume the powers granted the Convention by law.

To clarify these relationships, as well as to set up proper machinery to deal with the crisis, it was necessary to create a completely new form of administration. While the centralization of France was legalized as early as October 10, the functions of

13)

The most recent reprint of this law is in J.M. Thompson, ed., French Revolution Documents 1789-94 (Oxford, 1933), pp. 260-261; and in English, John Hall Stewart, ed., A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution (New York, 1951), pp. 479-481. The statement quoted is art. 1. The word "Terror" was first used by Barère, in comments on the decree before the National Convention. But he implied that it represented a "Terror" only to the enemies of the Revolution. Nineteenth century historians were the first to use the word out of context, to designate the period of the French Revolution which began on October 10, 1793, and ended on 9 thermidor year II (July 27, 1794).

every local authority were only determined by the "Constitution" of the Terror, the Law of 14 frimaire year II (December 4, 1793). Billaud, as the man who had secured the triumph of the Mountain on September 5, was charged with the preparation of this document. He discussed the new principles in his Report of 28 brumaire (November 18).¹⁴⁾ Contemporaries and modern historians alike have given him due credit; some have even held him alone responsible for the centralization of the French state.¹⁵⁾

The delivery of the speech itself was interrupted by Billaud's collapse. The Moniteur did not mention the incident, but the Courrier de l'Egalité gave a detailed account:

" Billaud-Varennes alloit lire ... un projet de décret, ... mais un évanouissement subit et complet l'a mis hors d'état de continuer. Il alloit tomber; on a volé à son secours; on l'a sorti de la salle où l'air manque presque tous les jours, on le lui a fait respirer... Un demi quart d'heure après Billaud-Varennes a reparu mieux portant... et a continué son rapport, l'ayant demandé lui-même à cause de la malveillance qui auroit pu mettre à profit un ajournement." ¹⁶⁾

14)

"Rapport sur un mode de gouvernement provisoire et révolutionnaire" in Moniteur (2 frimaire an II - November 22, 1793), XVIII, 473-479. Only mentioned briefly in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XXV, 312. Reprinted in Journal des Débats et des Décrets, LIV, 40-54; [Guillaume N. Lallemand, ed.], Choix de Rapports, Opinions et Discours Prononcés à la Tribune Nationale depuis 1789 jusqu'à ce jour (Paris, 1818-1825), XIII, 131-149. Excerpts in Paul Mautouchet, ed., Le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire (10 Août 1792-4 brumaire an IV) (Paris, 1912), pp. 206-215

15)

C. F. Beaulieu, Essai historique sur les causes et les effets de la Révolution de France (Paris, An XI-1803), V, 229, calls Billaud "rédacteur" of the Revolutionary Government. Also Albert Mathiez, La Vie Chère et le Mouvement Social sous la Terreur (Paris, 1927), pp. 416-418; Jacques Godechot, Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire (Paris, 1951), pp. 258-259.

16)

Courrier de l'Egalité, no. 485 (29 brumaire an II), VI, 396.

Billaud's picture of inefficiency in the government shows his feeling that little has changed since August.

" Fixez vos regards, [he said], sur toutes les parties de la France, et partout vous apercevrez les lois sans vigueur; vous verrez même que plusieurs n'arrivent point aux administrations; et que le surplus leur parvient si tard, que souvent l'objet en est atténué. Vous distinguerez une apathie égale chez tous les agents du gouvernement; en un mot, vous serez effrayés en apprenant qu'il n'y a que les décrets, ou favorables à l'ambition des autorités constituées, ou d'un effet propre à créer des mécontentes, qui soient mis en exécution avec une ponctualité aussi accélérée que machiavellique... "17)

The laws which are not enforced are particularly those dealing with the economic crisis.

" Les décrets sur les sequestrations, [he continued], tombent insensiblement en désuétude, parce qu'ils frappent sur l'avidité des riches marchands, dont la plupart sont aussi administrateurs. La même cause a aussi rendu les lois sur les subsistances toujours insuffisantes, souvent meurtrières, en empêchant qu'elles aient une exécution uniforme et générale. Aussi, ... l'intérêt particulier continue à être le mobile de l'action civile, et les leviers du gouvernement agissent plutôt pour ceux qui les meuvent que pour le peuple, qu'on semble vouloir dégoûter de sa liberté, en le privant sans cesse des bienfaits de la révolution ... " 18)

The solution to these evils is apparently better laws and more rigid application of their principles. In other words, complete centralization. Billaud attacked again the provincial administrators, whom he considered still federalist in sympathies.

17)

Moniteur (2 frimaire an II-November 22, 1793), XVIII, 473.

18)

Idem.

"L'assassin le plus redoutable, [he stated], est celui qui loge dans la maison."¹⁹⁾ The admiration of the public makes it possible for these men to remain in office. To make idols of political leaders evidently leads to slavery in the end. The Greek city-states survived only because they punished their politicians when they became successful. But in France,

" tant d'autorités colossales, qui furent constamment les vampires de la liberté, n'ont rien perdu de leur essence despotique, de leurs attributions corrosives, de leur prépondérance absorbante." 20)

Billaud turned next to an analysis of the nature of the ideal government.

" La meilleure constitution civile, [he declared], est celle qui est la plus rapprochée des procédés de la nature, qui n'admet elle-même que trois principes dans ses mouvements: la volonté pulsative, l'être que cette volonté vivifie, et l'action de cet individu sur les objets environnants. Ainsi tout bon gouvernement doit avoir un centre de volonté, des leviers qui s'y rattachent immédiatement, et des corps secondaires sur qui agissent ces leviers, afin d'étendre le mouvement jusqu'aux dernières extrémités." 21)

In simple words, there must be a central authority to plan and pass the laws, agents who would act as its spokesmen, and local bodies, which, inspired by these agents, would execute the decrees. Billaud compared such an efficient administration to that of the old regime, and its all-powerful bureaucrats, overlapping offices and functions, unnecessary paper-work, etc.²²⁾ He recognized that the domination

19)

Ibid., XVIII, 474.

20)

Idem.

21)

Idem.

22)

Idem.

of the central authority by one individual or faction might lead to abuses. But he considered this danger quite remote, certainly not as great as the continuation of the old system. 23)

Billaud's concrete proposals began with a demand that the Executive Council be abolished. 24) In his opinion, there are already too many people who have the power to interpret decrees; besides, the Executive Council becomes really unnecessary if all its decisions have to be approved by the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud's next request was the creation of a "Bulletin exclusivement consacré à la notification des lois." 25) He said that it would cost the government only 4 million livres a year to issue such a newspaper, instead of the 15 million livres spent now on efforts to publicize the laws.

Then, he launched into a more extended discussion of centralized government. The question was apparently what to do with the existing local authorities, which could not simply be abolished. Billaud proposed that the departmental administrations should engage principally in the collection of taxes. He held that

" les contributions, pour être réparties avec impartialité entre chaque district, et perçues exactement, exigent que ceux chargés de cette opération soient placés à une certaine distance

23)

Idem.

24)

Idem.

25)

Ibid., XVIII, 475.

des personnes et des lieux... Il est donc sage de les isoler par éloignement... Or sous ce point de vue, les départements paraissent l'autorité la plus propre à ce genre d'administration." 26)

They should also administer public works and the social services, but, on the other hand, should be deprived of all political functions.

"Ainsi rendu à sa véritable destination, la partie purement administrative, [he concluded], cette institution deviendra aussi utile qu'elle a été liberticide..." 27)

Measures against the district administrations, on the other hand, are not necessary, since they are not independent in any case.

They should only be "chargés de suivre l'action du gouvernement sous l'inspection immédiate de la Convention..." 28)

As for the central authorities themselves, fewer deputies of the Convention should be absent from Paris, since

"Celui qui demeure longtemps éloigné de la Convention doit s'apercevoir qu'il n'est plus en mesure, et qu'il a besoin de venir se retremper à ce foyer de lumières et d'enthousiasme civique." 29)

The assembly itself should enforce stricter discipline, since only those who observe the laws themselves deserve to govern. 30)

The establishment of a sound administration, which will benefit the whole French people, will be better proof of the patriotism of the law-makers than long speeches about political principles. 31)

26)

Ibid., XVIII, 476.

27)

Idem.

28)

Idem.

29)

Ibid., XVIII, 478.

30)

Idem.

31)

Ibid., XVIII, 478.

Billaud ended his Report by reading the Committee of Public Safety's project of law. Its three sections formed the basis for the Law of 14 frimaire, establishing the Revolutionary Government. Section I declared that the minutes of all sessions of the National Convention have to be printed in an official paper; also that Prosecutors or Presidents of sections must publicize all laws. ³²⁾ Section II starts with the sentence; "La Convention nationale est le centre unique de l'impulsion du gouvernement." ³³⁾ It proposes to put all political bodies and public officials under close supervision of the Committee of Public Safety. "La surveillance active" of laws will become the duty of either the Executive Council (general laws) or the district administrations (revolutionary measures). In the districts, the Comités de surveillance and municipalities will be responsible for law enforcement. Administrators must stay in their respective capitals (department and district), only Public Prosecutors will be permitted to travel. ³⁴⁾ According to section III, foreign affairs ³⁵⁾ will be handled exclusively by the Committee of Public Safety. The departments will take charge of taxation and public services, ³⁶⁾ lose all rights of interference in political matters. Agents of the Executive Council and the Commission des subsistances will

32)

Idem.

33)

Idem.

34)

Idem.

35)

Idem.

36)

Idem.

be subordinate to the representatives on mission. These, in turn, cannot order new levies of men, or raise new taxes or loans, except by special permission of the Convention. 37) 38)

The Report seems to have been well received; Cabot, in a letter to the Committee of Public Safety, called it "sublime". 39) Billaud himself elaborated on some points during the discussion of the Law of 14 frimaire in the Convention. Even before his speech, on 22 brumaire (November 12), he had asserted that the deputies of the assembly should be granted immunity against arbitrary arrest.

" La Convention, [he had declared], doit se tenir également en garde contre les mesures exagérées et contre les suggestions du modérantisme. Il faut que rien n'altère ce principe, qu'aucun tribunal, aucune autorité dans la république ne peut prononcer sur un représentant du peuple avant que l'assemblée elle-même ait pris connaissance des motifs qui déterminent son arrestation; autrement, il n'y a plus de représentation . . . Peu importe que des hommes de tel ou tel côté se croient menacés!" 40)

On 9 frimaire (November 29), he asked that the representatives on mission be prohibited from forming Central Commissions or Revolutionary Armies, since that would mean a delegation of their authority. But he thought that secondary agents (undefined) should be charged with responsible tasks, since they would otherwise be

37)

Ibid., XVIII, 476.

38)

Idem.

39)

Albert Mathiez, Un Procès de Corruption sous la Terreur: L'Affaire de la Compagnie des Indes (Paris, 1920), p. 180.

40)

Moniteur (25 brumaire an II - November 15, 1793), XVIII, 419.

41)
 useless and paralyze the execution of the laws. Finally, on 14 frimaire (December 4), just before the vote on the Law, he explained to the Convention the true aim and purpose of the decree:

" On a dit: Pourquoi toujours un gouvernement provisoire au lieu de nous donner un gouvernement définitif? C'est parce que ne pouvant procéder tout-à-l'heure à l'exécution de la constitution, [of June, 1793], il faut un gouvernement révolutionnaire, qui empêche que l'action du corps politique ne soit le résultat de l'arbitraire

La loi que nous proposons est nécessaire; elle tend à vous procurer des alliés dans les puissances étrangères, en prenant une attitude ferme, en faisant peser sur la tête des coupables toute la rigueur du gouvernement." 42)

The Law of 14 frimaire (December 4) 43) embodied all of

Billaud's proposals; some of them were even taken verbatim from his Report of 28 brumaire. 44) For the publication of decrees, a

Bulletin des Lois de la République was issued (Section I, arts. 1-12).

41)

Ibid., (10 frimaire an II-November 30, 1793), XVIII, 590.

42)

Ibid., (16 frimaire an II-December 6, 1793), XVIII, 590.

43)

"Décret constitutif du gouvernement révolutionnaire." Reprinted in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XXVI, 360-378; Journal des Débats et des Décrets (no. 446), LIV, 250-259; Révolutions de Paris, no. 220, 401-411; La Feuille Villageoise, no. 12 (29 frimaire-December 19), VII, 272-284. Later in C.-A. Dauban, Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869), pp. 14-23; "Le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire. Réimpressions de Textes Officiels, Alphonse Aulard, ed.; La Révolution Française, XXVII (1894), 247-257; A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, IX, 149-161. Paul Mautouchet, ed., Le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire (10 août 1792-4 Brumaire an IV) (Paris, 1912) pp. 233-243; J. M. Thompson, ed., op. cit., pp. 262-273. In English, Frank Maloy Anderson, ed., The Constitutions and Other Select Documents Illustrative of the History of France, 1789-1901 (Minneapolis, 1904), pp. 194-204; J. H. Stewart, ed., op. cit., pp. 481-490.

44)

For instance, art. 1 of Section II: "La Convention nationale est le centre unique de l'impulsion du gouvernement." See Moniteur (2 frimaire an II-November 22, 1793), XVIII, 478 (for Report), and J. M. Thompson, ed., op. cit., p. 263 (for law).

The sixty-nine articles of the law established clearly the functions and limits of power of every official or agency in the government. There could be no doubt that the Convention had given legal sanction to complete centralization of the state. Had this Law been properly enforced, the Mountain (with the help of local Jacobin Societies) would have effectively controlled the nation. While it was stated several times in the Law that the National Convention was the central authority, it was also legally recognized that the Committee of Public Safety was the executive power in the state. In practice, this gave considerable advantage to the latter, since the assembly hardly ever made decisions on matters not proposed by the Committee of Public Safety.

To acquaint the existing authorities with the Law, the Committee issued a set of twelve circulars of instruction. ⁴⁵⁾ Of these, seven are by Billaud-Varennes and five by Robespierre. Each is addressed to a particular agency; each starts out with praise and ended with recommendations for further courses of action. The idea basic to all the circulars is that of "purification". Each agency is admonished to clean its own house; at the same time, it is warned not to overstep the limits of its

45)

Reprinted in A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XXVII, 245-282. A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, IX, 161-186. Excerpts in P. Mautouchet, op. cit., pp. 243-255. Aulard, in loc. cit., XXVII, 247, says that these printed circulars are as rare as inédits.

power and stick to its proper functions. The representatives on mission are accused of an excess of zeal; ⁴⁶⁾ the departmental administrations, on the other hand, of laxity. ⁴⁷⁾ Throughout, appeal is made to the higher sentiments; the National Agents with the Communes are informed that their ranks will be purged, but,

" Placés entre la peine et le devoir, vous choisirez ce dernier, non par un sentiment de crainte auquel des coeurs républicains sont inaccessibles, mais par des motifs généreux, par amour du bien, par besoin de le faire." ⁴⁸⁾

At a later period, other circulars were sent out by the Committee. Three of these published by Aulard bear Billaud's signature in first place. One antedates the Law of 14 frimaire. The circular to the Popular Societies of 23 brumaire (November 13) was obviously a step preparatory to the reorganization of the government. ⁴⁹⁾ In violent language, it attacked the lukewarm supporters of the Terror.

" L'intrigue, [it said], a succédé au fédéralisme; ainsi, c'est toujours le sordide intérêt personnel, qui, sous des formes diverses, se montre avec confiance ...

L'ambition des places est la compagne ordinaire de la médiocrité, le véritable talent est modeste ...

Il est temps que le mérite soit connu, que les véritables talents soient discernés, que le patriotisme pur et désintéressé soit employé..."⁵⁰⁾

46) Ibid., XXVII, 258.

47)

Ibid., XXVII, 267. This circular reprinted in J.M. Thompson, ed., op. cit., pp. 274-277.

48)

Ibid., XVII, 278.

49)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, VIII, 392-394. Carnot's signature second.

50)

Ibid., VIII, 392.

The societies were ordered to make lists of capable and reliable administrators and send them to the Committee of Public Safety.⁵¹⁾ This was apparently not done, since a letter sent by the Committee to all representatives on mission, dated 20 pluviôse (February 8), requested the latter to make "correct" lists and to investigate why the Societies did not obey the instructions.⁵²⁾ The circular to the district administrations of 9 ventôse (February 27) dealt with various laws, which had evidently not been properly enforced.⁵³⁾ First, there is an admonition to collect all taxes honestly and send the receipts to the National Treasury without holding back any sums (in obedience to the decrees of 16 frimaire).⁵⁴⁾ Second, the administrations are ordered to enforce strictly the law of 17 frimaire, dealing with the confiscation of property of parents of émigrés.⁵⁵⁾ Third, similar instructions concerning two laws of 1 frimaire; one returning national goods and domains to the state,⁵⁶⁾ the other granting pensions to clergymen, who voluntarily resigned their positions.⁵⁷⁾ The last circular, of 23 pluviôse

51)

Ibid., VIII, 393.

52)

Ibid., X, 775-776. Only signatures those of Billaud and Collot.

53)

Ibid., XI, 46-47. Robespierre's signature second.

54)

Ibid., XI, 46.

55)

Idem.

56)

Ibid., XI, 47. This law cannot be found either in the official Collection Générale des Décrets par la Convention Nationale, or in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, or in the Moniteur.

57)

Idem.

(February 11), is the most interesting. Addressed to the National Agents with the district administrations in the territory occupied by rebels or the enemy, it reminded them to make lists of people to be outlawed after "liberation" of the district by the Republican armies.
58)

2. Against Left and Right Oppositions:

14 frimaire year II (December 4, 1793) - 1 ventôse year II (February 19, 1794).

It became now necessary to convince certain groups that the new administration was not going to ruin France. Purges on a wide scale would have frightened merchants and industrialists, and the Government would have lost their support. For the war effort, it was imperative that those in charge of essential production be well disposed toward the rulers of the state. National unity became more important than party platforms. But the Paris Commune and its spokesmen, the Père Duchesne in the lead, demanded vociferously that prominent men all over the country be put on trial. For the next two months, Billaud opposed these requests, while at the same time leaning far toward the Left to effect a conciliation between the Hébertists and the Committee of Public Safety. His motives were unselfish, yet, when he had to

58)

Ibid., XI, 70-71. Barère's signature second.

proceed against the enemies of France, he let personal grudges sway his judgment.

His conflict with the Left started over a proposal in the National Convention to establish a special section in the Committee of Public Safety to deal with political prisoners. The Hébertists were against it, since the sections of Paris would have had to give up control of the prisons. A person screened and released by the proposed Commission de Justice could not have been arrested again. The Committee of General Security, the Revolutionary Tribunal, and the administration of the prisons would all have to become subordinate agencies of the Committee of Public Safety. Chaumette, the Public Prosecutor of the Commune, invited members of the Revolutionary Committees of each section to discuss the matter with the municipal administration, as well as formulate other plans of collaboration. This was a sign that local authorities might disobey decisions of the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention. Consequently, Billaud denounced the meeting of the sections (14 frimaire-December 4). He declared that according to a law of September 17, 1793, the Revolutionary Committees of the sections were under supervision of the Committee of General Security, and were not permitted to meet with the municipal administration except by special permission of that Committee. ⁵⁹⁾ "Reconnaissant que le procureur de la

59)

Moniteur (15 frimaire an II-December 4, 1793), XVIII, 583. See also the comment in Paul Sainte-Claire Deville, La Commune de l'An II (Paris, 1946), p. 137.

commune a été induit en erreur par un mouvement de sensibilité",
 60) the Convention then cancelled the meeting. On the other hand,
 when the Commission de Justice was under discussion in the assembly,
 Billaud opposed its establishment. He feared that relatives of
 the accused would attempt to bribe members of the Commission.

" Si la Convention, [he said], eût conservé son énergie
 et sa fermeté, elle aurait passé à l'ordre du jour
 sur les réclamation des contre-révolutionnaires
 qu'on vous présenta à la barre. Il est certain que
 le comité ... ne peut répondre à toutes les
 sollicitations de l'aristocratie, qui ne méritent
 que notre animadversion." 61)

The Commission was not established. The left opposition should
 have been satisfied. But the reports of agents of the Ministry
 of the Interior show that a good many persons blamed Billaud for
 his attitude. Mercier, on 7 nivôse (December 27), found that
 "beaucoup de citoyens, au Jardin de la Révolution, le désapprouvaient
 et blâmaient sa conduite;" 62) while, on the next day, "on murmure
toujours contre le citoyen Billaud-Varenes." 63) Rolin, on
 on 8 nivôse (December 28), remarked that in the café Manouby,
 "des citoyens se permettaient ... de le soupçonner de vouloir aigrir
tous les esprits par sa trop grande rigueur." 64)

60)

Ibid. (15 frimaire an II-December 5, 1793), XVIII, 583.

61)

Ibid. (8 nivôse an II-December 28, 1793), XIX, 62. Session of 6 nivôse
 (December 26). Louis Blanc, Histoire de la Révolution Française (Paris,
 1861), X, 243, called the rejection of the Committee a great victory for
 the Hébertists. See also the comment in C.-A. Dauban, ed., La Démagogie
en 1793 à Paris (Paris, 1868), p. 580.

62)

Pierre Caron, ed., Paris pendant la Terreur. Rapports des Agents
Secrets du Ministère de l'Intérieur (Paris, 1910-1949), II, 34.

63)

Ibid., II, 60.

64)

Ibid., II, 63.

In the same vein, Billaud proceeded against the right. On 12 nivôse (January 1), Charlier reported in the National Convention that poor materials were used in the manufacture of uniforms and that defective munitions were sent to the front. Billaud rose to demand that the guilty furnishers be sent to the armies and executed in full view of the troops.⁶⁵⁾ When the assembly accepted his proposal, he requested that generals convicted of treason should suffer the same fate.

" Si Custine, [he said], eût été supplicié à la tête de l'armée du Nord, peut-être serions nous maintenant rentrés dans la Belgique, suivant le plan que nous en avions donné."⁶⁶⁾

Ten days later followed the Fabre d'Eglantine incident. The Hébertists had attacked Chabot and Fabre d'Eglantine as speculators for a long time. The assembly was probably justified in investigating men of such obvious dishonesty as these two. But the assembly would not have ordered the inquiry, had not the Left applied pressure. Vadier, himself one of the most radical members of the Mountain, opposed the whole procedure, since he felt that the central authorities should not accept dictation from the Père Duchesne.⁶⁷⁾ Danton, the original accuser of the two men, changed his mind after he became aware that the Convention had lost the

65) Moniteur(14 nivôse an II-January 3,1794),XIX,114.

66) Idem.

67) Ibid.(26 nivôse an II-January 15,1794),XIX,210.Session of 24 nivôse (January 13).

initiative. Billaud's remarks, in the style of Hébert, reestablished the equilibrium.

" Il faut dire à la Convention, [he began], que Fabre est un scélérat consommé ... Un rapport général va être fait; alors nous connaissons tous les coupables, la hache de la loi les frappera. Nous pouvons seulement désirer que ce rapport soit fait le plus promptement possible, afin que nous soyons débarrassés des coquins qui se trouvent dans le sein de la Convention, et qui ne paraissent servir la république que pour mieux la trahir (Vifs applaudissements)." 68)

Danton suggested that discussion might be postponed until a special Commission, set up for this investigation, might be ready to make its report. Billaud thereupon implied that Danton himself was under suspicion.

" Limiter un délai pour faire ce rapport, [he said], serait étrangler cette affaire, à laquelle on doit donner la plus grande publicité par cela seul que des représentants du peuple sont inculpés et se sont rendus indignes du caractère dont ils étaient revêtus. Malheur à celui qui a siégé à côté de Fabre d'Églantine, et qui est encore sa dupe; il a trompé les meilleurs patriotes" 69)

The Convention, to end the debate, voted to let the Committee of Public Safety take all necessary steps in the matter. Nothing was done for a while. But it became apparent that this short discussion had provoked a split between the Dantonist faction and the Committee of Public Safety. The latter was now between two fires. It decided to dispose first of the left opposition. It might not have been entirely coincidental that it struck Hébert and his followers, when Billaud was away from Paris on a mission.

68)

Idem.

69)

Idem.

3. Mission to Port (Saint)-Malo:

1 ventôse year II (February 19, 1794) - 19 ventôse year II
(March 9, 1794).

Since the Fall of 1793, the Committee of Public Safety had planned an audacious blow at English defenses. While it was unlikely that Great Britain could have been invaded directly, the Channel Islands (Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou, and Wight) on the other hand, seemed to be open to attack. The Islands were perfect hide-outs for spies and foreign agents. The Committee of Public Safety possessed detailed information about their inhabitants, particularly the many émigrés who had settled there since 1789. Two men in the Committee were particularly concerned with the operation: Jeanbon Saint-André, the naval expert,⁷⁰⁾ and Billaud-Vareannes, who intended to lead the expedition in person. Oscar Havard, a historian not unfriendly to the Revolution, maintained that Jeanbon, a Protestant and a freemason, objected to the whole enterprise, since he did not wish to alienate his contacts with England.⁷¹⁾ But whatever his personal feelings, he was eventually persuaded to go along with his colleagues.⁷²⁾ A decree of 12 pluviôse (January 31), ordered the

70)

The best and only good study of Jeanbon Saint-André is still L. Lévy-Schneider, Le Conventionnel Jeanbon Saint-André (2 vs. Paris, 1901)

71)

Oscar Havard, Histoire de la Révolution dans les Ports de Guerre (Paris, [1913]), II, 342.

72)

As the price for his cooperation, the Committee recalled from Brest representative Laignelot, whose radical measures Jeanbon had disliked. See L. Lévy-Schneider, op.cit., I, 702.

attack on the Channel Islands to take place between 1 and 12 ventôse (February 19-March 2). General Rossignol, of the Armées des Côtes-de-La Rochelle, de Cherbourg, and de l'Ouest, was to assemble a force of 20 000 infantry, 300 cavalry, and 200 artillery, in Port-Malo (recently renamed from Saint-Malo). Billaud and his good friend, Pierre-Charles Ruamps, were to join him as political advisers and civilian representatives. From the very beginning, the plans were changed, since the Committee of Public Safety vacillated between optimism and utter despair. An arrêté of 24 pluviôse (February 12), declared that if no more than 12 000 men could be equipped for the expedition, only one island should be occupied, preferably Guernsey.

The order of Billaud's mission is dated 29 pluviôse (February 17); on the same day, he also obtained a grant of 6 000 livres for expenses. The first of the two arrêtés gave

73)

For all these details, see Emile Gabory, L'Angleterre et la Vendée (Paris, 1930-1931), II, 182.

74)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 87. Carnot's handwriting. Billaud's signature first, Barère's second.

75)

Ibid., XI, 218.

76)

Ibid., XI, 213. According to Compte Rendu par J.N. Billaud (Paris, 1'an III), p.1, he spent 2 455 livres and returned the rest to the National Treasury.

Billand "unlimited" powers, "pour l'exécution des mesures prises par le Comité."⁷⁷⁾ Ruamps had already left Paris.⁷⁸⁾ The day of Billand's departure (1 ventôse-February 19), Ruamps wrote that he expected the letter to arrive before the 10th. of the month.⁷⁹⁾ But that would already have delayed the start of the expedition for 10 days. Jeanbon, who had come to Paris for consultations, did not return to Brest until 2 or 3 ventôse. He had to equip the ships and dispatch them to the various sea-ports for loading, before any expedition could start at all.

The forces of the West were actually much smaller than the authorities in Paris thought. In Brest, where the main fleet was anchored, epidemics had reduced the number of seaworthy and experienced crews.⁸⁰⁾ The Commander-in-Chief of the ships in Port-Malo, Admiral Pierre-François Cornic-Dumoulin, had 30 000 men under his command, but for personal reasons, refused to cooperate with his colleagues in Brest.⁸¹⁾ His first assistant, Captain Jean-Louis-Christophe Régnier, had been assigned his post by mistake

77)

A. Anlard, ed., Recueil, XI, 218.

78)

His order of mission is lost, but in his account of his expenses, he said that he departed on 23 pluviôse (February 11). See Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p. 543.

79)

A. Anlard, ed., Recueil, XI, 277. Letter Ruamps to Billand-Varennes, dated 1 ventôse.

80)

O. Havard, op. cit., II, 347-349.

81)

Ibid., II, 351.

82)

• he was not even a sailor, but an army officer. General Bessignol, who commanded the land forces, was equally unequipped to deal with the responsibilities which he had now to assume. To Ruamps' delight, he promised that 20 000 men would be ready on 4 or 5 ventôse (February 22 or 23). Yet, the representative had also the impression that "son accent et son œil n'annoncent pas de grands talents."⁸³⁾ Bessignol could not deliver what he had promised; his own army was very small, and he obtained no reinforcements. Also, counter-revolutionaries were active in this region.

"Le fanatisme, [wrote Ruamps], est à son comble dans les campagnes. Les prêtres disent actuellement la messe tous les jours. Plusieurs prêtres étrangers s'y sont retirés."⁸⁴⁾

Three months before, on 24 frimaire (December 14), the Committee of Public Safety wrote to Le Carpentier, representative in the Manche and the Orne, that it had learned that the British were going to attack Fort-Malo from the sea.⁸⁵⁾ And again, it wrote a sharp letter to the same, early in nivôse, saying that

"l'état de Fort-Malo est inquiétant aujourd'hui plus que jamais. Le Comité est instruit que cette ville est le centre d'une nouvelle conspiration. Méfie-toi

82)

Ibid., II, 349.

83)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 277. Letter quoted above.

84)

Ibid., XI, 278. Letter quoted above.

85)

Ibid., IX, 395. Letter Committee of Public Safety to Le Carpentier, dated 24 frimaire. Written by Billaud, signed only by him and Barère.

des hommes qui t'entourent. La trahison veille;
 aie les yeux ouverts, frappe les traîtres; un instant
 de sommeil perdrait la patrie..." 86)

Le Carpentier was recalled and Ruamps assigned to arrest the active spies and saboteurs, before they could betray the plans of the expedition to the Channel Islands to the British. Since the morale of the troops was already very low because of the very serious shortage of food, Ruamps was also ordered to organize a system of supplies. 87)

Billaud arrived in Port-Malo around 5 ventôse. He started by reorganizing the staffs of the various army units. Rossignol was without doubt one of the most incapable generals ever to command a French army. The biographer of Jeanbon Saint-André asserted that Rossignol and Hazard, his Chief-of-Staff, were suspect because of their Hébertist leanings and contacts. 88) But the General was never accused of this; not even during the Thermidorian Reaction, when he was on trial. But his haughty attitude and feeling that he was secure in his position, because of his political record, may have irritated Billaud, who was used to being treated with respect by high officers. Rossignol

86)

Ibid., IX, 777-778. Letter Committee of Public Safety to Le Carpentier, undated (Aulard says ca. 11 nivôse). Written and signed only by Billaud. Reprinted in the otherwise uninformative Jules Raize, Une Commune Bretonne pendant la Révolution: Histoire de Saint-Servan (Ille-et-Vilaine) de 1789 à 1800 (Paris, 1907), p. 157.

87)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 310. Letter Ruamps to Committee of Public Safety, dated 2 ventôse.

88)

L. Lévy-Schneider, op. cit., II, 739.

should certainly have been recalled; he remained inactive at a time when speed and efficiency were most needed. The two representatives noticed that neither munitions nor supplies had arrived in Port-Malo; the General retorted that everything was ready for the campaign; that the artillery had already embarked. 89) Billaud and Huamps were themselves infected with an optimism, which gave them illusions of French power. Consequently, they proposed to the Committee of Public Safety to attack Wight with 20 000 men, after Jersey and Guernsey had been conquered. "Souvenez vous [they wrote], dans la dernière guerre [the American Revolution or the campaign of 1792 ?], on employa moins de force pour aller plus loin encore." 90) And the freethinker Billaud even invoked Heaven, saying that "la cause de la liberté est trop juste pour que le ciel ne la seconde pas." 91) The answer from Paris brought them back to reality. Barère stated first, that more information should be gathered on Jersey and Guernsey, and second, that 10 000 Hessian troops on Wight, "qu'il ne s'agit pas de craindre, mais de vaincre." 92) should be taken into account. Yet, five days later, in their long report, the representatives still declared that,

89)

Ch.-L. Chassin, La Vendée Patriote, 1793-1800 (Paris, 1893), III, 467. Rossignol's own account, written in prison in year III, is reprinted on pp. 467-490.

90)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 397. Letter Representatives in Port-Malo to Committee of Public Safety, dated 7 ventôse.

91)

Ibid., XI, 396. Same letter as above.

92)

Ibid., XI, 440-441. Letter Committee of Public Safety to Representatives in Port-Malo, dated 9 ventôse.

" sans doute l'audace est souvent imprudente; mais il est des positions telles qu'on ne peut s'en tirer qu'en frappant les grands coups, et, s'ils font leur effet, jugez où cela peut nous conduire... d'autant mieux qu'on nous apprend... qu'en Angleterre la terreur est à son comble." 93)

But Billaud and Ruamps also gave a true picture of the situation in this letter. Over two-thirds of the soldiers in Port-Malo,

they declared, were without arms. 94) Civilians were starving; the army had barely enough to feed itself. 95) Everyone feared sabotage

and one baker had been arrested for selling rotten bread to the soldiers. 96) Rossignol was responsible for this state of affairs.

" Soit par maladie, [wrote Billaud], soit par autre cause, le général ne nous a pas tout à fait paru tel que nous devons le croire, d'autant qu'à l'extérieur rien n'annonce qu'il soit indisposé." 97)

Rossignol claimed that he had been sick for two weeks; after a brief meeting with Billaud, he sent his Chief-of-Staff (Hazard) to visit the representatives. 98) The latter complained that they had

not been treated with proper honors. 99) Finally, Rossignol recalled,

93) -----
Ibid., XI, 535. Letter Representatives in Port-Malo to Committee of Public Safety, dated 14 ventôse.

94) Ibid., XI, 537. Same letter as above.

95) Ibid., XI, 538.

96) Ibid., XI, 533.

97) Idem.

98) Ch.-L. Chassin, op. cit., III, 468.

99) Idem. See the letter on this subject, dated 10 ventôse, from Billaud to Rossignol, reprinted in Henri Wallon, Les Représentants du Peuple en Mission et la Justice Révolutionnaire dans les Départements en l'an II (1792-1794) (Paris, 1889-1890), II, 474.

" Ils, [Billaud and Ruamps], me reçurent avec cet air de gouvernants et d'auteurs, qui me fit bien voir, qu'ils avaient dessein de m'attaquer. Ils firent arrêter un de mes courriers, père de quatre enfants et homme de la Révolution depuis 89, ... Après ma réclamation, ... ils lui dirent qu'ils savaient bien que c'était moi qui lui avais dit de faire répandre le bruit que l'embarquement n'aurait pas lieu ...

Ce trait m'annonça quelque menée sourde contre moi. Je fus chez eux avec tous les généraux. Ils tinrent plusieurs propos, et dirent que tous les grands conspirateurs n'étaient pas encore frappés; qu'il y en avait encore à la tête des armées; mais qu'ils ne tarderaient pas à être découverts.

D'abord, je ne pris pas cela pour moi, parce que j'étais sûr de ne pas avoir trahi mon pays... Je voyais en tous les deux de véritables despotes....

Ils me parlaient de guillotine si souvent que cela me dégoûtait" 100)

Finally, after eight days, Rossignol offered his resignation, but it was not accepted. 101)

Another unhappy incident took place. On 13 ventôse (March 3), a parade was held. A battalion from Paris did not shout "Vive la République" with great enthusiasm. When questioned, the men answered that they were volunteers and that they had been promised by Lindet that they would be discharged after a punitive expedition into the Calvados. 102) Billaud and Ruamps recognized

100)

Ch.-L. Chassin, op. cit., III, 468-469.

101)

Ibid., III, 470.

102)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 534. Another account is in Armand Montier, Robert Lindet (Paris, 1899), p. 198 n.l. Lindet's connection with this matter brings out the fact that the battalion belonged to the Revolutionary Army. It would not have been within his power to dispatch or transfer regular army units.

that "La position était difficile," but, "une contenance sage et ferme les [the soldiers] fit rentrer dans l'ordre." After returning to their headquarters, the two representatives decreed that this battalion would be sent home immediately. The order stated, that

" Considérant que l'obéissance et le dévouement sont le premier devoir du soldat républicain ...
Considérant que la patrie compte assez de défenseurs généreux pour se passer de ceux à qui la loi permet de se retirer;
Considérant enfin que le républicanisme des Parisiens ne permet pas qu'on expose aucun de leurs concitoyens à démentir le sublime enthousiasme et à ternir tant de gloire, ...
Ils [the soldiers] partiront dans les 24 heures; ils laisseront leurs armes; ils emporteront leur solde payée." 105)

There can be no question that this small defection did not actually weaken the number of armed forces. But it demonstrated that the army commanders in Port-Malo were unable to inspire loyalty in their troops.

Consequently, Billaud and Ruamps made changes in the command. Rossignol retained his post for the time being, but young officers known personally to the two representatives were selected for his staff. These men all favored the descent on Wight, which, according to Lévy-Schneider, Billaud and Ruamps were still considering.

104) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XI, 534.

104) This order is reprinted in full in H. Wallon, op. cit., II, 475, as well as in Bonnal des Ganges, Les Représentants du Peuple en Mission près les Armées 1791-1797 (Paris, 1898-1899), 576-577.

105) H. Wallon, op. cit., II, 475.

106) L. Lévy-Schneider, op. cit., II, 738.

Jeanbon Saint-André in Brest was unwilling to participate in that uncertain venture. Alarmed, he wrote to the Committee of Public Safety in Paris. The latter warned the representatives in Port-Malo that a naval movement toward Wight would make it possible for the British fleet to surround the expeditionary force. 107)

" Il serait utile, [wrote Barère], ... d'assurer la conservation des îles de Jersey et de Guernesey... et de ne faire sur l'île de Wight, si tout est bien disposé, qu'une invasion subite pour effrayer Londres, car vous ne pouvez faire un établissement permanent

Le point essentiel, c'est d'assurer le succès de la première opération... vous ne devez pas la compromettre en l'approchant trop de flottes ennemies, sans avoir les plus grands moyens." 108)

All these matters delayed the expedition. Not only did supplies not arrive, but the weather was so bad that the ships could not leave their harbors. After shifting generals around, arresting some and promoting others, Billaud and Ruamps saw that nothing could be accomplished at this time. On 19 ventôse (March 9), Billaud returned to Paris. In a written statement, the Committee of Public Safety postponed the expedition indefinitely:

" Le Comité de salut public, [it said], ne voulant pas compromettre la flotte au moment de l'équinox, arrête qu'elle ne sortira pas du port de Brest, avant qu'elle en ait reçu l'ordre ultérieurement, et que ce délai sera employé à faire tous les apprêts nécessaires pour combattre plus efficacement les ennemis de la République." 109)

107) Idem. Reprint of Letter Committee of Public Safety to Billaud and Ruamps, dated 10 ventôse, and marked "Pièce secrète". It cannot be found in Aulard's collection.

108)

Idem.

109)

Ibid., II, 739. Not in Aulard's collection. Arrêté du 21 ventôse, written by Billaud and signed by him in second place; first signature Barère's.

Ruamps remained in Port-Malo. He was ordered to watch Rossignol closely; also to "recueillit de nouvelles preuves de sa coalition avec ces conspirateurs contre la liberté du peuple et la sûreté de la représentation nationale," (meaning the Hébertists).¹¹⁰⁾ The General was dismissed on 8 floréal (April 27), but arrested only early in thermidor and, after a long imprisonment, acquitted for lack of evidence. The Committee kept the invasion of the Channel Islands on its agenda, but the propitious moment had passed. Billaud declared later that,

" pendant les quatre derniers mois qui ont précédé le 9 thermidor, chargé de suivre l'exécution de ce même projet, je me suis spécialement occupé de toutes les recherches, de tous les plans, en un mot, de tous les détails que nécessitoit une si vaste entreprise." ¹¹¹⁾

110)

Ibid., II, 740 n.2. Letter Committee of Public Safety to Ruamps, dated 24 ventôse, written and signed first by Billaud. Not in Aulard's collection.

111)

Réponse de J.N.Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, Aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse an III), p.10.

88

4. The Fall of the Factions:

20 ventôse - 1 floréal year II (March 10-April 20, 1794).

Billaud returned in time for the elimination of the left
 112) opposition. The experience with Rossignol had taught him that
 inefficient administrators (and commanders) would retain their
 positions as long as certain factions were able to impose
 appointments on the central authorities. He probably agreed with
 his colleagues that national unity could not be achieved as long
 as this situation lasted. To destroy Hébert and his followers,
 he gave publicity to a truly fantastic story. He claimed, in
 an address to the Jacobin Club on 24 ventôse (March 14; the evening
 after the arrest of the Hébertists) 113), that radicals in the
 Paris Commune had organized a revolt in the prisons of Paris, with
 the intention of taking over the Government with the help of the
 Revolutionary Army. This "Conspiracy of the Prisons" was intended
 by the Committee of Public Safety to discredit Hébert. 114) In

112)

The whole problem of the Hébertist opposition, first discussed in
 [Jean] Villeneuve, L'Anarchie et le Comité de Salut Public en 1793
 (Paris, 1885), has since been examined by Albert Mathiez in two
 articles, "Etudes sur la Terreur: Les Citra et les Ultra", and "Etudes
 sur la Terreur: La Chute des Factions (Germinal an III)", Annales
Historiques de la Révolution Française, III (1926), 513-535, and IV (1927),
 135-148, respectively. The two reliable biographies of Hébert, Paul
 d'Estrée, Le Père Duchesne: Hébert et la Commune de Paris (1792-1794)
 (Paris, [1912]), and Gérard Walter, Hébert et le Père Duchesne (Paris,
 1946), are part of the movement of rehabilitation of that personality.
 113)

It is in Moniteur (28 ventôse an II - March 18, 1794), XIC, 720.
 Reprinted in A. Aulard, ed., Sociétés, V, 683-685. Excerpts in G. Walter, op.
cit., p. 230.

114)

See Albert Mathiez, La Révolution Française (Paris, 1922-1927), III,
 150-153.

the prevailing atmosphere of hunger and uncertainty, many otherwise reasonable men became hysterical at the mere thought of a Restoration of the Monarchy. Hébert, as Assistant Public Prosecutor, came into contact with prominent Royalists in the prisons. He was obviously in an ideal position to organize a "Conspiracy." Not, however, Danton, or General Beauharnais, against whom the same charges were revived, in messidor and early thermidor respectively. Hébert lost all support among the people; yet, neither he nor any other person were ever tried for aiding prisoners to escape. Neither did the number of executions rise appreciably in ventôse and germinal. The story of revolt in the prisons was evidently a trick used by the Committee of Public Safety to discredit its opponents. But as told by Billaud at the Jacobin Club, it sounded convincing to those who were ready to believe the worst anyway.

" Il est des traits, [he said], qui caractérisent ces hommes et qui vont apprendre au peuple qu'en révolution il ne faut jamais idolâtrer personne. Ces hommes atroces ... allaient chercher leurs complices au fond des prisons. Ils devaient distribuer des armes aux scélérats qui ont déjà combattu contre le peuple; ils devaient les faire venir aux Jacobins pour les inonder de leur sang et de celui du peuple ... On a mis en arrestation

115)

See the arrêté of the Committee of Public Safety of 7 messidor (June 25), in A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XIV, 518. Signed only by Billaud, Barère and Lindet (in that order), it directed the police administration and courts to "find out" who, in the prisons, was engaged in the "conspiracy!"

116)

See Donald M. Greer, The Incidence of the Terror During the French Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p. 166.

les hommes qui, en parlant de la liberté, avaient le royalisme dans le coeur ... Déjà les mesures étaient prises pour égorger une partie des prisonniers; l'on avait mis à part ceux à qui la liberté devait être rendue pour verser le sang du peuple. La pénurie momentanée des subsistances est le résultat des efforts des conjurés; les denrées ont été enfouies ou perdues pour en priver le peuple et l'exciter au désespoir. Des hommes de l'armée révolutionnaire étaient déjà consignés pour combattre contre la liberté ... Tels étaient les projets sinistres des hommes qui ont trop longtemps abusé le peuple; ils seront punis de leur scélératesse " 117)

Brochet, the agent of the Ministry of the Interior, remarked that, on this occasion, Billaud

" a parlé avec beaucoup de force ... La société a souvent interrompu l'orateur pour le couvrir d'applaudissements ou pour témoigner toute l'indignation dont elle était pénétrée. "Jurons," a dit en finissant Billaud-Varennes, "jurons de ne faire grâce à aucun conspirateur!" Ce serment solennel a été fait avec joie, et les tribunes l'ont répété avec la plus grande énergie." 118)

According to other agents, the speech was publicly read in some sections of Paris the next day. One of them noticed that

"à chaque phrase, ... les femmes poussaient de longs soupirs et, en se regardant, disaient: "Oh mon Dieu! s'en serait-on jamais douté." 120)

117)

A. Aulard, ed., Société, V, 683-684.

118)

C.-A. Dauban, Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869), p. 237. A slight different version, possibly by another agent, in Adolphe Schmidt, ed Tableaux de la Révolution Française (Leipzig, 1864), II, 151.

119)

C.-A. Dauban, op. cit., p. 244; A. Schmidt, ed., op. cit., II, 165.

120)

Idem.

On 3 germinal (March 23), the Hébertists were executed. The Committee turned immediately against the Right. Albert Mathiez' investigations have brought to light the details of the opposition to the Committee of Public Safety, the web of intrigue and speculation, of which Chabot, Basire and Fabre d'Eglantine were the masterminds. ¹²¹⁾ The fact that their operations were known and tolerated for many months gave these men a sense of security. In the "confession" written by Chabot after his arrest on 27 brumaire (November 17), he stated that Billaud knew of his speculations all along and that someone had told him: "Il y en a beaucoup qui sont entrés dans les marchés de bled; Billaud-Varennes lui-même était intéressé." ¹²²⁾ It never occurred to these businessmen that their shady operations would eventually be stopped. The other leaders of this right opposition were also implicated, but they could not be tried on charges of speculation. Yet, it was necessary for the Committee of Public Safety to dispose of them in some way. Danton and his friends were tired of the restrictions imposed upon the French people. Their revolutionary ardor waning, they were in a position to use their oratorical talents in the Convention against the Robespierriest faction, or to gain popular support for a

121)

Some of Mathiez' major studies deal with this subject. Apart from the works mentioned below, reference should be made to Etudes Robespierriestes: I. La corruption parlementaire sous la Terreur (Paris, 1917); "Etudes sur la Terreur: Les Indulgents", Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, III (1926), 417-438; La Révolution et les Etrangers. Cosmopolitisme et Défense Nationale (Paris, 1918); and Autour de Danton (Paris, 1926).

122)

A. Mathiez, Un Procès de Corruption sous la Terreur: L'Affaire de la Compagnie des Indes (Paris, 1920), p. 87.

negotiated peace. But that could not be permitted in a centralized state. Moreover, certain members of the Committee of Public Safety saw an opportunity to satisfy personal grudges of long standing.

"Billaud-Varennes ne me pardonne pas d'avoir été mon secrétaire," said Danton during his trial. ¹²³⁾ This could, however, not have been the only reason for Billaud's unreasonable hatred against his former friend. ¹²⁴⁾ Was it true that he became aware of Danton's attempts to force the Convention to conclude peace with England and accept an English prince as Regent of France? According to Mathiez, Louis Comte, an agent of the Committee of Public Safety, had informed Billaud of discussions between Danton's emissary, Naudet, and the suspect General Wimpffen in the Vendée, on the subject of a Regency for the Duke of York. The fact was confirmed by the General's adjutant, who had gone into hiding in

123) Notes de Topino-Lebrun, Juré au Tribunal Révolutionnaire de Paris, sur le Procès de Danton et sur Fouquier-Tinville, ed. J.-F.-E. Chardoillet (Paris, 1875), p. 19. Topino-Lebrun, an artist by profession, was disqualified as a juror for this trial, since he owed his appointment to Dantonist connections. Present as a spectator, he wrote the minutes of the trial and drew some sketches.

124) See Lawrence Gronlund, Ca ira, or Danton in the French Revolution (Boston, 1888), p. 189, for this interesting argument: "It was on principle that he pursued Danton: it was the hatred of the Terrorist to the man of pity. And that hatred dated already from the September Massacres."

125) Paris. But this whole affair was never mentioned at Danton's trial. 126) As for the "Conspiracy of the Prisons", the report of police administrator Wichterich on the subject, was accepted by Fouquier-Tinville, but not used as evidence. 127) To return to Billaud's motives: Courtois de l'Aube, a friend of the defendant, said at one time that "Billaud devait de l'argent à Danton, et se brouilla avec lui pour cela." 128) Finally, a modern historian argued that Billaud wanted to remove Robespierre. In order to do that, he had to eliminate first Danton, who had always supported the latter. 129) Courtois cannot be believed; he wrote his observations during the Thermidorian Reaction, when he was one of the chief prosecutors against the former members of the Committee of Public Safety. D'Héricault's thesis, on the other hand, is not based upon evidence and must also be dismissed. Since Danton's

125)

Albert Mathiez, Danton et la Paix (Paris, 1919), p. 198, and the same author's Procès, p. 126. See also D. Guérin, op. cit., I, 380.

126)

The studies of Dr. J. F. E. Robinet, Danton's chief apologist (before Aulard), are very useful here, although they present little new material and are no profound interpretations. Le Procès des Dantonistes (Paris, 1879) is the best discussion of the charges. The same argument is in Danton Homme d'Etat (Paris, 1889). For a new approach, see Louis Gandel, "Le Procès de Danton," La Révolution Française, XC (1937), 1-29.

127)

Charles Berriat Saint-Prix, La Justice Révolutionnaire à Paris, Bordeaux, Brest, Lyon, Nantes, Orange, Strasbourg (Paris, 1861), p. 97. This reliable work was later used by Robinet and others.

128)

Alphonse Aulard, L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française: Les Orateurs de la Législative et de la Convention (Paris, 1885-1886), II, 486.

129)

Charles d'Héricault, La Révolution de Thermidor. Robespierre et le Comité de Salut Public (2ème. éd., Paris, 1878), p. 128.

remarks concerning Billaud were also somewhat less than compliments it may be concluded that the two men were temperamentally unfit to be friends, and that a clash between them was bound to occur sooner or later. Courtois reported Danton as saying,

" que les honneurs n'avaient point changé Billaud, mais qu'ils avaient au contraire que mis plus à découvert son penchant à la scélératesse.

Entre Billaud et moi, disait-il, il y a un noeud gordien de ressentiment qui ne se dénouera que par une grande catastrophe ..." 130)

Camille Desmoulins, on the other hand, seems to have enjoyed his feud with the members of the Committee of Public Safety 131) He made an enemy of Billaud as early as July 1793. Desmoulins' friend was General Arthur Dillon. As Commander-in-Chief of the Armée des Ardennes in October 1792, he had permitted the Landgrave of Hesse to evacuate his troops, in return for a promise to withdraw from Prussian service for a year. 132) Arrested on July 13, 1793, Dillon's name figured prominently in Barère's report of August 1, among those engaged in negotiations with the British. 133)

130)

Dr. Robinet, ed., "Notes et Souvenirs de Courtois dell'Aube, député à la Convention Nationale," La Révolution Française, XIII (1887), 814-815.

131)

The two good biographies are Edouard Fleury, Études Révolutionnaires Camille Desmoulins et Roch Marcandier, La Presse Révolutionnaire (2ème. éd., 2 vs., Paris, 1852); and Jules Claretie, Camille Desmoulins. Lucile Desmoulins (Paris, 1875). Violet Methley, Camille Desmoulins (New York, 1915), is unreliable.

132)

See the Correspondence between the two commanders reprinted in Moniteur (October 12, 1792), XIV, 182; Montmer-Ternaux, Histoire de la Terreur. 1792-1794 (Paris, 1863-1881), IV, 205. This was a custom of war in the eighteenth century. As for promises to refrain from fighting a particular enemy for a stipulated time, they were exacted even from the future Marshals of Napoleon. See comte Vigier, Davout. Maréchal d'Empire (1770-1823) (Paris, 1898), I, 58.

133)

Moniteur (August 7, 1793), XVII, 325-328.

Billaud had met General Dillon during his mission to Châlons-sur-Marne. The latter had been indiscreet. Desmoulins issued a pamphlet on July 27, 1793, commonly referred to as a Lettre au général Dillon.¹³⁴⁾ It contained the following passage:

" Aussi pourquoi, pourquoi avez-vous dit en présence de maintes députés que lorsque Billaud était Commissaire du pouvoir exécutif au mois de septembre dans votre armée, il avait eu un jour une telle peur qu'il vous avait requis de tourner le dos et qu'il vous avait toujours regardé de travers et comme un traître pour lui avoir fait voir l'ennemi? Jugez si ce bilieux patriote vous pardonne d'avoir dit cette plaisanterie qu'il ne me pardonnera pas d'avoir répétée." ¹³⁵⁾

Billaud did not forget; Dillon was sent to his death on 24 germinal (April 13), eight days after his friends. Jealousy moved Desmoulins to continue his attacks. There exist from his hand two Fragments, written late in nivôse.¹³⁶⁾ Desmoulins said "que je ne saurois pardonner au gouvernement révolutionnaire de Billaud-Varenes" that the latter had not given Desmoulins credit for his discovery of the Hébertist conspiracy.¹³⁷⁾ In fact, he said,

134)

Full title: Réponse de Camille Desmoulins, député de Paris à la Convention, au général Dillon, en prison aux Madelonnettes.

135)

E. Flaury, op. cit., II, 17; J. Claretie, op. cit., p. 267.

136)

Le Vieux Cordelier. Edition complète et critique, ed. Henri Clavet et Albert Mathiez (Paris, 1936), pp. 271-288. These Fragments were first published in Edouard Carteron, Complément de l'Encyclopédie moderne, vol. VI, 1863, article "Indulgents".

137)

Ibid., p. 271.

Robespierre and the other members of the Committee would not have been able to bring anyone to trial, had Desmoulins not given all the necessary information.

" Depuis huit jours, [he said], Saint-Just et Billaud ouvrent enfin un œil; et l'autre est encore fermé par la passion et leur orgueil blessé ...
 Exécrable Billaud! Est-ce donc qu'on me fera un crime d'avoir plus de sagacité que toi à découvrir cette dernière conspiration? Est-ce qu'on me fera un crime de m'être trouvé à tous les combats des patriotes contre les aristocrates, depuis le 12 juillet [1789]; tandis que j'apprends qu'il y avait deux ans que la Révolution était commencée que tu n'avais encore rien fait pour elle et que, d'avocat obscur et inconnu, un beau jour tu t'es faisais écrivain révolutionnaire ... " 138)

Furthermore, in no. VII of the Vieux Cordelier, which was never published, Desmoulins featured a list of those who were helping the English by causing internal dissention in France. Billaud's name could be found near the top. 139) These insults, more or less of a personal character, in a way justified Billaud's wish to remove a character assassin, who could damage his popularity. 140)

Rivalry also existed between him and Fabre d'Eglantine. It appears that in September 1793, when Fabre's project for a Republican calendar was discussed in the Convention, Billaud proposed

138)

Ibid., pp. 284-287.

139)

Ibid., p. 246. Previously in the edition of the Vieux Cordelier in Mémoires sur les journées de Thermidor, eds. Barrière et Berville (Paris, 1825), p. 161; and Oeuvres de Camille Desmoulins, ed. [Jules Claretie] (Paris, 1874), II, 284.

140)

The best biography is Louis Jacob, Fabre d'Eglantine, chef des "fripons" (Paris, 1946), unfavorable, but based on reliable evidence.

one of his own, in which the months were patriotically called
 "république", "régénération", "liberté", "justice", etc. 141) It
 must have irked a member of the Committee of Public Safety that,
 while Fabre's project was accepted, his own was not even discussed.
 The police spy Riouffe also reported that Fabre feared that Billaud
 might steal a play which he had written in prison, and publish it
 as his own work. 142)

There remain Philippeaux, Delacroix, Chabot and Basire. 143)
 The "confessions" of the last two were enough to convict them.
 Delacroix was Robespierre's personal enemy. He was, moreover, so
 much opposed to centralization, that even Danton, his old friend,
 denounced him in the Jacobin Club on 2 nivôse (December 22). 144)

 141)

Jacques Godechot, Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution
 et l'Empire (Paris, 1951), p. 364.

142)

Honoré baron Riouffe, "Mémoires d'un Détenu, pour servir à
 l'histoire de la tyrannie de Robespierre," in Mémoires sur les
 Prisons, eds. Barrière et Berville (Paris, 1823), p. 69. The memoirs,
 probably written in ventôse year III, are typical Thermidorian
 propaganda.

143)

On Philippeaux, Paul Mautouchet, Le Conventionnel Philippeaux
 (Paris, 1900) is well documented, but so much biased in his favor that
 it gives a very one-sided picture. On Chabot, vicomte de Bonald,
François Chabot, membre de la Convention (Paris, 1908), does not manage
 to rehabilitate this strange personality, despite all his efforts.

144)

See the well-balanced A. Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels
 (Paris, 1916) pp. 492-493. Before the indictment, Billaud ordered his
 friend, Garnier de Saintes, to investigate complaints by the Popular
 Society of Le Mans against Philippeaux.

Hérault de Séchelles stood slightly apart from the Dantonist group, although he was also involved in speculations. ¹⁴⁵⁾ Buchez et Roux gave a most curious reason for his downfall. They stated that there was a spy among the members of the Committee of Public Safety. Letters from the Convention with information valuable to the enemy, but unsigned, were found on Spanish officers captured in Toulon. Robespierre suspected Billaud; Billaud blamed Hérault de Séchelles, who, when confronted with the evidence, ¹⁴⁶⁾ resigned from the Committee (on 11 nivôse=December 31). Mathiez reexamined the whole question and came to the conclusion that ¹⁴⁷⁾ this was not the reason for Hérault's arrest and trial.

Danton's enemies worked hard to build a case against him.

" Billaud, Barère, Vadier, Voulland, Amar se liguèrent, [sais Courtois], pour précipiter la chute de Danton, non pas en l'attaquant à force ouverte, mais en le minant sourdement ... Ils travaillèrent une année entière au succès de leur attaque. Ils fournirent à Saint-Just toutes les notes qui servirent à la contexture de son rapport ... " ¹⁴⁸⁾

145)

Emile Dard, Un Epicurien sous la Terreur: Hérault de Séchelles (1759-1794) (Paris, 1907) is much better than Ernest Daudet, La Roman d'un Conventionnel: Hérault de Séchelles et les Dames de Bellegarde (Paris, 1904). The latest research is incorporated in Louis Gaudel, "Jean-Marie Hérault de Séchelles," La Révolution Française, LXXXVIII (1935), 4-45.

146)

P.-J.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, ed., Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française (Paris, 1834-1838), XXI, 24.

147)

Albert Mathiez, Etudes Robespierristes: II. La Conspiration de l'étranger (Paris, 1918), p. 167.

148)

Dr. Robinet, ed., loc. cit., XIII, 809.

Some notes in Robespierre's handwriting are the only account of the meeting of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security during the night of 9 to 10 germinal (March 29-30). Billaud took the lead. He convinced the hesitant Robespierre that it was necessary to bring Danton to trial instantly; that the matter should not be delayed for as long as one day. Finally, it was Billaud who signed the order of arrest in the first place. It should be noted that, unlike in the case of the Hébertistes, not all members of the faction were prosecuted. Some prominent friends of Danton, notably Courtois de l'Aube and Thuriot, remained at liberty. Later, these men took their revenge. But in germinal, the Dantonist "machine" was effectively destroyed. One arrêté issued by the Committee of Public Safety on 9 germinal (March 29), dissolved the Revolutionary Committee of the section de Marat, the Dantonist stronghold; another of the same date dismissed

149)

The story is retold in J.B. Merton, The Bastille Falls and Other Studies of the French Revolution (New York, 1936), p. 242, and J.M. Thompson, Robespierre (New York, 1936), II, 152.

150)

It is in A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XII, 283. This order concerned only Danton, Desmoulins, Delacroix and Philippeaux (the other defendants were already in prison). It is in Amar's handwriting and signed in second place by Vadier. Of the twenty members of the two Committees present, only Lindet and Rühl refused to affix their signatures to the document.

151)

Ibid., XII, 259. Billaud's signature first; Robespierre's handwriting and second signature.

152)
 the top men in the police administration of the Paris Commune;
 a third of 16 germinal (April 5) ordered the arrest of Dufourny,
 the Dantonist in the departmental administration of Paris. 153)

On 16 germinal (April 5), the leaders of the right opposition
 were executed. On 1 floréal (April 20), Billaud read his Report
 on the state of the nation before the National Convention. 154)

Since "le comité de salut public a senti la nécessité de fixer
 enfin les bases du système qui doit régler notre politique." 155)

Billaud felt called upon to explain the aims of the administration.
 The speech itself is not very important. Empty rhetoric manages
 to conceal whatever profound thoughts it might contain. References
 to personalities of Antiquity abound (Tarquinius, Caesar, Catilina).
 The main theme is virtue; a quality which the executed leaders
 of the factions had apparently lacked. The efforts, Billaud
 maintains, of the people have produced the Revolution.

152)

Idem. Robespierre's writing; Billaud first, Couthon second.

153)

Ibid., XII, 407. Billaud's handwriting and first signature; Lacoste
 (of the Committee of General Security) second; thirteen other
 signatures from members of both Committees.

154)

Reprinted in Moniteur (2 floréal an II-April 21, 1794), XX, 263-268
Journal des Débats et des Décrets, LIX, 30-35, 37-45. Just mentioned
 briefly in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XXXVI, 20. The
Courrier de l'Égalité, nos. 615, 616 (6, 7 floréal), VIII, 197-198, 202-204,
 has about two-thirds; the rest was promised but never printed. Later
 reprinted in [G.N. Lallemand, ed.], op. cit., XIV, 137-154; Buchez et Roux,
 eds., op. cit., XXXII, 335-353. Large excerpts in Henri Wallon, Le
 Tribunal Révolutionnaire. 10 mars 1793-31 mai 1795 (Paris, 1880), II, 70-
 74. There exist no reprints of more recent date.

155)

Moniteur (2 floréal an II-April 21, 1794), XX, 263.

" C'est cette haine profonde de la tyrannie qui ... soutenant, en dépit de tant d'intrigues, l'opinion publique au plus haut degré, vous a entraînés dans ce tourbillon lumineux pour vous placer à une élévation qui met déjà vos ennemis sous vos pieds. Maintenant il s'agit de s'y maintenir ..." 156)

The people, virtuous as they are, can also easily be misled. Billau recognizes the right of revolution, but also believes that the end justifies the means.

" Tant que l'homme probe, [he, says], respire en paix et que le méchant est seul comprimé, le gouvernement fait son devoir. La tyrannie commence le jour où l'on est prosérit parce qu'on est pur ou qu'on veut résister à l'oppression Si vous craignez l'échafaud, songez qu'on y arrive à grands pas en marchant d'erreurs en écarts, et bientôt de débits en forfaits." 157)

The enemies of the people are still active, particularly in the upper ranks of the armies. Not only are the generals constantly plotting with the enemies of France against the Republic, but some have even ambitions to become military dictators.

" L'histoire nous apprend, [Billaud continues], que c'est par là que toutes les républiques ont péri.. Le gouvernement militaire est le pire après la théocratie... [it] n'a pour ministres que la viole et la mort; c'est un glaive laissé dans les mains de la cruauté personifiée; c'est un tigre altéré de sang, et redoutable encore quand il est enchaîné."}

The duty of the Convention is consequently to continue its rigorous persecution of all unpatriotic officers.

156)

Idem.

157)

Ibid., XX, 264-265.

158)

Ibid., XX, 265.

If this is done, victory becomes a foregone conclusion. The neutral countries are ready to join France in its crusade for the Rights of Man; Austria lost hope of a Restoration after the conspirators Hébert, Danton and Fabre d'Eglantine were punished.¹⁵⁹⁾

" Et toi aussi, tremble, Albion! l'heure de ta décadence n'est pas éloignée ... car nous avons aussi des flottes prêtes à mettre à la voile, et de plus des républicains ... pour vaincre les vils esclaves d'un despote imbécile ..." 160)

This final victory can also be speeded up by a more intense concentration upon the war effort within the country. "Republican" education, "exempte d'obscénités et ne retracant que des scènes de vertu et de civisme," should go hand in hand with economic well-being.¹⁶¹⁾ Billaud repeats his theory, expressed in the Elémens du Republicanisme, that no one in the state should be left without means of support and that every person should have a chance for economic advancement.¹⁶²⁾ After this is accomplished, he concludes, the people would be tied completely to the Revolution and would follow their leaders to the inevitable victory over the powers of despotism.¹⁶³⁾ On the whole, the speech is simply a reflection of the mind of the rulers of France in the Spring of 1794. It also contained a warning to the French people that

159)

Ibid., XX, 266.

160)

Idem.

161)

Ibid., XX, 267.

162)

Idem.

163)

Ibid., XX, 268.

the fight is not yet over and that it is necessary to endure further restrictions and deprivations. The Report was enthusiastically received; its delivery frequently interrupted by applause. ¹⁶⁴⁾ Eventually the Convention decreed

" qu'appuyée sur les vertus du peuple français, elle fera triompher la république démocratique et punira sans pitié tous ses ennemis." ¹⁶⁵⁾

5. The Divisions in the Committee of Public Safety:

2 floréal - 7 thermidor year II
(April 21-July 25, 1794).

When Courtois de l'Aube asked Danton to speak up against Robespierre and his friends, the latter replied:

" Ne nous pressons pas; il vaut mieux laisser aux tigres le soin de se dévorer entre eux que de se mettre de la partie afin de les inviter à se jeter sur nous." ¹⁶⁶⁾

The prophecy was wrong only insofar as the differences within the Committee of Public Safety did not come to light until after Danton's death, or maybe just because of it. The conflict grew increasingly bitter, leading eventually to Robespierre's downfall on 9 thermidor (July 27), and the end of the Terror.

164)

Idem.

165)

Idem.

166)

Dr. Robinet, ed., "Notes et souvenirs de Courtois de l'Aube, député à la Convention nationale," La Révolution Française, XIII (1887), 810.

The factor of an actual agreement among certain members of the Convention and the Committees of Public Safety and General Security to destroy Robespierre is established beyond doubt. But there is no proof at all that Billaud participated in all these intrigues. This is important. A great deal has been written about the activities of various people during the critical hours of 9 thermidor. But the events leading up to the crisis have been partly disregarded. It is true, certain incidents cannot be interpreted correctly, since many documents have been lost. The historian lacks also the most essential information on some important personalities, information which, incidentally, is not at all difficult to obtain. He knows very little of Couthon, Barère and Collot-d'Herbois, to mention only three important members of the Committee of Public Safety. 167) It is strange that Robespierre's closest collaborators should have been thus neglected. It is no less difficult to understand, why the members

167)

Robert Leunay, Barère de Vieuzac (L'Anacréon de la Guillotine) (Paris, 1929), avoids at least the most obvious errors and misinterpretations. But it is hardly an adequate biography. Leo Hershey, "Barère, Anacreeon of the Guillotine," South Atlantic Quarterly Review, XXVI (1927), 266-279, an excellent analysis, is unfortunately limited by its size. There exists even less on Couthon and Collot-d'Herbois, although certain episodes in the lives of these men have been examined by scholars. Moreover, insight into Couthon's character may be gained from the letters to his constituents, Correspondence de Georges Couthon, ed. L.F. Mège (Paris, 1872).

168)

of the Committee of General Security have never been examined. Yet, this Committee was more actively engaged in building up a case against Robespierre than the other, more celebrated one. There is great need for an investigation of the parts played by Moïse Bayle, Levicenterie, Jagot, or the extremely moderate Rühl. And most definitely, a biography of Tallien should be written. On the other hand, the feelings and actions of Fouché, Barras, Fréron, Cambon and Billaud-Varennes are pretty well known.

In any event, an account of Robespierre's fall requires the acceptance of certain facts and arguments, which are nowadays accepted by historians: 1. There was disagreement between Saint-Just and Carnot over the conduct of the war. 2. Saint-Just became increasingly irritated at Billaud's and Collet's strange behavior in the Committee. 3. Vadier (of the Committee of General Security) was jealous of Robespierre and Saint-Just. 4. Several representatives on mission (Fouché, Barras, Fréron, Dubois-Grancé, etc.) were recalled, because Robespierre was convinced of their dishonesty or unnecessary cruelty. 5. Collot-d'Herbois having been as responsible as Fouché for the atrocities in Lyon, the latter's recall endangered his own position. 6. Robespierre did not attend meetings of the

 168)

The one study, Georges Belloni, Le Comité de Sécurité Générale de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1924), deals in great detail with organization and procedure, but does not even have a list of the members of the Committee. Only four of the twelve have biographies, Amar in Georges Lenôtre, Vielles Maisons, Vieux Papiers, 6ème. série (Paris, 1930), pp. 27-11; David Lloyd Dowd, Pageant-Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David at the French Revolution (Lincoln, Neb., 1948), does not deal with David's political activities (this is planned for another volume). Stéphane-Pol, Autour de Robespierre: Le Conventionnel Le Bas (Paris, [1900]), and Albert Tournier, Vadier Président du Comité de Sécurité Générale sous la Terreur (Paris, [1896]), are inadequate.

Committee of Public Safety from 15 messidor (July 3) onward.

7. Due to the increasing severity of the Terror, a strong feeling of fear and dejection dominated all elements of the population. Many politically influential people hoped for a return to more normal conditions.

This is the framework for the "Revolution" of Thermidor. The rebellion against Robespierre was made possible by the explosive situation outlined above. If these seven factors were the only ones which brought it about, Billaud would not have been involved in it at all. If he had other, more personal, reasons for desiring Robespierre's fall, there is still no proof that he participated in any conspiratorial activities.

Practically all the information about the division within the Committee comes from Saint-Just, who had private grievances; or from Barère and Billaud, who, writing for their defense after Thermidor, were inclined to give unfavorable views of Robespierre and his followers.

Doubtlessly, collaboration between Billaud and Robespierre was close. Most historians have elaborate theories to explain the break between the two men. For instance, they maintain that, taking public opinion into account, Robespierre, his close friends, and the "non-political" members of the Committee wanted to stop the Terror, to transform the revolutionary institutions into more permanent ones and to effect a transition to a peacetime

169)

administration without sharp conflict. The Ventôse Laws and the Cult of the Supreme Being were attempts at stabilization. But Billaud, Collot, and the recalled representatives were only interested in maintaining the status quo, since their importance in the Government might be reduced by political changes. They decided to eliminate Robespierre rather than let this happen. Levasseur de la Sarthe, a reliable observer, who knew personally all the members of the Committee, wrote in his memoirs:

" Les Billaud-Varennés, les Collot-d'Herbois sentaient bien qu'ils devaient disparaître du pouvoir quand la crise terrible au milieu de laquelle nous étions serait passée, et ils ne songeaient qu'à la prolonger. La fête de l'Être-suprême les courroïça, comme symptôme de retour de l'ordre. L'organisation des commissions populaire chargées de mettre en liberté les suspects injustement incarcérés produisit le même effet ..."

170)

But is this really true as far as Billaud is concerned? The Ventôse Decrees (8, 13 ventôse-February 26, March 3) were not primarily punitive in character, but designed to effect an economic settlement. ¹⁷¹⁾ The second of the Laws, the important one,

169)

Out of seventeen authors who gave detailed opinions on the subject, ten believed that this was the chief reason for the conflict. Among them is Alphonse Aulard, who, in Histoire politique de la Révolution Française (5ème. éd. Paris, 1913), p. 496, says: "Les conjurés ne voulaient point arrêter la Terreur; ils reprochaient au contraire à Robespierre sa modération à l'égard des catholiques et ses avances au Marais."

170)

Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), Ex-Conventionnel (Bruxelles, 1832), III, 189.

171)

Reprinted in P. Mautouchet, ed., Gouvernement, pp. 273-276. In English, the second one only in J. M. Stewart, ed., op. cit., pp. 525-526. By far the best discussion is in Albert Mathiez, "La Terreur Instrument de la Politique Sociale des Robespierristes: Les décrets de ventôse sur le séquestre des biens des suspects et leur application," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, V (1928), 193-219. It is reprinted in the author's Girondins et Montagnards (4ème. éd., Paris, 1930), pp. 109-138.

ordered local authorities to turn over the confiscated property of the enemies of the Revolution to indigent citizens in each community. Had the decree been applied, it might have produced a division of land, such as Billaud had advocated in his Elémens du Républicanisme. Why should he have objected to the implementation of his own ideas? Of a more controversial nature was the first of the Ventôse Decrees, which created Popular Commissions (Commissions populaires) to speed up the release of those unjustly imprisoned. Evidently, this was a concession to the Plain in the National Convention and meant a more moderate administration of justice. An entire dissertation has been devoted to proving that Billaud and Collot, with the assistance of the Committee of General Security, sabotaged these plans, not because Billaud and his followers were against them on principle, but because they saw that by delay, they could undermine Robespierre's popularity. ¹⁷²⁾ But on 24 floréal (May 13), five Popular Commissions were set up in Paris. The arrêté is in Billaud's handwriting, which would seem to indicate that he was responsible for the measure. ¹⁷³⁾ Next day, a similar Commission was established in Bordeaux. ¹⁷⁴⁾ And, said Billaud later, the Committee planned,

172)

Lina Uhlbaum, Beiträge zur Vorgeschichte des Sturzes Robespierres (Hamburg, 1933), pp. 2-24.

173)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XIII, 484. First signatures Voulland, Billaud second, Robespierre third.

174)

Ibid., XIII, 515. Signed Billaud, Barère, Robespierre only, in this order.

early in thermidor,

" la mise en liberté des agriculteurs détenus, les autres parens des défenseurs de la patrie qui n'étoient pas dans la classe agricole... On n'oublioit, ni les ouvriers, ni les artistes, ni les hommes de commerce, ni les gens de lettres, ni les autres citoyens..." 175)

Surely, all this does not point to sabotage of the Ventôse Decrees; in fact, no evidence exists that Billaud was, in this matter, in disagreement with the Triumvirate (Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon).

As far as the Cult of the Supreme Being is concerned, it was Robespierre's idea. He also organized the big ceremony of 20 prairial (June 8), which irritated certain members of the two Committees (particularly the sceptic Vadier). It is doubtful whether the new cult would have replaced Christianity in the hearts of the French people, even had it been accepted as the "state religion." As a measure of stabilization, it certainly held no great appeal. Yet, if he had been opposed to a return to normal conditions, Billaud might have used the religious question as a weapon against Robespierre (just as Vadier did). With true poetic license, Thomas Carlyle quoted Billaud as saying to Robespierre: "Avec ton Etre Suprême, tu commences à m'embêter." 176) Lacretelle jeune, a Royalist journalist in hiding during the Terror, wrote

175)

Les Membres de l'ancien Comité de Salut Public, Au Peuple Français et à ses Représentans ([Paris, pluviôse l'an IIIe]), p.32. Billaud was the author of this pamphlet, written in his defense.

176)

Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution (2nd. ed., London, 1842), II, 334.

many years after the Revolution that Billaud had been an atheist. From that statement, historians concluded that he must have objected to Robespierre's cult. However, it should be noted that Billaud did not make a single statement about religion after 1789, when his book, Le Dernier Coup Porté aux Frânes et à la Superstition, was published. Even in that work, he only criticized the organization of the Gallican Church, not Roman Catholic dogma. As a disciple of Rousseau, he probably inclined toward a more militant form of agnosticism, but there is no proof that his views were extreme; and even less that he felt that the Cult of the Supreme Being would mean a return to the practices of the Old Regime. Even Aulard, who studied the subject of religion during the French Revolution more extensively than any other historian, failed to discover a single instance of active opposition to religion on Billaud's part.

The historian is consequently unable to ascertain that Billaud opposed Robespierre's policies. As a matter of fact,

177)

Charles [Joseph Dominique de] Laetelle, Histoire de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1824-1825), III, 201.

178)

The persecution of the priests as a class or as a political group is quite another matter. Aulard does not even mention Billaud's name in his works dealing with the Cult of the Supreme Being, Le Culte de la Raison et de l'Être Suprême (Paris, 1885), and Le Christianisme et la Révolution Française (Paris, 1925); nor in the article "La Politique religieuse du Comité de Salut public en décembre 1793", La Révolution Française, XXX (1896), 97-103. Albert Mathiez, equally hostile to Billaud, makes no reference to him either in La Révolution et l'Église (Paris, 1910), or the essay on the Cult of the Supreme Being in Autour de Robespierre (Paris, 1925).

investigation points to extremely close collaboration between the two men. All differences of opinion seem to have been over small matters. In the measures of the Terror, Billaud's name appears prominently; the regime could have had no better supporter. And, to be sure, at the time of his "retirement" from the Committee, Robespierre had just begun to plan a return to more normal conditions.

The best example of harmony within the Committee is its treatment of the representatives recalled between pluviôse and thermidor. Nobody liked these bloodthirsty men. Already on 16 nivôse (January 5), Fréron complained in a letter to Moïse Bayle, that the Committee considered him a "traitor."¹⁷⁹⁾

" Comment surtout Billaud-Varennes, [he wrote], qui me connaît de longue main, a-t-il pu me faire l'injure de me flétrir dans sa pensée!"¹⁸⁰⁾

Bayle thereupon went to defend his friend.

" Billaud se présenta, [he answered], à nous avec la figure d'un homme pénétré de la plus profonde douleur. Nous lui en demandons le sujet. Sa réponse est: "Barras et Fréron trahissent; ils veulent réaliser les projets de Calonne."¹⁸¹⁾

179)

Lettres de Barras et de Fréron en Mission dans le Midi, Edmond Poupé, ed. (Dragignan, 1910), p. 121. Letter Fréron to Moïse Bayle, dated 16 nivôse. On Fréron, see the excellent Raoul Arnaud, Journaliste, Sans-Culotte et Thermidorien: Le Fils de Fréron (1754-1802) (Paris, 1909).

180)

H. Poupé, ed., op. cit., p. 121.

181)

Ibid., p. 189. Letter Moïse Bayle to Barras and Fréron, dated by mistake 20 frimaire (it should probably be pluviôse).

p. 270 follows p. 268

Investigation proved that the so-called "counter-revolutionary" letter of Fréron was a falsification. But it is understandable that from that time on, he and Billaud were not on good terms.

On 24 prairial (June 12), Tallien, who had just returned from Bordeaux, denounced the Committee of Public Safety in the National Convention, claiming that he had been followed and spied on by agents of the Committee (which was true). Billaud rose to exclaim:

" L'impudence de Tallien est extrême. Il ment à l'assemblée avec une audace incroyable! Le fait dont il est question s'est passé avant-hier, puisque je le savais hier à midi. Les hommes dont a parlé Tallien sont d'excellent jacobins, dont l'un se nomme Jarry; mais citoyens, nous nous tiendrons unis; les conspirateurs périront et la patrie sera sauvée." 182)

Billaud was to regret these words. In his Crimes de Sept Membres des Anciens Comités, Laurent Lecointre challenged him in these words:

" Dis nous Billaud, étois-tu ce jour là d'accord ou non avec Robespierre, pour perdre Tallien? oui tu l'étois." 183)

Billaud replied then, that he knew about spies only after Tallien's complaint, thus was not responsible for the incident. 184)

182)

Moniteur (26 prairial an II - June 14, 1794), XX, 718. Reprinted in [Jacques-Antoine] Dulaure, Esquisses historiques des principaux évènements de la Révolution française (Paris, 1823-1825), III, 226. Later, in Ernest Hamel, Histoire de France Depuis la Révolution Jusqu'à la Chute du Second Empire (2ème. éd. Paris, 1883-1893), I, 460; Louis Barthou, Le Neuf Thermidor (Paris, 1926), p. 25.

183)

Laurent Lecointre, Les Crimes de Sept Membres des Anciens Comités de Salut Public et de Sécurité Générale (Paris, [vendémiaire, an III]), p. 5

184)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, à Laurent Lecointre (Paris, [an III]), p. 46.

In a similar spirit was the reception accorded Barras, and Dubois-Crancé returning early in pluviôse and on 6 thermidor (July 24) respectively. Barras tells how he went to the Committee of Public Safety to report on his mission. He found Robespierre, Billaud, Carnot, Barère, Prieur, and Lindet present.

" Les membres du Comité, [he wrote], en me voyant entrer, restèrent assis et gardèrent le silence, les yeux fixés sur leurs portefeuilles. Il y avait de quoi pouvoir se livrer à quelque inquiétude sur une pareille réception Resté debout et sans qu'aucun d'eux me fit l'invitation de m'asseoir, je donnai quelques détails sur la situation où j'avais laissé le Midi: aucun signe d'adhésion ni de contradiction ne fut donné à mon report Seulement, lorsque j'eus parlé et offert de donner au Comité tous autres renseignements qu'il pouvait désirer, Billaud ... me dit sèchement: "Cela suffit, citoyen représentant; le Comité t'a entendu, et te fera appeler lorsqu'il aura quelque chose à te demander. Tu peux te retirer." 185)

It might be said that this is an invention by the "author" of the memoirs, were it not for a similar account by Dubois-Crancé, written in 1798 or 1799.

" On me fit attendre, [he wrote], une heure dans l'antichambre, afin on m'introduisit. ... Je demandai quelle était la cause de mon rappel. Billaud me répondit: "Si le comité a besoin de renseignements, on vous écrira; retirez vous!" Je le regardai avec une dédaigneuse fureur; mais je me contins; j'étais accusé, il fallait me justifier" 186)

185)

George Duruy, ed., Mémoires de Barras, membre du Directoire (Paris, 1895), I, 143. This is the best edition of these "Memoirs", which are not at all by Barras, but by one Rousselin de Saint-Albin. See, for that whole question, Burt [Hardly] Powell, Die Memoiren von Barras über den 9. Thermidor (Bonn, 1899). The account of the visit to the Committee is reprinted in R. Arnaud, op. cit., p. 269, but is not even mentioned by the biographer of Barras, Henri d'Alméras, Barras et son Temps (Paris, 1930). 186)

Théodore Jung, ed., Analyse de la Révolution Française. par Dubois-Crancé (Paris, 1885), p. 140. Also in the editor's L'Armée et la Révolution: Dubois-Crancé (Paris, 1884), p. 140. But in the latter, the wording is changed.

Dubois-Grancé was suspect because of his moderate views; the others, on the contrary, because of their extreme terrorism. It is significant that Fouché was never publicly accused for the atrocities committed in Lyon; probably because the Committee did not want to embarrass Collet-d'Herbois, his partner on that mission.

These cruel men were justly despised; but then, why did the Committee support others, equally as bloodthirsty? Carrier's role as the protégé of Billaud-Vareannes must be considered an invention, since neither his nor the Committee's correspondence points toward such a relationship. The two men were not friends before Carrier's mission; neither was Billaud's name mentioned during Carrier's trial. ¹⁸⁷⁾ However, Joseph Le Bon, Robespierre's childhood friend, ¹⁸⁸⁾ enjoyed the active support of the Committee.

As late as September 1793, the most bloodthirsty of the representatives on mission wrote to a friend in Arras that he had

¹⁸⁷⁾

François Mignet, Histoire de la Révolution Française (3ème. éd., Paris, 1826), II, 76, was the only historian who ever said so. The two very good biographies of Carrier, Alfred Lallié, J.-B. Carrier Représentant du Cantal à la Convention. 1756-1794 (Paris, 1901), and Gaston Martin, Carrier et sa Mission à Nantes (Paris, 1924), certainly do not tie their hero to any member of the Committee of Public Safety. Carrier was connected with Hébert and the Paris Commune. ¹⁸⁸⁾

The work of Le Bon's rehabilitation has proceeded for a long time, starting with his grandson's Emile Le Bon, Joseph Le Bon dans sa Vie Privée et dans sa Carrière Politique (Paris, 1861). It was followed soon after by A.-J. Paris, La Terreur dans le Pas-de-Calais et dans le Nord; Histoire de Joseph Le Bon et des Tribunaux Révolutionnaires d'Arras et de Cambrai (2ème. éd., 2 vs., Paris, 1864). A more recent study, Louis Jacob, Joseph Le Bon, 1765-1795. La Terreur à la Frontière (Nord et Pas-de-Calais) (2 vs., Paris, [1932]), tries to restore the balance, but still leaves a not too unfavorable picture of the man.

no high regard for Billaud, "dont les allures et les discours exagérés font le jeu des contre-révolutionnaires." 189) Apparently that relationship changed as soon as Le Bon went on his mission, on 8 brumaire (October 29). When the latter asked how large his powers were, Billaud wrote:

" Nous vous observons que vous pouvez donner des ordres au tribunal criminel pour l'évacuation des prisons. Toutes les mesures révolutionnaires vous sont permises ou plutôt commandés par vos pouvoirs et par le salut de la patrie." 190)

This could only mean a blanket permission to execute all the suspects in the prisons of Arras. And it was Billaud who signed first the renewal order for the Revolutionary Tribunal in that city (30 germinal-April 19). 191) When Guffroy, a deputy from the Nord at the National Convention, went to the Committee in floréal to demand Le Bon's recall, his request was rejected. Then, he went to see Billaud personally.

" Je fus au moins une demie heure, [he wrote], avec lui dans son cabinet. Je lui racontai assez en détail les maux dont la commune d'Arras et les environs étoient victimes; il me laissa dire; il parut très-réservé, mais pourtant pas aussi repoussant que Collot et Robespierre il me parla de l'énergie que doit avoir le gouvernement révolutionnaire ... "Cela [an investigation of Le Bon] n'est pas nécessaire, Robespierre est de ce département-là aussi; il dit au Comité le contraire de toi, et il connaît ce qui en est mieux que toi ..." 192)

189)

L. Jacob, op. cit., I, 202.

190)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, VIII, 592-593. Letter Committee of Public Safety to Le Bon, dated 1 frimaire. Only other signature that of Carnot.

191)

Ibid., XII, 680. Only other signatures Prieur and Robespierre. On other renewal orders, Billaud signed in fourth and third place respectively.

192)

A. -B. -J. Guffroy, Les Secrets de Joseph Lebon et de ses Complices. ([Paris, anIII]), pp. 83-84.

Robespierre's friend was thus protected against prosecution. Later, Le Bon admitted: "Certes, ces hommes m'ont beaucoup servi, et je leur suis grandement redevable."¹⁹³⁾ This support was, of course, among the accusations directed by both Lecointre and Saladin against the former members of the Committee.¹⁹⁴⁾ Billaud thereupon denied ever having given Le Bon the powers he claimed to have, saying that "assurément, je ne prétends point excuser Joseph Le Bon, s'il est coupable des faits qu'on lui impute."¹⁹⁵⁾

Even closer political collaboration between the Triumvirate in the Committee of Public Safety and Billaud-Vareannes can be noted insofar as three "terroristic" measures are concerned: The Bureau de police générale, the Law of 22 prairial on the reorganization of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and the Popular Commission of Orange.

The Bureau de police générale of the Committee of Public Safety has been the subject of a detailed study by a disciple of Mathiez.¹⁹⁶⁾ While Ordning's story is based on logic, his assumptions are by no means definite. Apparently, the "politicians" in the Committee decided that a section should be established to deal with certain questions of police. In any event, the decree on police

193)

Louis Jacob, ed., La Défense du conventionnel Joseph Le Bon présentée par lui-même (Paris, [1932]), p. 52.

194)

Lecointre's accusation in Moniteur (14 fructidor an II-August 31, 1794), XXI, 620. That of Saladin in Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un, ... pour l'examen de la conduite des Représentans du Peuple Billaud-Vareannes, Collet-d'Herbois et Barère ... et Vadier ... (Paris, 28 ventôse, an III), pp. 67-71. All the documents are reprinted there.

195)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud à Laurent Lecointre, p. 79.

196)

Arne Ordning, Le Bureau de Police du Comité de Salut Public (Oslo, 1930).

powers of 27 germinal (April 16) implied that much, although no formation of a special agency is mentioned in it. 197) If there was a Bureau, its work was kept a secret; to the outside world, the impression was conveyed that the Committee always acted as a unit. 198) Opposition came, of course, from the Committee of General Security, which wanted to remain the only authority responsible for arrests and releases. This is the fundamental explanation for Vadier's desire to eliminate Robespierre and his friends. It had neither been proved that such a Bureau actually existed, nor that Billaud was a member of it. He, at any rate, denied having belonged to any special section, or having assumed functions which had not been his from the very beginning. 199) The whole truth may never be known, since the Bureau, if it existed, left no minutes of its sessions. The orders of arrest emanating from the Committee after 27 germinal are not different than those issued previously. 200) In fact,

197)

"Décret de Police Générale." Reprinted in J.M. Thompson, ed., *op. cit.* pp. 280-283. Georges Lefebvre, "La Rivalité du Comité de Salut Public et du Comité de Sécurité Générale," Revue Historique, LVI (t. 167, 1931), 336, says that the establishment of the Bureau was a result of this law. This is a review article of Ordning's study.

198)

Ibid., LVI, 338.

199)

Mémoire inédit de Billaud-Varennes sur les Evénements du 9 Thermidor, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris, 1910), p. 41. This is also the opinion of D. Centore-Bineau, Saint-Just. 1767-1794 (Paris, 1936), p. 241, who claims that Saint-Just directed the Bureau all by himself and without anyone's assistance.

200)

A. Ordning, *op. cit.*, p. 45. Billaud, in his answer to Lecointre's charges (p. 27), spoke of monthly reports dealing with police matters, emanating from the Committee. They have not been found.

Ording's thesis holds only true, if two factors are admitted beyond dispute: That the Triumvirate attempted to gain full control over the Bureau (meaning that it tried to decide certain matters without the assent of Billaud, Collet, and Barrère), and that a conspiracy involving members of the two Committees, was in preparation since germinal. But if Billaud (and Collot and Barère) agreed with the Policies of the Triumvirate, he would hardly have objected to these policies, if planned either in a Bureau de police générale, or in the ordinary sessions of the Committee. One man who should have known of such a special section, was the prosecutor at the Revolutionary Tribunal, Fouquier-Tinville. But he denied that there was a Bureau separate from the Committee.

The historian knows only that Billaud signed various arrêtés, dealing with arrests and releases from prison. That is all which matters; the fact that there might have existed a separate agency from which these decrees emanated, is of little importance. And the Law of 22 prairial (June 10), permitted the Committee of Public Safety to interfere in the business of the Committee of General

201)

On Fouquier-Tinville, the very best account of his whole career can be obtained from the minutes of his trial. There are 49 supplements to the daily Bulletin Républicain, entitled Procès de Fouquier-Tinville et autres Membres du Tribunal du 22 prairial (Paris, [1795]). Three good biographies interpret this information: M. Dumenget, Fouquier-Tinville et le Tribunal Révolutionnaire (Paris, 1878); Hector Fleischmann, Les Coulisses du Tribunal révolutionnaire. Fouquier-Tinville intime (Paris, [1909]), and Alphonse Dunoyer, Fouquier-Tinville. Accusateur Public du Tribunal Révolutionnaire. 1746-1795 (Paris, 1913).

202)

Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un... par Saladin, pp. 11-12. Also in H. Fleischmann, op. cit., p. 234.

Security; to order arrests, to make changes in the administration of the prisons, to discuss prospective defendants with Fouquier-Tinville, etc.

203)

That Law itself extended the functions of the Committee of Public Safety; for emergency purposes, it granted that body authority to translate persons before the Revolutionary Tribunal. According to the Law of 14 frimaire, this power belonged exclusively to the National Convention and the Committee of General Security. It should not come as a surprise that Vadier and his colleagues became jealous. Barère later circulated the story that Billaud reproached Robespierre that the latter had not consulted his colleagues before proposing the Law.

" "Je vois bien que je suis seul et que personne ne me soutient," dit Robespierre, et aussitôt il entre en fureur, il déclame avec violence contre les membres du Comité, qui ont conspiré, dit-il, contre lui. Ses cris étaient si forts que sur les terrasses des Tuileries plusieurs citoyens s'étaient rassemblés; on ferme la fenêtre, et l'on continue la discussion avec la même chaleur. "Je sais, dit Robespierre, qu'il y a dans la Convention une facti qui veut me perdre" - "Il faut donc dire, reprend Billaud, d'après ton décret, que tu veux guillotiner la Convention Nationale." Robespierre répond avec agitation: "Vous en êtes tous témoins, que je ne dis pas que je veuille faire guillotiner la Convention nationale; je te connais maintenant," ajouta-t-il en

203)

Reprinted in Moniteur (24 prairial an II - June 12, 1794), XX, 696-69 Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XXXIII, 169-177; Buchez et R. ed., op. cit., XXXIII, 193-198; J.M. Thompson, ed., op. cit., pp. 284-287. In English, F.M. Anderson, ed., op. cit., pp. 154-157; J.H. Stewart, ed., op. cit. pp. 528-531.

s'adressant à Billaud - "Et moi-aussi, je te connais comme un contre-révolutionnaire," répond ce dernier
" 204)

Was this a clumsy attempt on Barère's part to clear himself and his colleagues? At one time, Billaud himself stated that he knew

nothing at all about the Law before its submission to the

Convention; 205) at another, he claimed that the Committee had been informed about it previously. 206) In fact, Fouquier-Tinville

arrived to warn the legislators of certain provisions in the Law, which would impede the administration of justice. He was told

"que cet objet regardoit Robespierre." 207) Who spoke the truth?

The Robespierrist Ernest Hamel called Barère's story a lie; the

Dantonist Louis Barthou believed it implicitly. 208) Mathiez was

certain that the meeting took place, but thought that Billaud felt

that the Committee of General Security should have been consulted,

since his own Committee knew all about the Law since Fouquier-

Tinville's visit. 209) However, harsh words were quickly forgotten

204)

Réponse de Barère, Billaud-Vareennes, Collot-d'Herbois et Vadier aux Imputations de Laurent Le Cointre. "Reprinted in La Révolution Française, XXXIV (1898), 169-170. Billaud, in the session of the Convention of 13 fructidor (August 30), said that Robespierre "pleura de rage." See Moniteur (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 634.

205)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud... à Laurent Lecointre, p. 56.

206)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, Aux Inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse an III), pp. 12-13.

207)

L. Lecointre, op. cit., p. 74; Réponse de J.N. Billaud .. à Laurent Lecointre, p. 55; Billaud's testimony before Convention on 13 fructidor (August 30), in Moniteur (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 632.

208)

Ernest Hamel, Thermidor (Paris, 1891), p. 34, and L. Barthou, op. cit., p. 19

209)

Albert Mathiez, "Le Neuf Thermidor de M. Barthou," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, IV (1927), 8, and reprinted in Girondins et Montagnards (4ème. éd. Paris, 1930), p. 209.

and the whole Committee stood united when the Law was pushed through the assembly. On 23 prairial (June 11), Billaud rose to defend Robespierre against charges, that the latter had prevented discussion of the measure on the Convention floor. (210) And even later, on 8 thermidor (July 26), he may have spoken against a proposal by Paris and Fréron to revoke the Law. (211)

The Popular Commission of Orange, the third "terrorist" measure, was established on 21 floréal (May 10), as an experiment. Before submitting a general decree on the subject to the National Convention, Robespierre probably wanted to see how a "reformed" system of judicial procedure worked. The Commission was unique insofar as the offices of prosecutor, judges, and jurors were combined in the same five persons. Although defense lawyers were admitted, the vesting of power over life and death in five men was an extremely radical way to deal with the enemies of the Republic. But the primary intention of the Committee of Public Safety was probably not to induce these men to perpetrate the bloody excesses, which gave the Commission its bad reputation. The order for its establishment was signed by Robespierre, Collot, Barère, Billaud, Carnot, Prieur, Lindet and Couthon, in that order. (212)

210) Moniteur (25 prairial an II-June 12, 1794), XX, 705.

211) Georges Lefèbvre, "Sur la loi du 22 prairial an II," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XXIII (1951), 243. If he made any remarks on the subject in the National Convention, they were not mentioned in the Moniteur.

212) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XIII, 406. Also in Rapport fait au Nom de la Commission chargée de l'examen des Papiers Trouvés chez Robespierre et ses Complices .. par E.B. Courtois (Paris, an III), p. 374, and Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un ... par Saladin, p. 49.

The renewal order, dated 15 prairial (June 3), bears Carnot's signature first, followed by those of Billaud, Couthon, Robespierre, and others. ²¹³⁾ Billaud was consequently not responsible for

either of the two decrees, although he admitted that he participated in the experiment. ²¹⁴⁾ All these facts show conclusively that

late in prairial Billaud still cooperated with Robespierre. No conflict is discernible, no evidence of deep-seated disagreement exists. If there was dissention in the Committee, Billaud did not purposely contribute to it.

The premise must be stated again: No evidence links Billaud-Varennes to the conspirators against Robespierre. It neither means that he was Robespierre's friend, nor that he discouraged the worst abuses of the Terror. It is impossible to deny that he was one of those primarily responsible for the executions on a large scale. On a number of occasions, he stated quite plainly, that if the Republic were to survive, its enemies had to be killed without mercy. To this attitude must be added the heavy burden of work in the Committee, which resulted in disorder, waste, and unnecessary sacrifice of human lives. There is an element of truth in Barras' statement that many might have been saved, if the lists of the accused had been drawn up in an atmosphere of calm and after careful investigation of each case. ²¹⁵⁾

213) A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XIV, 106.

214) Réponse de J.N. Billaud ... à Laurent Lecointre, p. 103.

215) G. Duruy, ed., op. cit., I, 174.

But that was not possible. The Law of 22 prairial was one of the reasons. The newly-gained right of the Committee to bring people to justice gave these men a disproportionate sense of their own importance. Billaud might still have believed that members of the National Convention should be immune from prosecution; but his ideals forced him to disregard such constitutional questions. He, as well as Robespierre, disliked men like Fouché and Barras and believed that they had to be eliminated in the interests of national security. On the other hand, all the deputies, (even those who were quite innocent of abuses), realized that their lives depended upon whims of the members of the Committee of Public Safety and, in great fear, turned against Robespierre and his friends.

On 4 and 5 prairial (May 23 and 24), attempts were made on the lives of Collet-d'Herbois and Robespierre, by L'Admiral and Cécile Renault respectively. Apparently, Billaud thought that he too was going to be a victim of assassins. Vilate reported that, on 22 or 23 messidor (July 10 or 11),

" au milieu de la place adjacente à la salle des jacobins, était rassemblée un groupe entourant un homme effaré: on s'écrie: "C'est un assassin de Robespierre, de Billaud-Vareennes; il y a des scélérats dans la Convention." A peine dans la société, Billaud se retourne et me dit: "On est venu chez moi m'assassiner. - Il n'est pas étonnant, qu'on en veuille à tes jours, répliquai-je, s'il y a des scélérats dans la Convention. - Nomme les. - Je ne les connais pas." (216)

216)

Vilate, "Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor," in eds. Berville et Barrière, Mémoires sur les Journées de Thermidor, 1794, (Paris, 1825), 200. Reprinted in Alphonse Duncoyer, Deux Jurés du Tribunal Révolutionnaire: Vilate "Le Petit Maître", Trincharé "L'Homme de la Nature" (Paris, 1909), p. 163.

These remarks cost Vilate his liberty and turned him into Billaud's most bitter enemy. But it need hardly astonish anyone that the latter behaved strangely. His fear evidently made it impossible for him to fulfill his duties with the necessary composure. Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, who did not dislike Billaud, wrote that, during the meetings of the Committee of Public Safety, he

" se tenait alors à l'écart sur un fauteuil adossé à la muraille, les bras croisés, les yeux fermés et comme absorbé dans une rêverie profonde. En deux ou trois occasions seulement, il quitta cette attitude pour faire une sortie violente aux dominateurs qui l'avaient provoqué; puis il rentra dans la taciturnité qu'il s'était prescrite..." 21

Of a suspicious nature to begin with, he came to see an enemy in everyone. Joseph Lavallée, a fairly well informed Royalist writer, blamed Billaud for Robespierre's absence from the Committee. Billaud and Collot, he wrote,

" commencèrent par le dégouter en contrariant sans cesse ses avis ... Ils humilièrent sa vanité en ne lui confiant jamais aucun des rapports à faire à la Convention. L'inhabile despote, au lieu de terrasser ces hommes ... préféra de leur céder la place, s'éloigna insensiblement des séances et enfin ces totalement d'y paraître." 218)

If this were true, it would constitute a logical explanation for Robespierre's withdrawal. But most historians have rather accepted

217)

"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. Membre du Comité de Salut Public (Paris, 1946), p. 447.

218)

Joseph Lavallée, Histoire de l'origine des progrès et de la décadence des Diverses Factions qui ont agité la France depuis le juillet 1789 jusqu'à l'abdication de Napoleon (London, 1816), II, 194. The same opinion was held by Campbell, a later historian, in his History of Our Own Times (London, 1845), II, 237.

the theory that Billaud was jealous of Robespierre and forced him to stay away for that reason. ²¹⁹⁾ The contemporaries could certainly not understand why two men who agreed on most problems, should fall out so suddenly. In all probability, Saint-Just contributed also much to the misunderstandings. ²²⁰⁾ The violent scene between Billaud and Robespierre on 23 prairial (June 11) has been mentioned. But according to Mathiez, rivalry between Robespierre and Saint-Just would also have led to a break between these two men and to a split within the Committee. ²²¹⁾

There were possibly reasons for suspicion. Sir Francis Drake, the British agent in Genoa, and Las Cazas, the Spanish Ambassador in Venice, both received information directly from the Committee of Public Safety. ²²²⁾ Moreover, the Committee knew

219)

Among the reliable contemporaries, Pierre Paganel, a moderate deputy, in his Essai historique et critique sur la Révolution française (Paris, 1805), II, 397-398, and his very hostile colleague, Durand de Maillane, in Histoire de la Convention nationale, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1825), p. 80. Also J. Lacretelle, op. cit., III, ²²⁰⁾

Saint-Just's biographers have tried to emphasize, with varying success, his independence of thought and action. The most reasonable analysis, by the Robespierriest A. Kuscinski, in op. cit., pp. 548-552, is rather unfavorable to Saint-Just because of that. The best among the longer biographies is D. Centore-Bineau, op. cit. Also good is the older Edouard Fleury, Saint-Just et la Terreur (2 vs., Paris, 1852). The two works in English, Geoffrey Bruun, Saint-Just, Apostle of the Terror (Boston, 1932), and Eugene Newton Curtis, Saint-Just, Colleague of Robespierre (New York, 1935), are models of historical objectivity, but do not offer novel interpretations of events. The much acclaimed Marie Lenéru, Saint-Just (Paris, 1922), is a good "psychological" study, with all the limitations common to biographies of this kind. ²²¹⁾

A. Mathiez, Etudes Robespierriestes: II. La conspiration de l'étrange (Paris, 1918), p. 147. ²²²⁾

Ibid., p. 167. The Drake papers were preserved by the Grenville family and published in 1894. Las Cazas wrote about his source to his friend E.-F. Hénin, the French chargé in Constantinople, who, in turn, informed Paris of the leak of information.

that secrets of its debates were known to spies of foreign powers. ²²³⁾ Drake mentioned a "very trustworthy" secretary of the Committee as his source; Mathiez said that this was Billaud. ²²⁴⁾ Actually, he offered no evidence for this assumption. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the most passionate proponent of the guerre à outrance should have given information to the enemies of his country. Rumors after Thermidor also connected Robespierre with Benjamin Vaughan, an Englishman living in Paris. In any event, no issue was ever made of this matter of espionage in high places; those most concerned probably believed that it would be wiser to hush up a regrettable situation.

When Robespierre's enemies saw that Billaud regarded him with suspicion, they tried to convince the latter to join them in the conspiracy. Billaud actually dominated the Committee during the two last months of the Terror. Saint-Just was away on missions; and when he returned, Robespierre stayed away. While the "experts" were busy with their own affairs, Couthon's ill health did not permit him to attend all sessions. On 27 prairial (June 15), Billaud visited the Committee of General Security. He must have had a special reason, since the two Committees met at least once a week and an average of forty-five letters passed between them every month. ²²⁵⁾ Billaud stated later that he had been requested

223)

Idem.

224)

Idem.

225)

G. Belloni, op. cit., pp. 171, 200.

to come,

" pour concerter ensemble les moyens d'arrêter le tyran dans sa course dictatoriale. Je répondis qu'on s'entendait sans avoir besoin de parler, quand on était animé des mêmes principes " 226)

Not only did he fail to commit himself, but he ruled out further private conferences with the conspirators. 227) On 6 messidor

(June 24), Robespierre asked Billaud to go on mission to the Armée du Nord. The meeting ended in another quarrel, and Billaud remained in Paris. 228)

So did Saint-Just, whom the enemies of Robespierre wanted to send away. 229) Robespierre came to two more

meetings of the Committee; he did not attend after 15 messidor (July 3). His absence did really not matter, since Billaud

continued to follow Robespierre's policies. Saladin could truthfully state that "sans y paraître, son esprit y vivoit, son influence y régnoit." 230) The mass executions, arbitrary arrests and other

226) Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Vareennes, ed. Ch. Vellay, p. 39. See also Albert Mathiez, "Les Divisions dans les Comités de gouvernement à la veille du 9 thermidor," Revue Historique, XL (p. 118, 1915), 74. Reprinted in the author's Autour de Robespierre (Paris, 1925), pp. 148-176.

227) Ch. Vellay, ed., op. cit., p. 39.

228) L. Lévy-Schneider, "Les démêlés dans le comité de salut public avant le 9 thermidor," La Révolution Française, XXXVIII (1900), 105. The information comes from the file assembled by the Committee against Demaillot, one of its agents. "Réponse de Barère ... aux Imputations de Laurent Le Cointre," ibid., XXXIV (1898), 170, places the incident on 23 prairial (June 11). Gérard Walter, Robespierre (Paris, 1936-1939), II, 270, gives 10 messidor (June 28) as the date.

229) E. Fleury, Saint-Just, II, 273.

230) Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un ... par Saladin, p. 10.

abuses continued as before. ²³¹⁾ And Billaud determined this policy to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, the conspirators still thought to win him over. Fouché, Billaud's friend since the 1770s, effected a reconciliation between the latter and Tallien. ²³²⁾ He wrote on 2 thermidor (July 20):

" J'allais droit à ceux qui partageaient le gouvernement de la Terreur à Robespierre, et que je savais être envieux et craintifs de son immense popularité." ²³³⁾

Billaud did not play the game. In fact, an attempt was made by the two Committees to bring Robespierre back. Three detailed accounts exist of the meeting of 5 thermidor (July 23), by Saint-Just, Barère and Rühl of the Committee of General Security, respectively. Robespierre came, but only after he had been summoned by special order. ²³⁴⁾ He was particularly suspicious of Billaud, since he had been informed that the latter had compared

²³¹⁾

According to A. Mathiez, Révolution Française, III, 208-209, 1285 death sentences and 278 acquittals were handed down between 23 prairial and 8 thermidor (as against 577 convictions and 182 acquittals during the previous forty-five days). L. Lecointre, op. cit., p. 120, speaks of lists of 300 and 178 victims respectively, who had been designated for execution during the early days of thermidor, but were saved by Robespierre's fall.

²³²⁾

Louis Madelin, Fouché. 1759-1820 (2ème. éd. Paris, 1903), I, 175. This is still a valuable study; vastly better than compte de Martel, Types Révolutionnaires: Etude sur Fouché (2 vs. Paris, 1879), or Stefan Zweig, Joseph Fouché, Bildnis eines politischen Menschen (Leipzig, 1930). Madelin is one of the few historians, who write convincingly about people they dislike.

²³³⁾

E. Hamel, Thermidor, p. 71. The letter (it is not known to whom it was addressed) was seized in Nantes by representative Bô and sent to the Committee of Public Safety as a proof of Fouché's treasonable intentions, but it arrived only after Thermidor.

²³⁴⁾

Moniteur (11 germinal an III-March 31, 1795), XXIV, 84. From Barère's speech in his own defense on 7 germinal.

him to several famous traitors of Antiquity only the day before. Rühl, who had just returned from a mission, said that he knew of no divisions within the Committees, before he attended the meeting.²³⁵⁾ Saint-Just started by praising Robespierre. In answer, Barère accused the latter of wanting to purge the National Convention (starting with Feuché), in order to usurp police powers for himself.²³⁶⁾ Robespierre looked at his colleagues with

" des regards qui marquaient le plus profond mépris, [then] crut qu'il était temps d'éclater et se plaignit d'abord en général de ses nombreux ennemis ... il inculpa ensuite Amar, Vadier, Jagot, Carnot, Collet et Billaud."²³⁷⁾

Barère remarked that "Il y parla comme un homme qui avait des ordres à donner et des victimes à désigner."²³⁸⁾ Billaud was convinced that

" appuyé fortement par Couthon et Saint-Just, ... Robespierre devint lui-même accusateur et désigna nominativement les victimes qu'il voulait immoler."²³⁹⁾

235)

A. Aulard, ed., "Un Discours de Rühl en germinal," La Révolution Française, XII (1887), 373. From Rühl's speech in defense of the former members of the Committees on 3 germinal. This is not in the Moniteur.

236)

Moniteur (11 germinal an III-March 31, 1795), XXIV, 84. From Barère's speech of 7 germinal.

237)

A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XII (1887), 373.

238)

Moniteur (11 germinal an III-March 31, 1795), XXIV, 84. From Barère's speech of 7 germinal.

239)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud ... à Laurent Leccointre, p. 89.

Carnot answered that, indeed, he did not like Robespierre, and the others

" repoussèrent ses attaques avec tant de véhémence, d'énergie, et de bruit, que j'ai [Rühl] plus d'une fois invité Coliot à parler plus bas" 240)

After these emotional outbursts, everyone calmed down. It was agreed that Saint-Just should report on the state of the nation to the National Convention, an important concession by the Triumvirate to those who felt that the assembly should be informed of the work of the Committee. Neither Rühl nor Barère mentioned any moves at reconciliation. (241) Only Saint-Just, in his undelivered speech of 9 thermidor, told how the meeting ended.

" David se rangea de mon avis, [he wrote], avec sa franchise ordinaire. Billaud-Varennes dit à Robespierre: "Nous sommes tes amis, nous avons marché toujours ensemble." Ce déguisement fit tressaillir mon cœur. La veille, il le traitait de "Pisistrate" et avait tracé son acte d'accusation." 242)

Saint-Just was at that moment ready to take Billaud to task and slightly biased against him. It is possible that the latter had never spoken against Robespierre. The historian can only assume, for lack of proof to the contrary, that Billaud was sincere when

240)

A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XII (1887), 373.

241)

Albert Mathiez examined the whole meeting at length in "Les Séances des 4 et 5 thermidor an II aux deux Comités de Salut public et de Sécurité générale," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, IV (1927), 193-222. The article was reprinted in Girondins et Montagnards, pp. 139-170. He called all of Barère's account and Billaud's few statements unmitigated lies, and he did not refer to Rühl's speech even once.

242)

Oeuvres complètes de Saint-Just, ed. Ch. Vellay (Paris, 1908), II, 487.

he offered peace. On 5 thermidor, everyone seems to have believed him. On Billaud's and Collet's request, Saint-Just promised to omit from his report any mention of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. ²⁴³⁾ To satisfy Carnot, he also signed an order, which removed from Paris the cannonniers from three sections. ²⁴⁴⁾ The departure of these troops produced a serious shortage during the crisis. Without artillery, the Commune was unable to assist Robespierre and his friends. On the other hand, the members of the two Committees apparently agreed to permit Robespierre to stay away from their meetings. The latter's feelings have unfortunately not been recorded. In order to maintain unity, Saint-Just had compromised with his enemies. He found himself all alone against both Committees. His colleagues, on their part, felt that peace had been reestablished. Billaud, on that afternoon, certainly did not think of joining a conspiracy. Consequently, he was greatly surprised when he was slandered and assaulted by Robespierre's followers only three days later.

243)

Idem.

244)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XV, 375. First signature that of Billaud, followed by Carnot, Saint-Just and Barère. The order is dated 5 thermidor (July 23).

6. Thermidor: 8-10 thermidor year II

(July 26-28, 1794).

The events of the "Revolution of Thermidor," which led to Robespierre's fall, need not be told here. This had been attempted by several historians, although only a few have managed to give a clear picture. ²⁴⁵⁾ This study is only concerned with Billaud's participation in the events; in particular with the meetings of the National Convention, ²⁴⁶⁾ the Committee of Public Safety, and the Jacobin Club during the three crucial days (of 8, 9, 10 thermidor-July 26, 27, 28). On the first day, 8 thermidor (July 26), 247 Robespierre made a speech in the afternoon session of the assembly.

245)

The earliest critical study, Charles d'Héricault, La Révolution de Thermidor. Robespierre et le Comité de Salut Public (2ème. éd., Paris, 1878), is unsound in scholarship. Ernest Hamel, Thermidor (Paris, 1891), is too obviously biased in Robespierre's favor, while Louis Barthou, Le Neuf Thermidor (Paris, 1926), is an exciting narrative, but also unobjective. The dissertation of Geoffrey Bruun, Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety (typewritten manuscript, Cornell University, 1927), is a sound analysis, but fails to give an original interpretation. The most excellent examination is the recent Paul Sainte-Claire Deville, La Commune de l'An II (Paris, 1946). Albert Mathiez' articles, collected in Autour de Robespierre (Paris, 1926) and Girondins et Montagnards (Paris, 1930), are very valuable. See also the lavishly illustrated Albert Savine et Francis Bournand, Le Neuf Thermidor (Paris, 1907), mostly a collection of excerpts from contemporary sources.

246)

The best general account of the sessions is in the Moniteur (11, 12 thermidor an II-July 29, 30, 1794), XXI, 330-341; also Procès-Verbaux de la Convention Nationale, VIII, 183-230; Courrier de l'Égalité, nos. 707, 708 (9, 10 thermidor an II-July 27, 28, 1794), IX, 297-320. Among the later ones notice Charles Duval, Souvenirs Thermidoriens (Paris, 1844), I, 167-169, 207-235, where Billaud is not even mentioned once!

247)

Reprinted in Buchez et Roux, eds., op. cit., XXXIII, 406-448. It is only briefly referred to in the three contemporary sources of information mentioned above.

A long philosophical oration, it warned of the conspiracy among members of the Government. Although he mentioned no names, Robespierre alluded to "Danton's killers" on several occasions. He ended by requesting the Convention to take whatever steps were necessary to bring the "traitors" to trial. The conspirators, now warned that their plans were known to their prospective victim, decided to strike. Billaud was in doubt about the position to take. Actually, he only entered the discussion when Robespierre complained that the canonniers had been sent away by the Committee of Public Safety. Only three days previously, he had not objected to that measure.

" Le jour de mettre en évidence toutes les vérités est arrivé, [said Billaud],.... il existe un décret qui porte que des quarante-huit compagnies de canonniers de Paris, il y en aura toujours la moitié dans cette commune; or, dans ce moment, il en reste trente-trois. C'est avec de pareilles opinions qu'on trompe le peuple.... Robespierre avait raison: il faut arracher le masque sur quelque visage qu'il se trouve; et s'il est vrai que nous ne jouissons pas de la liberté des opinions, j'aime mieux que mon cadavre serve de trône à un ambitieux que de devenir par mon silence, le complice de ses forfaits." 248

This short speech had considerable effect. The session closed with a decision to submit Robespierre's speech to the examination of the Committee of Public Safety, before distribution to the Popular Societies throughout the country. Previously, Robespierre

248)

Moniteur (11 thermidor an II-July 29, 1794), XXI, 330. Reprinted in Buchez et Roux, eds., op. cit., XXXIII, 454.

had never needed to account for his words. Between him and the Convention, war had been declared.

In his desire to outwit his opponents, Robespierre attended that night the meeting of the Jacobin Club. Billaud and Collet were also present. The latter requested to be heard, but, despite some objections, Robespierre was granted permission to speak first. He then read off his speech to the Convention, and since he was now among friends, received enthusiastic applause. Dumas, the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal, agreed that the country was in great danger, and that the "Government" (meaning the Committee of Public Safety) was run by counter-revolutionaries.

" Il est étrange, a-t-il dit, que des hommes qui depuis plusieurs mois ont gardé le silence, demandent aujourd'hui la parole, pour s'opposer sans doute à l'émission des vérités foudroyantes,.... Il est facile de reconnaître en eux les héritiers d'Hébert et de Danton; ils seront, je le leur prophétise, héritiers aussi du sort de ces conspirateurs." (249)

Collet was shouted down, when he attempted to counter these charges.

249)

Georges Michon, "Les Séances des 8 et 9 Thermidor au Club des Jacobins," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, I (1924), 499. This account, the most detailed ever found of this meeting, is a reprint from the Correspondance politique de Paris et des départements, no. 90 (10 thermidor). In essential facts, it agrees with the letter of one Legraccieux, member of the Commune, written to the Popular Society of Paul-les-Fontaines (Drôme) during the uprising of the next day, and used by P. Sainte-Claire Deville, op. cit., p. 195, and the account given by Billaud himself in Réponse de J.-N. Billaud ... Aux imputations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse, an III), pp. 15-16.

" Billaud-Vareennes frémissait: "Je ne reconnais plus les Jacobins, s'écrie-t-il, dans une société où l'on insulte un Représentant du peuple qui rappelle qu'il a manqué périr victime de son patriotisme."

Les menaces, les cris et le tumulte des tribunes se dirigent contre Billaud et l'empêchent de parler plus longtemps Quelques-unes de ses paroles parviennent cependant à l'oreille au travers du fracas et des cris: "à la guillotine, à la guillotine il parlait des Jacobins nouveaux, des erreurs où Robespierre avait été entraîné...." 250)

Silence was only obtained when Couthon began to speak. He defended Robespierre, but apparently did not propose measures against the other members of the Committee. Billaud's supporters remained silent; he said later:

" Réuni à Collot j'ai avec lui affronté toute la fureur des conjurés et de ceux qu'ils avaient égarés, pendant plus de cinq heures, au milieu de l'agitation la plus violente et de mille cris: à la guillotine!" 251)

Billaud also claimed that he and Collot were finally beaten up and ejected from the meeting, amidst threats and shouts of revenge. 252)

It was now around 1 a.m. in the morning of 9 thermidor. Why, after this strenuous day, did Billaud and Collot decide to return to the Committee of Public Safety? Barère, who gave a

250)

G. Michon, loc. cit., I (1924), 500.

251)

Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Vareennes, ed. Ch. Vellay, pp. 49-50. Billaud's version was the one used by A. Aulard, ed., Société, VI, 282-285, and Gérard Walter, Histoire des Jacobins (Paris, 1946), p. 336.

252)

Ch. Vellay, ed., op. cit., p. 50. G. Michon, loc. cit., does not say a word about this. The Correspondance only mentioned that after the noise had died down, the meeting was adjourned. It is possible that Billaud invented the violent conclusion.

sketchy account of what happened, did not mention Billaud's presence, but he was listed by Rühl among those present. 253)

When the two representatives arrived in the Committee, they found Carnot and Saint-Just, the latter working on his report to the National Convention. Apparently, members of the Committee of General Security had been summoned, but by whom and for what purpose? Simon-Edmé Monnel, a deputy, who wrote a very long description of the meeting many years after the event, pretended that he saw the various leaders of the conspiracy assembled in the Committee. 254) But his is a very fanciful account, embroidered by the author's vivid imagination. 255) It must be rejected

in toto. Barère said that Collet accused Saint-Just of supporting Robespierre; that, in reply, the latter threatened to expose the "counter-revolutionaries" in the Committee. 256)

253)

"Réponse de Barère ... aux Imputations de Laurent Le Cointre," La Révolution Française, XXXIV (1898), 157-160. Also A. Aulard, ed., "Un Discours de Rühl en Germinal," La Révolution Française, XXI (1887), 375; and Billaud's own statements in the National Convention of 13 fructidor (August 30), in Moniteur (16 fructidor an II-September 2, 1794), XXI, 639, and in Ch. Vellay, ed., op. cit., p. 50.

254)

[Simon-Edmé Monnel], Mémoires d'un prêtre régicide (Paris, 1829), II, 292. Monnel died in 1822; since his book shows no name of an editor, it is possible that it was written by some other person altogether (just like Barras' and Robespierre's memoirs).

255)

In the National Convention, Fréron stated (on 13 fructidor) that he went to the Committee to request the imprisonment of several leaders of the Paris Commune. He met Cambon (who did not belong to either of the two Committees) in the hall. Both men were refused admittance. But they could hear the quarrel between Saint-Just and Carnot. See Moniteur (16 fructidor an II-September 2, 1794), XXI, 639.

256)

E. Fleury, Saint-Just et la Terreur (Paris, 1852), II, 338-344, has an excellent summary of the meeting, a recapitulation of the various accounts by the contemporaries.

He quarrelled with Carnot, and Collet wanted to have him arrested on the spot. Eventually, Saint-Just promised to present at 10 a.m. his report to the Committee for censorship. He left around 5 a.m. (257) The others summoned various municipal officers for questioning. It is not known, when the meeting adjourned. From his actions during the morning and early afternoon, Billaud must now have decided to follow the conspirators up to a point. His treatment at the hands of the Jacobins had probably convinced him that a reconciliation with Robespierre was not possible. The latter had to be forced to justify his actions before the assembly. Billaud's next speech was written with that compromise in mind. More than likely, he would have been satisfied if Robespierre had apologized and promised to subordinate himself to the other members of the Committee. Saint-Just probably believed also that peace could be restored. His report was designed to bring public censure by the assembly upon Billaud and Collet. But he did not ask for their ejection from the Committee, nor accuse them of lack of patriotism. Even in these early morning hours of 9 thermidor (July 27), some of the chief actors in the drama must have assumed that violence was not required to bring the conflict to an end.

257)

Moniteur (16 fructidor an II-September 2, 1794), XXI, 639. Billaud said: "Nous pensâmes qu'en les [the members of the Commune] tenant au milieu de nous, ils ne pourraient correspondre avec les autres conjurés ..."

There is no evidence that Billaud left the rooms of the Committee of Public Safety during the morning. ²⁵⁸⁾ Saint-Just did not come to the meeting at 10 a.m., as he had promised. Instead, there was an angry scene between Couthon and his colleagues about an hour later.

Billaud arrived in the National Convention too late to hear the few sentences, which Saint-Just had time to deliver. ²⁵⁹⁾ Later, he could read the accusations of the Triumvirate against him, since the report was printed. ²⁶⁰⁾ Some sentences from it have been quoted before; other are of perhaps even greater interest.

" Collet et Billaud prennent peu de part, depuis quelque temps, aux délibérations, et paraissent livrés à des intérêts et à des vues plus particulières. Billaud assiste à toutes les séances sans parler, à moins que ce ne soit dans le sens de ses passions, ou contre Paris, contre le tribunal révolutionnaire, contre les hommes dont il paraît souhaiter la perte...

Billaud répète souvent ces paroles avec un feint effroi: "Nous marchons sur un volcan." Je le pense aussi, mais le volcan sur lequel nous marchons est sa dissimulation et son amour de dominer

Billaud annonçait son dessein par des paroles entrecoupées; tantôt c'était le mot de "Pisistrate" qu'il prononçait, et tantôt celui de "dangers"... "261)

258)

Wilfred B. Kerr, The Reign of Terror, 1793-4 (Toronto, 1927), 473, speaks of a private meeting between Billaud and Collet during that time, but even if it took place, it is without interest.

259)

Peter Richard Rohden, Robespierre. Die Tragödie des politischen Ideologen (Berlin, 1935), p. 462.

260)

Reprinted in Buchez et Roux, eds., op. cit., XXXIV, 6-20; Oeuvres Complètes de Saint-Just, ed. Ch. Vellay, II, 477-491. Excerpts in E. Hamel, Thermidor, p. 201.

261)

Oeuvres Complètes de Saint-Just, ed. Ch. Vellay, II, 481-482.

" Il a donc existé un plan d'usurper le pouvoir, en immolant une partie des membres du Comité, et en dispersant les autres dans la République, en détruisant le Tribunal révolutionnaire, en privant Paris de ses magistrats. Billaud-Varennes et Collet-d'Herbeis sont les auteurs de cette trame...." 262)

According to Barthon, this last paragraph was added at the last minute, in an attempt to give meaning to Robespierre's vague charges of the day before. 263) It fell upon Saint-Just to come to his friend's aid. He probably had no wish to proceed against Billaud; otherwise, he might have demanded punitive measures. In order to restore unity in the Committee, he was only interested in the truth; facts, that the accused could not publicly deny. He denounced Billaud only for behavior unbecoming a defender of the Republic, not for a specific crime.

Saint-Just was interrupted after having read about five lines of his report. Tallien rose to state that, since he had failed to submit his address to his colleagues for approval, Saint-Just was not speaking in the name of the Committee, but only for himself. Then came Billaud's turn. His speech, rarely quoted, is, however, one of the most dramatic of the French Revolution. 264)

262)

Ibid., II, 490.

263)

L. Barthon, op. cit., p. 86.

264)

It is in Moniteur (11 thermidor an II - July 29, 1794), XXI, 332. Reprinted in Buchez et Roux, ed., op. cit., XXXIV, 21-23, and [Lamothe-Langon], Histoire pittoresque de la Convention Nationale et de ses principaux membres (Paris, 1833), IV, 126-135. Excerpts in the Courrier de l'Égalité, no. 708 (10 thermidor an II), IX, 306; Mémoires de E. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), III, 219-224; L. Badaud-Lacroze, ed., "La Journée du 9 Thermidor an II d'après le Conventionnel Crevelier," La Révolution Française, IV (1908), 63-64; E. L. Higgins, ed., The French Revolution As Told by Contemporaries (Boston, 1939), pp. 355-356.

" Hier, [he began], la Société des Jacobins était remplie d'hommes apostés;... Hier on a développé dans cette Société l'intention d'égorger la Convention nationale. (Il s'élève un mouvement d'horreur.) Hier, j'ai vu des hommes qui vomissaient ouvertement les infamies les plus atroces contre ceux qui n'ont jamais dévié de la révolution..." 265)

He interrupted himself to point out a spectator, whom he recognized as having attended last night's meeting at the Club. This Naulin, an agent of the Committee of General Security, was seized and ejected from the Convention "au milieu des plus vifs applaudissements."

Billaud continued:

" Le moment de dire la vérité est arrivé.... L'assemblée jugerait mal les événements et la position dans laquelle elle se trouve, si elle se dissimulait qu'elle est entre deux égorgements. Elle périra si elle est faible... Je demande moi-même que tous les hommes s'expliquent dans cette assemblée. On est bien fort quand on a pour soi la justice, la probité et les droits du peuple.... Sachez, citoyens, qu'hier le président du tribunal révolutionnaire a proposé ouvertement aux Jacobins de chasser de la Convention tous les hommes impurs, c'est-à-dire tous ceux qu'on veut sacrifier; mais le peuple est là, et les patriotes sauront mourir pour sauver la liberté...." 266)

He accused Robespierre of having pushed the Law of 22 prairial through the Convention without previous discussion with his colleague of having protected dishonest agents of the Committee, of having protested against and delayed Danton's arrest, and finally of having spies investigate deputies of the Convention.

265)

Moniteur (11 thermidor an II-July 29, 1794), XXI, 332.

266)

Idem.

" Tout cela m'a fait voir l'abîme creusé sous nos pas. Il ne faut point hésiter à le combler de nos cadavres ou à triompher des traîtres..." 267)

A student of these events called Billaud's speech "mild", but believed that he was chiefly responsible for the crisis. 268) In G. Bruun's opinion, the Committee (including Saint-Just) was still united in the morning. Had they continued to act as a group, the conspirators in the Convention would have had to remove the whole Committee, which they might not have been able to do. But Saint-Just was unable to read his report, and when Billaud brought personal grievances against Robespierre before the public, the other members of the Committee became paralysed with uncertainty, and permitted the initiative to pass into the hands of Robespierre's enemies in the Convention. 269) Billaud seems to have felt that his initial remarks had been too strong. He concluded his speech without demanding any special measures against Robespierre, probably expecting the latter to defend himself against the charges. According to the most accurate count, forty-five minutes had elapsed since Billaud had entered the hall of the assembly. 270) His main contribution for the day was over by 12.50 p.m. For the remainder of this afternoon session, he did not speak, except to call for the arrest of Dumas, President of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and Boulanger and Dufraisse, two "Generals" of the Revolutionary Army (then in command of the National Guard in

267)

Idem.

268)

G. Bruun, op. cit., p. 114.

269)

Ibid., pp. 90-91.

270)

P. Sainte-Calire Deville, op. cit., p. 199.

271)
 several sections of Paris). He did not participate at all in the riotous procedure which led to the arrests of the Triumvirate, Lebas, and Robespierre's brother, Augustin, around 4 p.m. In fact, he may have left the assembly and gone to sleep in the Committee of Public Safety, after Dumas and his friends had been arrested (between 1.30 and 1.45 p.m.).

That is, in any event, where the deputy Louis-Antoine-Joseph Robin found him, around 5.30 p.m., stretched out on a mattress on the floor. Robin had run into General Hanriot, Commander of the National Guard, who had just been indicted by the Convention. Robin had the General arrested and taken to the Committee. 272)
 Billaud, Amar, and Barère were present. In one version of the story, the following conversation took place:

" Barère lui[Robin] répondit d'un air embarrassé: "Que veux-tu que nous en fassions? fais-en toi même ce que tu voudras. - Qu'on le conduise au Comité de sûreté générale." - Sur l'observation de Robin, qu'il n'y avait pas de sûreté, Barère répliqua: "En bien, laisse-le aller." 273)

In another version, Billaud participated in the discussion.

271)

Moniteur(11 thermidor an II-July 29, 1794), XXI, 333. He called these men friends of Dumouriez, Hébert, and Danton.

272)

The only account of this incident comes from Courtois de l'Aube, to whom Robin communicated the facts. See Dr. Robinet, ed., "Notes et Souvenirs de Courtois de l'Aube, député à la Convention nationale," La Révolution Française, XIII(1887), 928. Also in Henri Wallon, Histoire du Tribunal Révolutionnaire de Paris (Paris, 1880-1882), VI, 233, who used another version of Courtois, an excerpt from a report before the Convention of thermidor year III.

273)

Dr. Robinet, ed., loc.cit., XIII(1887), 928.

" Que veux-tu que nous en fassions?dit Billaud.- Punir ces traîtres.-Mais enfin,dit Barère, que veux-tu que nous en fassions?Veux-tu qu'on nomme une commission militaire qui le juge prévôtalement? Ce serait un peu vigoureux,"reprit Billaud." 274)

Robin is supposed to have answered: "A moins d'être ses complices, on ne se conduit pas de cette manière."²⁷⁵⁾ He took his prisoner away with him, to the Committee of General Security. Harriot stayed there until around 7 p.m., when his friends liberated him. Every witness agreed that the members of the Committee of Public Safety had been panic-stricken. Their attempt at reconciliation had failed; instead, the indicted Robespierre was free and gathering his forces at the Hôtel-de-Ville. Billaud and his colleagues were certain that they would all lose their lives, if he won. Actually, Billaud need not have been afraid, since his name was not on any list of those to be eliminated in the hour of triumph, neither on the one drawn up late in the afternoon by the General Council of the Commune, nor on Robespierre's personal one, composed later that night.²⁷⁶⁾ But, it is possible that this was merely an oversight, since Collet's and Barère's names figured prominently on both.

274)

H.Wallon,op.cit.,VI,233.

275)

P.Sainte-Claire Deville,op.cit.,p.220.

276)

Billaud, in his Réponse... Aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles, p.18, said that his name headed the list of the Commune. But this is not the case (the list can be examined at the Archives Nationales). Billaud's name appeared only on a list drawn up many years later in memory of Thermidor, by Buonarotti and his friends.

After the crisis was over, the members of the Committees were accused of negligence in office and failure to participate in attempts to recapture Robespierre. Despite Sainte-Claire Deville's angry denials,²⁷⁷⁾ the historian is forced to conclude that the Committee of Public Safety did not issue a single effective measure during the crisis. The "politicians" showed an almost incredible lack of initiative; while the "experts" did not show up at all, either in the Committee, or in the National Convention. Between ca. 2 p.m. and ca. 8.15 p.m., Billaud did nothing at all. He may have deserved a rest, but he abandoned his friends and the Convention at a most critical moment. While Robespierre was indicted, arrested and refused admittance at the prisons, Billaud was probably asleep. While the former was freed by his friends and taken to the Hôtel-de-Ville to organize resistance to the National Convention, the latter looked with apparently small concern at the storm which he himself had helped to raise. To later accusations of apathy, he answered that nothing could have been done in any event; that vigorous actions²⁷⁸⁾ by the Committee would have led to its arrest by the Robespierrists.

Billaud-Varennnes arrived late for the evening session of the assembly. It had started around 7 p.m.; he did not enter the meeting before 8.15 p.m. He then reported that Henriot and his remaining canonniers had surrounded the National Convention, and

277)

P. Sainte-Claire Deville, op. cit., p. 247.

278)

Réponse de J.N. Billaud à Laurent Lecointre, pp. 84-87.

that the events of May 31, 1793 were going to repeat themselves. He assured the assembly that orders for the arrests of the National Agent of the Commune (Payan), and the Mayor of Paris (Fleuriet-Lescot), had been issued by the Committee of Public Safety at 4 p.m. ²⁷⁹⁾ He launched into an impassioned address.

" Il faut savoir prendre, [he said], des mesures vigoureuses, il faut savoir mourir à son poste. (Oui, oui! s'écrient tous les membres, nous le saurons tous. Les spectateurs applaudissent.) Les comités réunis vont vous présenter un rapport avec des mesures capables de sauver la liberté. Elles sont intactes; car ce hardi factieux, cet artificieux conspirateur, qui depuis six mois se couvrait du masque de la vertu pour égorger les républicains, est maintenant à la commune. Vous allez entendre le rapport des deux comités." ²⁸⁰⁾

Sainte-Claire Deville must have been thinking of this report when he spoke of energy deployed by the two Committees. But it prescribed no detailed course of action. The administrators of France managed only to convey some general thoughts. The National Convention, in view of this impotence, appointed Barras Commander-in-Chief of the assembly's armed forces. It also postponed, on Billaud's request, a patriotic celebration, which had been planned for the next day. "Nous irens au Panthéon," the latter remarked, "avec plus d'enthousiasme, quand nous aurens purgé la terre." ²⁸¹⁾

279)

Moniteur (12 thermidor an II-July 30, 1794), XXI, 339. A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, does not have such orders dated 9 thermidor. The two men had already been arrested very early in the morning of that day, but had subsequently been released.

280)

Idem.

281)

Ibid. (12 thermidor an II-July 30, 1794), XXI, 341.

The meeting lasted all night, until 6 a.m. of the next day (10 thermidor-July 28). Billaud apparently attended until Robespierre had been recaptured, shortly after 3 a.m. Only early in the morning did he and his colleagues leave the Convention to issue some emergency decrees. ²⁸²⁾ The deputy Jacques Cr velier, in a letter of 12 thermidor to the Sans-Culottes of Confolens (Charente), remarked that, as the night wore on, the assembly ²⁸³⁾ gained courage. This is definitely true as far as Billaud is concerned. His two remarks during the night called for an immediate march of the assembly's forces on the H tel-de-Ville; the second adding "afin que leurs [the Robespierrists'] t tes tombent avant une heure." ²⁸⁴⁾

Robespierre, under guard and in great pain, was lying on a wooden table in the Committee of Public Safety, when Billaud and some other deputies entered around 5 a.m. If Billaud spoke to his former colleague, their words were not recorded. ²⁸⁵⁾ He was also in the room four hours later (ca. 9 a.m.), when Couthon and Gobeau (or Gobault), a member of the General Council of the Commune, were brought in. He signed in first place the order

282)

G. Braun, op. cit., pp. 123-124. But he also admits that it is very hard to find out what happened exactly.

283)

L. Badaud-Lacroze, ed., loc. cit., LV (1908), 68.

284)

Moniteur (12 thermidor an II-July 30, 1794), XXI, 342.

285)

Dr. Robinet, ed., loc. cit., XIII (1887), 929. Courtois wrote that Bourdon de l'Oise went up to Robespierre and insulted him.

transferring the two and Robespierre to the Conciergerie, Barère
 and Collot-d'Herbois following suit. ²⁸⁶⁾ For the rest of the
 day, Billaud's movements cannot be reconstructed. It is unimportant
 to do so anyway, since the crisis was over. He did not appear
 in the Convention, but three arrêtés of the Committee of Public
 Safety, dated 10 thermidor (July 28), are signed by him in first
 place. Two are orders of release, a sure sign that new times
 had arrived. Four members of the Comité de surveillance of the
section du Finistère (arrested by a member of the Commune the
 day before), and the former General Laubadière, were set free; ²⁸⁷⁾
 but three members of the Revolutionary Committee of the section
de Marat were arrested, as Robespierriest sympathizers. ²⁸⁸⁾

Thus ended the "Revolution of Thermidor", and with it
 the active part of Billaud's political career. Not long after,
 he and his friends were deprived of their high offices and had
 to defend themselves and their actions. At the moment, Billaud
 believed that he had protected the rights of the National
 Convention against a dictator. He did not possess the insight

286)

Notes Historiques sur la Convention Nationale, le Directoire,
l'Empire et l'Exile des Votants, par Marc-Antoine Baudot, ed. [Mme.
Edgar Quinet] (Paris, 1893), p. 281. Baudot, a deputy of the Convention,
 may also have been present. His loosely organized notes are a very
 reliable source of information.

287)

A. Aulard, ed., Recueil, XV, 479, 486. The first arrêté is written by
 Lacoste, signed in second place by Lavicomterie (both of the Committee
 of General Security); the second, handwriting and only other signature
 Carnot's.

288)

Ebid., XV, 482. Handwriting also Billaud's. Second signature that of
 Collot.

and wisdom of his colleague Voulland of the Committee of General Security, who wrote to the administration of the district of Uzès (Gard), while the outcome of the struggle was still uncertain:

" Je ne vois dans tout ce qui se passe autour des deux comités que de petits amours blessés qui se sont aigris avec le temps, et dont l'explosion a été terrible." 289)

Billaud himself soon realized that Thermidor had not only made a reaction possible, but had for ever removed the possibility of a radical social revolution. Many years later, in exile and barely remembered by the new generation, he gave expression to his feelings.

" Nous nous sommes bien trompés ce jour là! [He told a visitor], nous avons recommencé après cette journée tous les chapitres de la réaction anglaise.... Nos divisions ont brisé ce jour-là l'unité du système révolutionnaire; vous avez vu aussitôt l'influence revenir à des misérables écartés pour vol, enfin à tous les fripons, les briseurs, les oligarques, les royalistes

Je le répète: la révolution puritaine a été perdue le 9 thermidor; depuis, combien de fois, j'ai déploré d'y avoir agi en colère!" 290)

289)

Albert Mathiez et H. Chobaut, eds., "Trois lettres inédites de Voulland sur la crise de Thermidor," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, IV (1927), 72. Reprinted in A. Mathiez, Girondins et Montagnards, pp. 170-183. The one quoted is the second letter, probably written during the morning of 9 thermidor.

290)

[Anonymus], Les Dernières Années de Billaud-Varennnes, "La Nouvelle Minerve", I (1835), 354.