

## Part V.

## Chapter I.

## The End of a Political Career.

## 1. The First Attacks against the Committees:

10 thermidor-15 fructidor year II (July 28-September 1, 1794).

The fall of Robespierre caused important political realignments. The Left recognized too late that the "Republic of Virtue" ceased to be a live issue. It had consequently no political platform, with which it could attract voters. The opponents of the Committees, on the other hand, organized political machines, whose programs appealed to all those who wished to abandon the regime of the Terror. The Thermidorian "Reaction" was only a struggle between these groups. 1) The Mountain became the "radical" party, insofar as it attempted to maintain the status quo. But unable to attract the people, it lost out, and its prominent leaders were eliminated. Since Billand was one of them, his political career was to end ingloriously very soon. He had fallen heir to Robespierre's mantle, but under changed circumstances, which he did not

1)

Probably the best account of the Thermidorian Reaction is Albert Mathiez, La Réaction Thermidorienne (Paris, 1929). Excellent is also Georges Lefebvre, Les Thermidoriens (Paris, 1937), though on a much smaller scale. The latter is the only one of the works quoted here which can be called in any way objective. The two older studies, Marc Bonnefoy, Les Suites du Neuf Thermidor: Terreur Blanches. 1785-1815 (Paris, 1892) and Jules Claretie, Les Derniers Montagnards (2ème. éd., Paris, 1868), although valuable for their documentation, are both unacceptable as interpretations. No one has ever written an account explicitly favorable to the Thermidorians.

understand at all. The man who did (and who used these circumstances to his own advantage) was the leader of the "new" Right, Jean-Lambert Tallien. Immensely clever as a politician, he moved behind the scenes. He wielded enormous power through his control of large blocs of deputies in the National Convention. Only the much larger number of Center deputies, many of them Tallien's personal enemies, prevented him from imposing his wishes upon the assembly at all times. Some of these antagonists, like Thuriot, had great ability and were successful in maintaining a precarious balance between the parties for some time.

Billaud viewed the large-scale defections from the Left with equanimity. In fact, he did nothing to restrain members of the Mountain from voting with the Plain. He was probably unaware of the formation of a strong Center bloc, whose aim was to restrain the Committee of Public Safety and to introduce moderate policies. Billaud became interested again in literary activities. Prieur de la Côte-d'Or wrote that

" après le 9 thermidor, Billaud-Varennnes reprit son activité. "Nous l'avons échappé belle, disait-il souvent, les péripéties par lesquelles nous venons de passer feraient un beau sujet de tragédie. J'écrirai cette tragédie-là..." Aucune oeuvre littéraire ne serait plus curieuse à connaître." 2)

2)

Hippolyte Carnot, Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils (Paris, 1861), I, 535. Reprinted in a collection of documents, Charles Vatel, ed., Charlotte de Corday et les Girondins (Paris, 1864-1872), I, XVI, n.1.

However, he neither wrote such a play, nor the second part of the Elémens du Republicanisme, which had already been announced in the Moniteur of 16 messidor (July 4). The advertisement of Mes opinions politiques et morales stated that

" Le sujet est celui traité dans les Elémens du Republicanisme, du même auteur; le plan seul est différent, ou plutôt c'est l'ordre des matières, dont la rédaction, moins contiguë, rendra la lecture plus variée, et par conséquent, plus attachante. Quoique les principaux aient une connexité intime, cependant ils embrassent tant d'objets qu'on peut les présenter partiellement. C'est ainsi qu'en y revenant à plusieurs fois, chaque touche leur donne une teinte nouvelle; et en dernière analyse ils ont plus de couleur et plus de ton.

... Une idée forte s'affaiblit souvent par son amalgame avec d'autres idées, au lieu que détachée, elle frappe davantage... L'art n'est pas de tout dire dans chaque chapitre, mais d'inspirer beaucoup plus qu'on n'a exprimé. Alors, non-seulement l'âme s'en pénètre mieux, parce qu'elle s'y attache plus fortement, mais l'instruction en devient plus complète, puisqu'on ne suspend la lecture que pour aller soi-même plus loin que l'auteur." 3)

Was Principes Régénérateurs du Système Social, published in pluviôse year III, a revised version of this work? If so, it does not read well, nor express "strong" ideas with clarity.

In the political arena, Billaud told the detailed story of Robespierre's "conspiracy" at a meeting of the Jacobin Club, on 11 thermidor (July 29). "Que cet exemple, [he concluded], ... vous apprenne à ne plus avoir d'idoles. Vous fûtes victimes de Lafayette, de Brissot, d'une infinité d'autres conspirateurs..." 4)

3)

Moniteur (16 messidor an II-July 4, 1794), XXI, 123.

4)

A. Aulard, ed., Société, VI, 299.

On the same afternoon, in the National Convention, he had objected to the suspension of the remaining members of the Revolutionary Tribunal. With Thuriot's support, he had managed to win postponement of the matter, until an investigation by the Committees of Public Safety and General Security had been completed.<sup>5)</sup> Yet, for the first time, he had met organized resistance to his proposals.

Forces were already at work to eliminate the radicals from public office, notably Billaud and Collot. Tallien, for one, had a personal grievance against the Committee of Public Safety: It had, on 3 prairial (May 22), ordered the imprisonment of Thérèse Cabarrus, with whom he had then been living in Bordeaux. The order for her arrest had been signed by Robespierre, Billaud, Barère, and Collot, in that order. Her biographers admit that she was indeed completely unscrupulous, although she did probably not engage in counter-revolutionary activities.<sup>6)</sup> It is interesting to note that Tallien joined the conspiracy against Robespierre only after he had learned that Mme. Cabarrus was to be tried early in thermidor, and that Robespierre had taken a special interest in the case. Yet, she was not released

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5)

Moniteur (13 thermidor an II=July 31, 1794), XXI, 356. Jacques-Alexis Thuriot, a most interesting personality, has never been examined by historians. A jurist of very high moral principles, he attempted to reconcile party differences during the Thermidorian Reaction. A good friend of Danton's and leader of the indulgents after the latter's death, he continued his distinguished career to the fall of the Empire.

6)

Joseph Turquan, La Citoyenne Tallien (Paris, [1898]), and Louis Gastir Reine du Directoire: La Belle Tallien. Notre Dame de Septembre (Paris, [1909]), Both authors were more interested in gossip than in the examination of historical evidence.



from prison before 26 thermidor (August 13), probably because Tallien did not wish to advertise their relationship previous to that date. Both he and his future wife (they were married on 6 nivôse year III-December 26, 1794) had now one burning desire: to avenge themselves on her persecutors.

For that purpose, Tallien found several henchmen. First, Jean-Claude-Hippolyte Méhée de la Touche.<sup>7)</sup> In September 1792, the latter had been Assistant Secretary (secrétaire-greffier adjunt) of the Paris Commune, and his immediate superior had been Tallien. Removed from office during the reorganization of the Commune in August 1793, he had his private grudges against the Committee of Public Safety. On 9 fructidor (August 26), exactly a month after Robespierre's fall, he published a pamphlet against Billaud and his associates, entitled La Queue de Robespierre, ou les Dangers de la Liberté de la presse.<sup>8)</sup> This was to be the first in the most famous series of Thermidorian pamphlets. Méhée followed up his initial success with other writings on the same

7) Very interesting is Georges Lonôtre, "Felhémési" in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 5ème. série (Paris, 1920, pp. 29-52. "Felhémési" was Méhée's pseudonym. Deported after 18 brumaire, he ended his long career in 1837, as an agent of the British government and the French Royalists.

8) The fact that this pamphlet was written on Tallien's orders is stated in A. Mathiez, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

9) subject; he himself being in turn imitated by other reactionaries 10)  
 and denounced by the defenders of the Committee of Public Safety. 11)  
 These pamphlets influenced public opinion to a very considerable  
 extent. The police agents Barrison and Le Camus reported on  
 9 fructidor (August 26):

" Hier au Jardin national, dans plusieurs groupes, on  
 parlait avec beaucoup de chaleur contre Barère,  
 Billaud-Varennes et Collet-d'Herbois." 12)

Since this was the popular feeling before the publication of  
 Méhée's pamphlets, it is likely that many persons became even  
 more hostile after they had read anti-Jacobin propaganda.

However, Tallien's main attack was to take place in the  
 National Convention itself. The man chosen to lead the campaign  
 was a deputy, who, up to that time, had not distinguished himself  
 in any way. Laurent Lecointre (de Versailles) was regarded with  
 suspicion by his colleagues, since he had always refused to align  
 himself with a faction. 13) But that may have been the reason

9) Notably La Grande Queue de Laurent Le Cointre; Rendez-Moi Ma Queue,  
ou Lettre à Sartine Thuriot, sur une violation de la liberté de la  
presse et des droits de l'homme; and Défends la Queue. Thuriot had  
 demanded the confiscation of these libellous works, but without success.  
 10)

For instance, Labil, La Grande Queue de Barère ou les Dangers d'aller  
aux Jacobins, and Y. Baralère, Coupons-lui la Queue.  
 11)

The best-known is Marie et Prévost, Réponse à la Queue de  
Robespierre par un Franc Républicain.  
 12)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., Paris sous la Réaction Thermidorienne et sous  
le Directoire (Paris, 1898-1902), I, 60.  
 13)

Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p.  
 388. A pretty good short biographical article is Théodore Lhuillier,  
 "Laurent Le Cointre (de Versailles), Député à la Convention", La  
Révolution Française, XXVIII (1895), 234-256.

why Tallien approached him, a man known to be above party disputes and petty jealousies. Levasseur de la Sarthe characterized him as

" n'ait du tout un homme politique. Il se laissait toujours diriger par le sentiment du moment." 14

And, remarked his colleague, Lecointre now followed the popular feeling of the moment, which was to repudiate the Terror and its leadership. 15) According to a reliable historian, Tallien promised Lecointre that in return for his services, his friend, Fouquier-Tinville would be cleared. 16)

On 11 fructidor (August 28), Lecointre rose in the Convention to declare:

" Citoyens collègues, je demande que la parole me soit accordée, demain à 2 heures, pour donner à la Convention nationale lecture de faits précis contre sept de nos collègues, dont trois membres du comité de salut public, et quatre de celui de sûreté générale.

Je demande cette heure, afin qu'ils soient prévenus et présents, conformément à vos lois et à mes principes." 17)

His request having been granted, he started immediately with the accusations. Fearing that he would be interrupted, he omitted

14)

Mémoires de Levasseur (de la Sarthe), Ex-Conventionnel (Bruxelles, 1832), IV, 78.

15)

Idem.

16)

J.-N. Davy, Les Conventionnels de l'Eure. Buzot, Duroy, Lindet à travers l'histoire (Evreux, 1876), II, 521-522.

17)

Moniteur (13 fructidor an II-August 30, 1794), XXI, 610.

18)  
 a long speech of introduction. The case against the  
 Committees was contained in twenty-six "articles".<sup>19)</sup> Three of  
 these concerned only the members of the Committee of General  
 Security (Amar, David, Vadier, Voulland)(XIV,XVI,XVII). In the  
 others, Lecointre charged the Committee of Public Safety with  
 neglect of duty during the crisis of Thermidor (XXIII,XXIV,XXV,  
 XXVI); with employing underworld characters as agents (VI,VII),  
 with preventing discussion of the Law of 22 prairial in the  
 National Convention (IX,X), with irregularities at the great  
 political trials ("packing" the jury, influencing Fouquier-Tinville,  
 etc.)(XI,XII,XIII,XV), with the imprisonment of 100 000 citizens,  
 some of them cripples, fathers of families, "et même des  
défenseurs de la patrie" (VIII,XVII,XIX), with keeping  
 Robespierre's absence from the Committee a secret (XXI), with  
 violations of laws and acts of Terror in general (I-IV). Lecointre  
 stated that his purpose was to prove that the seven accused "sont  
répréhensibles."<sup>20)</sup> He aimed at public censure of certain Committee  
 members, which, in turn, would lead to their replacement. He

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 18)

Laurent Lecointre, Les Crimes de Sept Membres des Anciens Comités de Salut Public et de Sécurité Générale(Paris, [20 vendémiaire, an III], p.7.

19)

Moniteur(14 fructidor an II-August 31,1794),XXI,620-621.Reprinted in L.Lecointre, op.cit., pp.18-22;Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale,VII,230-243;P.-C.Buchez et P.-C.Roux, eds.,Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française(Paris,1834-1838),XXXVI,51-55.A good analysis is in J.Claretie, op.cit., pp.23-24;a very detailed one in J.-N.Davy, op.cit.,II,516-552.

20)

Moniteur(14 fructidor an II-August 31,1794),XXI,620.

appears to have questioned the legality of their actions in the past; he appears not to have had criminal prosecution in mind. He might have believed that to stand morally condemned before the French people would be sufficient punishment of the accused. For that reason, he did not bother to prepare a tight legal case. Each point of accusation was partly true (the seven men had, after all, been responsible for the Terror), but Lecointre offered no evidence which would have been accepted as such in a court of law.

The immediate result of the attack was one of indignation. The Committees found immediately a defender in Jean-Marie-Claude-Alexandre Goujon, a stalwart deputy of the Left.

" Mon coeur est suffoqué, [he said], quand je vois avec quelle froide tranquillité on vient de jeter au milieu de nous des semences de division, quand je vois avec quel calme flégnatique on propose la perte de la patrie.... Hier vous avez passé à l'ordre du jour sur cette motion, et aujourd'hui l'on vient vous apporter des pièces contre des hommes qui ont bien servi la révolution... Je demande que la discussion cesse à l'instant..." 21)

After these impassioned remarks, the accused made their first mistake. They prevented an adjournment of the case. Billaud stated his desire to justify his actions and clear himself completely.

21)

Ibid., (14 Fructidor an II-August 31, 1794), XXI, 621-622. Also in L. Thénard et R. Guyot, Le Conventionnel Goujon (1766-1795) (Paris, 1809), pp. 130-131.

" Si le supplice de Danton est un crime, [he said], je m'en accuse, car j'ai été le premier à dénoncer Danton; j'ai dit que, si cet homme existait, la liberté était perdue; s'il était dans cette enceinte, il sera un point de ralliement pour tous les contre-révolutionnaires....

Quand on a la conscience pure, on ne craint pas la lumière; aussi suis-je le premier à demander ... que le voile soit déchiré, il faut que le peuple connaisse ses véritables amis et ceux qui veulent le poignarder...

Il est quelques faits qu'il faut que vous sachiez citoyens; c'est que Lecointre, qui a gagné 50 000 livres à la révolution, s'était dispensé de faire la déclaration des marchandises qu'il avait; qu'il vint nous le dire au comité; et que nous fûmes assez bons pour sauver à un représentant du peuple l'infamie du titre d'accapareur...

Cette accusation est un véritable jeu d'enfants. On reproche la continuation des pouvoirs, tandis que vous les avez chaque mois unanimement prorogés; vous êtes donc tous coupables..." 22)

Vadier then marched up to the speaker's platform and drew out a pistol, as if he wanted to commit suicide. He was disarmed, but, said the Moniteur, "le plus grand trouble règne." 23) Finally, on Thuriot's proposal, the National Convention declared that

" nos collègues... se sont toujours comportés conformément au vœu national et à celui de la Convention; ajoutons que la Convention rejette avec la plus profonde indignation la dénonciation de Lecointre et passe à l'ordre du jour." 24)

22)

Moniteur (14 fructidor an II-August 31, 1794), XXI, 622-623. Th. Lhuillier, loc. cit., makes no mention of Lecointre's speculations.

23)

Moniteur (14 fructidor an II-August 31, 1794), XXI, 623.

24)

Idem.

It seems that the people of Paris were less enthusiastic about this decision. The journalist Dussault, a reliable witness, reported that

" Le soir, les Tuileries....se remplirent de groupes en fermentation. On se plaignait de ce qu'une dénonciation si grave avait été traitée si légèrement. On retraçait tous les souvenirs qui pouvaient être désavantageux aux membres dénoncés... L'opinion était favorable à Lecointre, en ce sens qu'elle ne lui était pas défavorable..." 25)

Probably as a result of this pressure, Louis-Félix Roux, a Montagnard of little ability, who had aligned himself with the extreme Right, demanded in the National Convention the next day (13 fructidor-August 30), that the charges be taken up again.

By that time, Tallien and his friends had realized that they had not prepared their case well enough. Therefore, while Duhem and Bourdon de l'Oise (members of the Left) spoke in support of Roux' proposal, Tallien reminded the assembly that it would be best to drop the matter entirely. 26) He expressed the wishes of many, notably the surviving Dantonists in the Convention. That group was sharply divided; Thuriot, its chief spokesman, sincerely believed that the Committee members had acted in good faith, if not wisely. At the other extreme, Courtois de l'Aube felt that it was his mission to avenge the death of Danton, who had been

25)

J.-J. Dussault, Fragments pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Convention Nationale, Depuis le 10 thermidor, jusqu'à la Dénonciation de Lecointre, inclusivement (Paris, 1794), pp. 13-14. Part of this important pamphlet is reprinted in C.-A. Dauban, ed., Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869), pp. 513-518.

26)

Moniteur (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 627.

his intimate friend. Between the two stood Louis Legendre (de Versailles), who had been one of the leading conspirators against Robespierre. All his actions were motivated by fear for his life.<sup>27)</sup> He also wanted to strike Billaud and his friends, but believed that the right opportunity had not yet arisen. After Tallien's remarks, Legendre stated that he had tried to dissuade Lecointre from his course of action.<sup>28)</sup> Thuriot said that even if the accusations were founded on fact (he doubted it), it would hardly be in the national interest to make public the operations of the Committee of Public Safety.<sup>29)</sup> Billaud insisted again that he should have an opportunity to clear himself. He claimed that the assembly was dominated by counter-revolutionaries; that he had seen the marquis de Tilly, a known Royalist spy, confer with deputies outside the Convention hall that morning (the marquis had emigrated and did actually not return to France between 1792 and his death in 1816).<sup>30)</sup> Since Billaud was so insistent upon his rights, the assembly decreed that Lecointre should read the documents, which would furnish proof for his accusations. The latter expressed his regrets, but he did not have any papers; they are in the police.

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27)

On Legendre, see Georges Lenôte, "Le boucher Legendre," in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 5<sup>ème</sup> série (Paris, 1930), 215-246, and the biased article in A. Kuscinski, op. cit., 392-394.

28)

Moniteur (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 627.

29)

Ibid., (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 630.

30)

Ibid., (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 631.



files, he stated. <sup>31)</sup> Naturally, the Convention turned against

him. A member who has remained anonymous demanded: "Combien t'es-tu vendu, Lecointre?" <sup>32)</sup> Legendre himself praised the

Committee members. A lengthy discussion ensued, in which Billaud blamed Robespierre for the Law of 22 prairial, Couthon for the Popular Commission of Orange, and Fouquier-Tinville for the mass executions. <sup>33)</sup> He also maintained that

" L'absence de Robespierre du comité a été utile à la patrie, car il nous a laissé le temps de combiner nos moyens pour l'abattre; vous sentez que, s'il s'y était rendu exactement, il nous aurait beaucoup gênés. Saint-Just et Couthon, qui étaient fort exacts, ont été pour nous des espions très incommodes." <sup>34)</sup>

The discussion ended with a demand by Lacoste, himself a member of the Committee of General Security, that Lecointre be indicted for slandering the national government. Finally, Collot-d'Herbois thanked the Convention for its fairness, and asked for unity and harmony in the future. <sup>35)</sup>

Two days later, on 15 fructidor (September 1), the time came to appoint new members to the Committee of Public Safety. One-fourth were to be replaced every month. A lottery determined who was to leave and who to stay. When, on 15 fructidor, Barère drew the unlucky number, Billaud and Collot resigned together with him. They said that they would "sacrifice" themselves, so that

31)

Idem.

32)

Ibid. (15 fructidor an II-September 1, 1794), XXI, 632.

33)

Ibid. (15, 16 fructidor an II-September 1, 2, 1794), XXI, 632-634, 637.

34)

Ibid. (16 fructidor an II-September 2, 1794), XXI, 638.

35)

Ibid. (16 fructidor an II-September 2, 1794), XXI, 641.

the "Organizers of Victory," Carnot and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, might remain in office.<sup>36)</sup> This action was altogether a mistake. For one, the three men admitted tacitly that they were accomplices; in any event, their enemies gained that impression. They concluded that Barère, Billaud and Collot wished to leave the Committee before their crimes would come to light, in order not to disgrace their colleagues and the office. It is more likely that Billaud and his friends did not want to serve in a Committee, which, since the fall of Robespierre, included Tallien and Legendre.<sup>37)</sup> But since no "politician" of the Left remained in the Committee (Carnot, Lindet and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or were merely technicians), political control passed into the hands of the reactionaries.

According to his own testimony, Lecointre decided that the case against the Committees should be reopened. Undaunted by his failure, he went to the Committee of General Security,<sup>38)</sup> where he obtained documentary proof for his accusations. On 20 vendémiaire year III (October 11, 1794), his Les Crimes des Sept Membres des Anciens Comités de Salut Public et de Sécurité Générale, was published. But no documents pointing to Billaud's

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36)

Ibid. (17 fructidor an II-September 3, 1794), XXI, 656. Also Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, VII, 277-278.

37)

This is the opinion in J.-N. Davy, op.cit., II, 55.

38)

Lecointre, op.cit., p. II.

(and the six others') guilt are reprinted there; instead, after a repetition of his previous statements, Lecointre only copied from the Moniteur the various instances when members of the Committee supported the Triumvirate in the National Convention. His book was a collection of bitter reflexions, unfounded rumors, vague accusations, and charges which could not stand examination. Billaud was called "lâche et vil adorateur de la fortune ou de l'homme en place."<sup>39)</sup> Lecointre managed to discredit him as an honorable person, but failed to prove his criminal intent.

From that time on, Lecointre's star was on the decline.

He became disillusioned with the Thermidorians and joined the Left again, although he had been expelled from the Jacobin Club as a result of his denunciations. On 20 nivôse year III (January 9, 1795), he asked for an amnesty for those he had previously accused,<sup>40)</sup> and on 29 ventôse (March 19), he demanded the proclamation of the Constitution of 1793. This was the spark which set off the unrest of germinal.<sup>41)</sup> On 12 germinal (April 1), after the deportation of Barère, Billaud, and Collot had been decreed, Bourdon de l'Oise asked: "Où est Le Cointre qui sème ici la division parmi nous?"<sup>42)</sup> Despite Legendre's plea in his

39) Ibid., p.243.

40) Georges Belloni, Le Comité de Sûreté Générale de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1924), p.426. Also A.Kuscinski, op.cit., p.389.

41) Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), IV, 242; and A.Kuscinski, op.cit., p.389.

42) Idem. Also G.Belloni, op.cit., p.426.

43) defense, he was arrested and imprisoned in Mont-Saint-Michel. After his release and participation in all leftist coups d'état of the Directory, he was exiled to his country-house at Guignes (where he died in 1805) by the First Consul.

2. The Attack Continues: 16 Fructidor year II  
(September 2, 1794)-11 ventôse year III (February 29, 1795).

Since their enemies had failed so badly in these maneuvers, the Left gained confidence. On 20 fructidor (September 6), the Club électoral presented a petition to the National Convention asking for freedom of the press and new elections to the assembly. The Club électoral was an organization of the remaining Hébertist and even enragé elements. Headed first by Jean Varlet, one of the leaders of the popular movement of Summer 1793, and later by Gracchus Babeuf, it conducted a violent propaganda campaign against the Mountain. 44) Although Tallien and his friends should have been eager to get such support from the extreme Left, they were not inclined to accept it. 45) After

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43)

A. Kuscinski, op.cit., p. 389. Legendre stated that everyone in Lecointre's family had been insane and that the deputy himself was not of sound mind. By law, insane persons could neither be imprisoned nor deported.

44)

See, on the left opposition to the Mountain, Louis de Cardenal, "Robespierrisme et Terrorisme après Thermidor," Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XV (1938), 314-342. Also, Albert Mathies, La Réaction Thermidorienne (Paris, 1929), pp. 85-87.

45)

Ibid., p. 86. After Varlet had made a speech in praise of Lecointre, he was arrested by order of the Committee of Public Safety. The Committee kept him in prison until the end of the month.

the Club électoral had submitted its petition on 20 fructidor, Billaud requested an investigation of the Club, for counter-revolutionary activities.<sup>46)</sup> Ten days later (30 fructidor - September 16), Babeuf led again a delegation to the National Convention, but with as little success as on previous occasions.<sup>47)</sup> The Mountain still managed to win allies from the Center and Right in its fight against the extreme Left. But it also lost working-class support, and with that, its political strength.

Billaud continued in his old ways. In the National Convention,

" interrompu un jour par quelques signes d'improbation, il jeta un coup-d'oeil menaçant sur la Convention, et dit: "Je crois qu'on murmure." "<sup>48)</sup>

And his speech at the Jacobin Club on 23 fructidor (September 9) shows that he had not changed:

" Une conspiration atroce, [he said], menace en ce moment la liberté; ses auteurs ne sont pas difficiles à trouver: ce sont ceux qui cherchent la dissolution de la République.... Voilà les faits qu'il faut dénoncer à la Convention.... La Convention veut le salut de la liberté, que les Jacobins paraissent à la barre, et les aristocrates rentreront dans le néant..."<sup>49)</sup>

On 8 vendémiaire year III (September 29, 1794), the assembly discussed the cruelties committed by General Turreau, Commander-in-Chief of the armies in the Vendée. He had been duly appointed by the

46)

Moniteur (22 fructidor an II - September 8, 1794), XXI, 694.

47)

Ibid. (3e. sansculottide an II - September 19, 1794), XXI, 783.

48)

Mémoires sur la Convention, et le Directoire par A.C. Thibaudeau, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1824), I, 89.

49)

A. Anlard, ed., Société, VI, 435.

Committee of Public Safety, but his chief accuser was now Carnot.

Billaud pretended that

" La vérité est que le système du comité de salut public a toujours été contraire aux mesures de rigueur... (Violents murmures.) Pour bien juger la conduite du comité, il faut vous rappeler ... qu'il fallait combattre des rebelles avec vigueur .... (Oui, s'écrient plusieurs membres, mais non les égorger.) Je ne parle pas ici d'égorgement, jamais vous ne trouverez une pareille mesure dans les arrêtés du comité." 50)

He blamed Robespierre for Furréau's appointment, and when Carnot testified that "Billaud a constamment été opposé au système de Robespierre," there was general applause. But this was to be the last triumph of the Mountain.

Fallien and his friends having failed to destroy the former members of the Committees, Legendre and the ex-Dantonists believed that their chance had come. They expected support from the radicals of Paris, as well as from the standard-bearers of reaction. After 18 frimaire year III (December 8, 1794), the surviving Girondists, who returned to take their places in the National Convention, joined them in a powerful bloc. Billaud had also personal enemies. For instance, Dominique-Joseph Garat, the Dantonist Minister of Justice and the Interior, who had been released from prison after 9 thermidor. In the Committee of Public Safety, one member proposed him for the post of Commissioner of Education (Commissaire de l'instruction publique). Billaud

50)

Moniteur (12 vendémiaire an III-October 3, 1794), XXII, 118.

protested and said that he would reveal Garat's past actions to the National Convention, if the latter were confirmed. 51)

The two men were enemies from that time on. Garat took his revenge in 1799, when he prevented the grant of an amnesty for the exiled Billaud. 52)

The most effective way to strike the Left was by turning public opinion against it. Events were to show that these efforts of the Thermidorians were crowned with success. The war of the pamphlets was conducted with energy from the very beginning of the Thermidorian Reaction. The authors of most of these pamphlets (which were published anonymously) remain unknown to this day. These writings show some common characteristics; in fact, many can be classified into specific series. In that of Ménéce de la Touche, already mentioned, the members of the Committees ride on Robespierre's "tail" (as "parasites") or symbolize it (as "fly-swatters", etc.). 53) Another has Hell as

51)

D[ominique-]J[oseph] Garat, Mémoires sur la Révolution, ou exposé de ma conduite dans les affaires et dans les fonctions publiques (Paris, l'an III de la République), p.202. These memoirs are reprinted complete in P.-G.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, eds., Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française (Paris, 1834-1838), XVIII, 251-477.

52)

Moniteur (15 thermidor an VII-August 1, 1799), XXIX, 767.

53)

The defenders of Billaud and his friends, on the other hand, place the whole Convention on Robespierre's "tail", that is, they assume that the assembly bears collective responsibility for the Terror.

54) a setting. Billaud and his friends meet Robespierre and Danton there, after their own deaths. Or Robespierre himself announces their impending arrival. Finally, various pamphlets are reprints of other writings and speeches, for instance a translation of the plea of Lysias against Erasthenos and his colleagues, leading to a comparison of political morality in the Athens of Antiquity and the France of 1794. 55) One G. T. Willenave, calling himself "un des 132 Nantais du nombre des condamnés à mort," printed excerpts from Billaud's own speech of July 15, 1793, implying that they would be sufficient evidence to convict him. 56)

As for the style of these pamphlets, the motto of Méhée's La Grande Queue de Laurent Le Cointre, is

54)

The best known is Le Club infernal, of one Pilpay, which had several sequels. Also very popular was a newspaper, whose publisher has to this day remained anonymous. It is worthwhile giving the whole title of its second issue: Journal de l'Autre Monde, ou Conversation vraiment fraternelle du Diable avec Saint Pierre, sur des objets de grande importance. Nouvelles Recrues arrivant en Enfer. Réjouissances à ce sujet. Intrigues de Robespierre en l'autre monde. Ses liaisons scandaleuses avec Proserpine. Sédition aux Enfers. Châtiments des Conspirateurs. Rapport de l'Avocat-général près du Tribunal de Pluton. The anonymous Les Ombres Françaises ou Robespierre dans l'autre Monde should also be mentioned. The prototype of the whole series is a poem, L'Entrée de Danton aux Enfers, written by the Jacobin, J.-B. Salle in 1793. (It was published by Georges Moreau-Chaslon in 1865.)

55)

This Plaidoyer de Lysias, Contre les Membres des Anciens Comités de Salut Public et de Sécurité Générale, "translated" by one Athanase Augier, has been variously ascribed to de Saint-Aignan, and to P.-S. Dupont de Nemours. It was published by the latter's print-shop.

56)

G.T. Villeneuve, Plaidoyer de Billaud-Varennnes contre les Membres des anciens comités de salut public et de sécurité générale.



typical:

" Lorsqu'arrivés au bord du fleuve Phlégéon, Robespierre et Saint-Just, Payan, Dumas, Couthon, Payèrent pour passer cet endroit redoutable, Le nautonnier Caron, citoyen équitable, A nos cinq passagers voulut remettre en mains l'excédent de la taxe imposée aux humains; Gardez, lui dit Couthon, la somme toute entière, Je paie pour Billaud, Collet-d'Herbois, Barère." 57)

The author goes on:

" J'ai lu la série de tes [Lecointre's] vingt-six chefs d'accusation, et jeme suis convaincu, Laurent Lecointre, que tu étois bien mal adroit et bien imbécille..."

Barère, Collet et Billaud ont été proclamés des bourreaux, à la face du ciel et de la terre; on n'est embarrassé que sur le choix des faits qui constatent mathématiquement leur scélératesse, et tu vas leur reprocher des peccadilles..." 58)

Méhée calls the three objects of his dislike in turn "Collet-Lion, Billaud-Tigre, et [Barère] Vieux-Sac." 59) Another writer, Labil,

expresses his hatred in the guise of objectivity.

" Quoi, Billaud, [he says], tu oses avec tes complices, invoquer pour notre commune justification, vos divisions, à l'époque qui a sauvé les Français! Mais je veux croire que ces prétendus divisions [in the Committee of Public Safety]; je veux même publier ton innocence, si ta fertile imagination peut m'offrir l'idée de quelques forfaits en horreur de la nature et à l'humanité dont tes mains ne soient pas fumantes." 60)

57)

[J.C.M. Méhée de la Touche], La Grande Queue de Laurent Le Cointre (Paris, an III), title page.

58)

Ibid., pp.1-2.

59)

Ibid., p.3.

60)

[Labil], Billaud-Varennes Jugé par Lui-Même, ou Réponse à la Réponse de Billaud-Varennes (Paris, an IIIème. de la République), p.12.

He says that, in Billaud's defense against Lecointre's

accusations, <sup>60)</sup> "on n'y trouve qu'un verbiage fatiguant, que contradictions, qu'incohérences et qu'impostures grossières." 61)

Among the most original of these pamphlets is probably Boreillard's Adieux de Carrier à Collet, Billaud, Barrère, Duhem, Levasseur, et autres Chevaliers de la guillotine. It is written in the form of Carrier's last will and testament. He leaves

" Au lieu Billaud, pour son réveil, le pistolet avec lequel j'ai fait semblant de vouloir me tuer quand on m'a signifié mon décret d'accusation. Cette arme lui ménagera le beau mouvement tragique de Vadier, que je n'aurois pas manqué d'imiter, si la Convention nationale n'avoit pas eu la cruauté de m'empêcher d'assister à son appel nominal." 62)

The members of the Committees did not lack defenders. Most curious among the writings in their favor is the anonymous pamphlet, with the full title: Leurs Têtes Branlent. A Votre Tour Après Carrier, Messieurs B. Barrère, Collet-d'Herbois, Billaud-Vareunes, Vadier, Voulard, Amar, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. Et vous tous enfin qui composez les 2 anciens comités de salut-public et de sûreté-générale; Et de suite le docteur Duhem, et le financier Cambon. Actually, it is a parody of a Thermidorian denunciation.

" Jusques à quand verrons-nous, [it says], la justice impuissante, le crime audacieux et triomphant? Jusques à quand marcheront-ils tête levée, au milieu d'un peuple qu'ils ont déshonoré, trahi, assassiné, ces hommes féroces, ces monstres, ces cannibales, ces buveurs de sang ....

61)

Ibid., p. 28.

62)

[Boreillard], Adieux de Carrier à Collet, Billaud, Barrère, Duhem, Levasseur, et autres Chevaliers de la guillotine (Paris, Imprimerie de la Vérité, an III), p. 5.

Ceux-là l'ont déshonoré qui n'ont pas voulu permettre à monsieur Pitt d'organiser, à l'anglaise, le gouvernement français, à monseigneur le duc d'York de s'emparer de Dunkerque, et à sa majesté Britannique de rester dans Toulon...

Au nom et comme fondé de procuration de son altesse le prince duc régnant de Cobourg, j'accuse l'ancien comité de salut public d'avoir fait la dernière campagne sur des plans contraires à toutes les lois de l'ancienne tactique..." 63)

Lindet is denounced for not having joined the Girondists ("Tu devois préférer le fédéralisme à l'unité de la république, et la guerre civile à toute espèce d'arrangemens"<sup>64)</sup>), and also for having prevented speculation in army furnishings. As for Carnot, "nous

l'abandonnons aux failles anodines et véridiques de L'INCORRUPTIBLE Fréron."<sup>65)</sup> In so far as Billaud is concerned, the author states

simply: "Billaud, le gouvernement révolutionnaire est ton ouvrage."<sup>66)</sup>  
Crois-tu qu'on puisse te pardonner?"

All these writings seem overly naive; childish endeavours compared to the defense pamphlets written by the accused themselves. They lack subtlety and the crude satire is offensive to a modern reader. In their time, however, they were well suited to the

63)

[Anonymous], Leurs Têtes Branlent.... (Paris, bn III), pp.1-3.

64)

Ibid., p.4.

65)

Ibid., p.5. Reference is here to Fréron's Orateur du peuple, first published on 26 fructidor year II (September 12, 1794). Most vicious in his attacks on the Committees, Fréron tried to prove that not the "politicians" alone were guilty, but that the "experts" in the Committee of Public Safety had also been responsible for the Terror.

66)

Idem.

unsophisticated tastes of the lower classes of the cities. The influence of these pamphlets was undoubtedly considerable.

One final attempt to discredit Billaud's character must be mentioned; the only serious move to tie him to Robespierre by means of a documented account of the last months of the regime of the Terror. When Lecointre had denounced the Committees for employing underworld characters as agents, he might have had Joachim Vilate in mind. His own indiscretions had finally landed the latter in jail (on 2 thermidor-July 20). On 17 thermidor (August 4), he wrote a long letter to Billaud, whom he blamed for his arrest. <sup>67)</sup> Begging for his release, he said that

" ceux qui ne connaissent te diront que je suis léger, inconséquent, mais incapable de toute vue contre-révolutionnaire." <sup>68)</sup>

Billaud did not react at the time. But on 6 germinal year III (March 26), when questioned in the National Convention, he denied having met Vilate more than once. <sup>69)</sup> Next day (7 germinal-March 27), Barère reviled the latter. Several deputies of the Right and Center supported him. <sup>70)</sup> In prison meanwhile, Vilate wrote three

67) Alphonse Aulard, ed., "Lettre de Vilate à Billaud-Varennes," La Révolution Française, XII (1887), 272-273; Charles Vellay, ed., "Une lettre de Vilate à Billaud-Varennes," Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, I (1910), 416-417. Released on 9 thermidor, Vilate was immediately rearrested as an accomplice of Naulin, the Vice-President of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Billaud kept this letter among his private papers, for reasons unknown.

68) A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XII, 273.

69) The incident described above, p. 281.

70) Moniteur (11 germinal an III-March 31, 1795), XXIV, 82.

long pamphlets, Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor; Continuation des Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor; and Les Mystères de la Mère de Dieu dévoilés.

Since he was utterly dishonest, not a word of his accounts can be accepted for the truth. <sup>71)</sup> Obviously, these works did not save their author, who met his fate by being executed as an accomplice of Fouquier-Tinville on 18 floréal year III (May 7, 1795).

On 12 vendémiaire year III (October 3, 1794), just one month after Lecointre's first speech, the second attack against the former members of the Committee began. The meeting of the Convention started with Laporte's denunciation of the Committees of the sections of Paris, followed by remarks of Fréron and Bantabole that the local authorities should not be held responsible for acts of terrorism, since they had been obliged to follow orders from the central agencies of the Government. <sup>72)</sup> Legendre then rose to deliver his charges.

" Il faut que la vérité soit connue, [he said], sans ménagement, il faut que chacun de nous dise: Si j'ai failli, si j'ai été coupable, voilà ma tête....  
 Je sais que je vais ouvrir une discussion terrible mais je brave les murmures et les récriminations. Il est dans l'ordre des choses que la vertu fasse pâli le crime. J'ai juré au peuple que je suppléerais au défaut de talent par l'énergie que la nature m'a donnée. J'ai promis au peuple que je porterai toujours ma ceinture de probité.

71)

In the opinion of Augustin Challamel, Histoire-Musée de la République Française (3ème. éd., Paris, 1857), II, 59, Vilate's books are reliable sources of information, were recognized as such, and did Billaud untold harm.

72)

Moniteur (14 vendémiaire an III-October 5, 1794), XXII, 137.

On a envoyé en mission Saint-André et Prieur [de la Marne], c'est-à-dire qu'on s'est débarrassé des hommes dont on craignait la vertu.... Robespierre, Couthon, Saint-Just ont été dénoncés parce que Billaud, Collot, Barère en sont devenus jaloux. He le déclare à la Convention, je les regarde comme des conspirateurs.... Représentants, j'ai fait mon devoir, c'est à vous de faire le vôtre. Je vous en sème au nom du peuple. (Vifs applaudissements)." 73)

As far as Legendre was concerned, that was all he was going to say at this time. He hoped that others would carry on the fight. But for the moment, he lacked support.

On the other hand, all three of the accused defended themselves at length. That first day revealed already the pattern of their defense. At no time did Barère, Billaud, and Collot challenge the legality or even the justice of the proceedings. But they made great ado over the fact of collective responsibility in the Committee of Public Safety. Again and again, they claimed that they were not guilty alone, and that all members of the Committee during the Terror should be held to account for their actions. Carnot and others supported this point of view. If carried through, it would have meant a

73)

Ibid. (14 vendémiaire an III-October 5, 1794), XXII, 138.

74)

Idem (Barère); Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, à Laurent Lecointre, Représentant du Peuple (Paris, [an III]), p. 3; Moniteur (9 germinal an III-March 29, 1795), XXIV, 71-72.

75)

Opinion de Carnot, Représentant du Peuple, Sur l'accusation proposée Contre Billaud-Varenes, Collot-d'Herbois, Barère et Vadier, par la commission des Vingt-Un... ([Paris, an III]), p. 3.

widening of the scope of the prosecution; the "experts" would have had to explain their reasons for the decrees issued in their names. In fact, it would have meant a declaration of non-confidence in the "Organization of Victory." But the war had been conducted successfully. Nobody in the National Convention wanted to censure, let alone accuse, Carnot, Lindet, and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or. And it would have been absurd to hold Jeanbon Saint-André and Prieur de la Marne responsible for measures which they had not even known about. It is conceivable that the accused would not have been convicted, had they had an opportunity to prove this point.

Their second argument was weaker. They asserted that the Committee had done very well under difficult circumstances. In the Summer of 1793, the French state and the Republic were in great danger. After one year of "sound" government, the foreign enemy had been driven from French soil, and the Revolution safeguarded.

76)

76)

Les Membres de l'ancien Comité de Salut Public, Au Peuple Français et à ses Représentans ([Paris, pluviose, l'an IIIème.]), pp. 2-27. This is one of the most detailed accounts of the work of the Committee ever given. But it deals neither with the machinery of the Terror, nor the conflicts among the various members. Also, Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Varenes sur les Evénements du 9 Thermidor, Charles Vellay, ed. (Paris, 1910), pp. 53-54; Réponse de J.-N. Billaud.... à Laurent Lecointre, pp. 22-26; Moniteur (4 germinal an III-March 24, 1795), XXIV, 56 (Collet).



" Sans doute, [said Billaud], il y a eu des mesures outrées, et des excès commis. Quelle est la révolution qui en a été exempte?" 77)

Collot and Carnot both ascribed these abuses to overwork and mental strain. 78)

" Nous pouvons bien n'être, [stated Barère], que des hommes très ordinaires, très peu habiles en gouvernement, et très peu versés dans l'administration des républiques, mais qui du moins se sont montrés très constamment attachés à la République, et infatigables à la servir; du moins nous ne sommes ni insensés, ni scélérats, ni fous, ni aristocrates; nos preuves sont dans nos travaux constants pour la République une et indivisible et pour le droit du peuple depuis le mois d'août 1793 jusqu'à ce moment... " 79)

The accused expressed several times the opinion that they were honest, brave and courageous men; 80)

Billaud emphasized in particular that he was mild and gentle by nature. 81)

His enemies, he stated, were "hommes de sang", using calumny as a weapon. 82)

77)

Réponse de J.-N. Billaud ... à Laurent Lecointre, p.17.

78)

Moniteur (14 vendémiaire an III-October 5, 1794), XXII, 140; Opinion de Carnot ..., pp.4-5, 10.

79)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., "Réponse de Barère, Billaud-Varennes, Collot-d'Herbois et Vadier aux Imputations de Laurent Le Coindre," La Révolution Française, XXXIV (1898), 69. Barère was the author of this defense pamphlet.

80)

Idem; Moniteur (14 vendémiaire an III-October 5, 1794), XXII, 141.

81)

Ch. Vellay, ed., op. cit., pp.35-36: "Ceux qui me connaissent savent s'il est une manière d'être plus paisible que la mienne... Mes dénonciateurs ont eu beau chercher; ils sont encore à trouver dans ma conduite un seul trait de cette espèce." Also Réponse de J.-N. Billaud ... à Laurent Lecointre, p.126; Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, Aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse, an III), p.11.

82)

Les Membres de l'ancien Comité ... Au Peuple, p.35; "C'est à vous, véritables hommes de terreur et de sang, qui croyez aveugler le peuple sur vos complots par les grands mots de justice et d'humanité, vertus qui n'ont jamais été dans vos cœurs."



It is needless to point out that such remarks did not endear him to his opponents.

In answer to Legendre's short remarks, Barère, Billaud, and Collet denied everything. From these three men, the assembly gained the impression that Robespierre came to the Committee only to dictate his orders or to instruct his "stooges", Couthon and Saint-Just. The accused did nothing to dispel the impression that they had been cowards and had feared to oppose the "dictator". On 12 vendémiaire (October 3), they could still count enough supporters among the deputies to delay the proceedings. Carnot and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or convinced the assembly that nothing would be gained by the prosecution of their colleagues. The meeting adjourned after it had been decreed to await a report by the Committee of Public Safety on the activities of its former members.<sup>83)</sup> For the second time, the attack had failed.

Yet in the Jacobin Club, Sylvain-Phalier Lejeune, one of the most bloodthirsty of the representatives on mission during the Terror, heckled the leaders of the Mountain and accused them of not speaking in the National Convention (25 vendémiaire=<sup>84)</sup> October 16). Billaud answered:

83)

Moniteur (14 vendémiaire an III-October 5, 1794), XXII, 142.

84)

A. Aulard, ed., Société, VI, 590.

" Ceux qui avaient intérêt à ce que nous ne parlussions pas nous ont accusés de vouloir dominer la Convention nationale et les Jacobins, et dès lors nous nous sommes nous-mêmes condamnés au silence... Il est des circonstances où le silence sert quelquefois mieux que la parole ..." 85)

Yet, he began immediately to write and speak. When Lecointre had first accused him, he had apparently drafted a memorandum, "aux représentants du peuple." 86) This long manuscript (of over 90 pages) was never printed and probably not put to any use.

Discovered at the end of the nineteenth century by Ernest Hamel, it was subsequently published by Charles Vellay, as Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Varennes sur les Evénements du 9 Thermidor. 87) Since Billaud himself found it of small value, very little need be said about it. It contains a fairly detailed description of the conflict between Robespierre and the other members of the Committee of Public Safety, as well as numerous protestations of innocence. Some of the material was taken over into the Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, à Laurent Lecointre, Représentant du Peuple, which was only printed in 1795. It seems very strange that this work should have been published so late; at a time, in fact, when Lecointre had again joined the Left. It is obviously a refutation of the latter's book Les Crimes de Sept Membres des

85)

Idem.

86)

Ch. Vellay, ed., op. cit., pp. 1-2.

87)

Originally in the Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, I(1910), 7-44, 161-175, 321-336.

Anciens Comités de Salut Public et de Sûreté Générale. Billaud went over the twenty-six accusations point by point, remarking that most of them could not be proved. He also challenged Lecointre to explain what he had done to oppose Robespierre. The Réponse is a good "lawyer's brief" and a sound statement of Billaud's case. A third piece of writing, dating probably from the Fall of 1794, is Adresse de Billaud-Varennnes aux Français, contre Les oppressions actuels du Peuple; et pour la Liberté de la Presse. It ends with a note by an anonymous "editor" (maybe Billaud himself?), which says:

" Un patriote m'a remis ce discours de Billaud-Varennnes, il y a quelques jours. Comme ce qui est bon une fois l'est toujours, j'ai pensé qu'il étoit permis de l'adapter aux circonstances. J'y ai retranché de qui caractérisoit l'époque où il a été proposé dans une société populaire." 88) 89)

If such a speech was ever made, there is no record of it. It may have been held at the Cordeliers Club; on the other hand, it may only have been written in the fall of 1794. In style, it resembles Billaud's previous efforts. It is a call of alarm, in order to prevent a coup by the enemies of the nation.

" Le camp de ces ennemis, [it says], est... partout enfin où l'ambition et l'égoïsme savent arriver par surprise et se maintenir par trahison. Paris dans ce moment présente le tableau alarmant d'une tentation prochaine de contre-révolution..." 90) 91)

88)

Réponse de Billaud-Varennnes ... à Laurent Lecointre, pp.44-91.

89)

Ibid., p.18.

90)

Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varennnes, Adresse de Billaud-Varennnes aux Français, contre Les oppresseurs actuels du Peuple; et pour la Liberté de la Presse (Paris, 1795), p.8.

91)

Ibid., p.18.

The measures proposed are drastic. Suspect persons should be unmasked "par des listes mises sous les yeux du peuple;" they should also be forbidden to remain in Paris. The laws should be properly executed; where the authorities are unable to do so, the citizens should take justice in their own hands.

" Que la Nation entière se lève donc! ... Agissons, marchons, frappons ensemble: et dans un même instant tous les Vampires politiques et tous les Oppresseurs du Peuple seront pulvérisés."

The frequent references to the Queen (Marie-Antoinette) would seem to indicate that the speech was written in 1791 or 1792; on the other hand, the Thermidorians used frequently tricks of this kind. If it originated early in the Revolution, it is of very little importance, since it says nothing original. On the other hand, if it was conceived only in 1794, it becomes an appeal to the Left to take up arms against the National Convention, an incitement to rebellion. Encouraged by the failure of his enemies to bring him to trial, Billaud was possibly thinking in those terms.

In any event, he expressed this purpose in his next (and last) speech at the Jacobin Club, one of the most famous in the history of that Society (13 brumaire year III-November 3, 1794).

92)

Ibid., p. 4.

93)

Ibid., p. 6.

94)

Ibid., p. 7.

95)

A. Aulard, ed., Société, VI, 633. Moniteur (17 brumaire an III-November 1794), XXII, 431. Reprinted in P.-J.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, eds., op. cit. XXXVI, 147-148.

" On a mis en liberté, [he said], des nobles et des aristocrates, ... des dilapidateurs des deniers publics, qui n'ont pas encore rendu leurs comptes. Ce sont ces hommes qui accusent les patriotes; ils se réunissent à des individus couverts de dettes et de turpitudes, et qui vivent avec des femmes d'émigrés.

On accuse les patriotes de garder le silence; mais le lion n'est pas mort quand il sommeille, et, à son éveil, il extermine tous ses ennemis. La tranchée est ouverte; les patriotes vont reprendre leur énergie et engager le peuple de se réveiller..

Ayons la gloire de renverser les scélérats qui attaquent les amis du peuple, ou périssons en le défendant." 96)

Billaud challenged the National Convention itself. The immediate effect of the speech was that nobody answered Billaud's call to arms. At the next meeting of the Club, on 15 brumaire (November 5), no speaker came forward and the platform remained empty. Mathiez stated the truth when he wrote: "Décidément, le lion était bien mort. Il était impossible de le réveiller." 97) On 20 brumaire (November 10), Billaud went to the Jacobin Club for the last time; two days later, it was closed by order of the National Convention. Evidently, the revolutionary fervor of most Frenchmen had cooled.

Billaud's speech had also the expected effect on the Right. His enemies recognized it for what it was, a declaration of war.

96)

A. Aulard, ed., Sociétés, VI, 633.

97)

Albert Mathiez, La Réaction Thermidorienne (Paris, 1929), p. 78.

98)

Idem. Also Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution (2nd. ed., London, 1842), II, 367: "The dormant lion has become a dead one; and now, as we s any hoof may smite him."

The more hysterical element among the Thermidorians followed

Fréron, who wrote:

" On doit se souvenir de la longue lutte que les Thermidoriens eurent à soutenir, dans le sein de la Convention nationale, contre les Billaud, les Barère les Amar et leurs nombreux partisans... Billaud av annoncé aux Jacobins le Réveil du Lion. Cette société totalement dégénérée, était en pleine révolution contre la Convention." 99)

The moderate Durant de Maillane stated that

" Billaud-Varemes recourut à ses bons frères, les jacobins qui pleuraient la mort de leur chef. Il leur fit un discours sur les effets désastreux de la réaction... Les jacobins et les montagnards semblèrent s'éveiller en même temps, et ils préparèrent les deux insurrections des 12 germinal et 1er prairial." 100)

In the National Convention, Bentabole challenged Billaud on 15 brumaire (November 5).

" Est-ce le moment, [he said], où la représentation nationale annonce à l'Europe qu'elle veut un gouvernement digne de la nation, un gouvernement établi sur la justice et sur l'équité; dans le moment où la république prospère autant qu'il est possible, est-ce dans un pareil moment qu'il faut dire au peuple qu'il doit se réveiller? Je demande que celui qui a tenu ce propos l'explique, et nous dise pourquoi ce lion qui dort doit se réveiller?" (Vifs applaudissements.) 101)

In his answer, Billaud remained arrogant.

99)

Mémoires historiques sur la réaction royale et sur les massacres du midi, par le citoyen Fréron, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1824),

p.16.

100)

Histoire de la Convention nationale par Durant de Maillane, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1825), p.271.

101)

Moniteur (17 brumaire an III-November 7, 1794), XXII, 432.

" Personne ne peut nier, [he stated], qu'on ait protégé les contre-révolutionnaires, tandis qu'on a frappé tous ceux qui ont soutenu la révolution (quelques applaudissements). On ne peut pas mal interpréter l'idée que j'ai eu d'inviter le peuple à se réveiller sur les dangers qui l'environnent. C'est le sommeil des hommes sur leurs droits qui les amène à l'esclavage. (Les applaudissements se renouvellent)." 102)

Later, Billaud defended himself again for having used the phrase of the "Lion". He reminded his readers that he had not coined the expression, but that the section Lepelletier, in a petition to the National Convention, had spoken of the "Léopard Britannique" and the "Lion des Jacobins." 103)

" Aussi les maux faits à la France par le léopard britannique, [he said], sont-ils bien notoires; tandis que le Lion, contre lequel certaines gens déclament avec tant de véhémence n'a aucune action de sa vie qui puisse permettre qu'on vienne l'accuser de s'être livré à des sentimens de fureur, de haine et de vengeance." 104)

In the discussion which ensued, Tallien maintained that the speech was made to induce the people to rise and free Carrier from prison. 105)

102)

Idem.

103)

This petition is reprinted in Rapport au Nom de la Commission de Vingt-et-Un, ... Fait ... par le Représentant du Peuple Saladin (Paris 28 ventôse an III), pp. 248-250. It is dated 11 pluviôse an II. It declared: "Nous ne mettons nulle différence entre le "léopard britannique" et le "lion des Jacobins"; ils ont le même instinct, celui de la domination; le même goût, celui du sang. Acharnés tous les deux à la perte des Français, le premier a choisi sa proie sur les frontières le second l'a dévorée dans l'intérieur ..." Billaud chose to ignore the contents of this petition, when he referred to it.

104)

Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, Aux Inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse an III), pp. 9-10.

105)

Moniteur (17 brumaire an III - November 7, 1794), XXII, 432.

Eventually, Clauzel, a radical turned Thermidorian, proposed measures "qui empêchent aucun représentant du peuple de prêcher la révolte contre la Convention."<sup>106)</sup> And it was decreed to close the Jacobin Club (22 brumaire-November 12), thus depriving the Left of its meeting-place.

Legendre, in the meantime, had not given up. Before the month was over, he returned to the charges, maintaining, this time, that "l'opinion publique me redressera."<sup>107)</sup> On 5 frimaire (November 25), he stated that "les intimes de Robespierre, qui ne se sont divisés que sur les victimes, sont encore dans la Convention."<sup>108)</sup> He continued by charging that the Report on the events of Thermidor by the Committee of General Security had been held up, due to the influence of Barère, Billaud, and Collot.<sup>109)</sup> Monmayer, a radical member of this Committee, rose to answer.

" Je ne sais, [he declared], si Legendre a des pièces que nous ne connaissons pas, mais je n'ai pas trouvé dans celles que j'ai examinées, une seule ligne qui pût inculper les trois hommes dont il s'agit." <sup>110)</sup>

106)

Moniteur (17 brumaire an III-November 7, 1794), XXII, 432.

107)

Ibid., XXII, 436.

108)

Idem.

109)

Idem.

110)

Idem.



Outside of the assembly, Legendre enjoyed more support. On 9 or 10 frimaire (November 29 or 30), Billaud and Collet were set upon by a gang, while walking in a park. Beaten and insulted, they took cover in a nearby store. <sup>111)</sup> When their friend, Duhem, complained to the Committee of General Security of "anarchy" in the streets, he was told "qu'il était difficile d'empêcher Collet et Billaud d'être hués." <sup>112)</sup> It is not known if this assault was the spontaneous manifestation of a mob, or if it had been an organized attack. On 12 frimaire (December 2), the Courrier républicain reported also that writings against the three men were circulated all over Paris, "et sous les yeux mêmes de ceux contre qui ils sont dirigés." <sup>113)</sup>

The opportunity for the Right came unexpectedly. Carrier's trial revealed the complicity of the Committee of Public Safety in the crimes of the accused. On 15 frimaire (December 5), the Committees of Public Safety, General Security, and Legislation were ordered by the National Convention to examine certain of Lecoindre's old charges. <sup>114)</sup> Merlin de Douai reported, on 7 nivôse

111)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., Paris pendant la Réaction Thermidorienne et sous le Directoire (Paris, 1898-1902), I, 285-286. Similar accounts from Annales Patriotiques et littéraires, of 11 frimaire, and Petite Feuille de Paris, of the same date. One paper says "hier", the other "avant-hier".

112) Ibid., I, 285. From the account of the Annales patriotiques et littéraires.

113)

Ibid., I, 289.

114)

Moniteur (18 frimaire an III-December 29, 1794), XXII, 676.

(December 27), that this examination had conclusively proved the innocence of Amar, David, and Voulland, but not that of Barère, Billaud, Collot, and Vadier of the Committee of General Security. 115) He then requested that, in conformity with the Law of 8 brumaire, a commission of Twenty-One be appointed to sift the evidence and report whether there were grounds for legal action against the four men. 116) As required by the Law, the Commission was chosen by lottery. It is interesting to analyze its composition. 117) Most of the twenty-one men designated to examine the records of their fellow-deputies were little-known.

115) Ibid. (9 nivôse an III-December 29, 1794), XXIII, 71. Merlin, one of the chief agents of Philippe Egalité during the first years of the Revolution, became a lukewarm Montagnard and, after Thermidor, an ardent reactionary. His actions were certainly influenced by personal grievances against members of the former Committees. See Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p. 450.

116) The Law of 8 brumaire, in Moniteur (12 brumaire an III-November 2, 1794), XXII, 382, stipulates that if any Committee of the National Convention finds cause for an examination of suspect persons, the assembly has to establish a Commission of Twenty-One, to be chosen by lottery. This Commission may only investigate the specific points of the accusation; it has to hear the defendant or his lawyers, and has to let him see all the documents in its possession. The indictment itself can only be made after its report, by voice vote, in the National Convention. Carrier was the first person tried under this Law.

117) List of names in Moniteur (9 nivôse an III-December 29, 1794), XXII, 72. Also in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LII, p. 111. In the Moniteur, practically every name is misspelled. The list of members, in alphabetical order, follows: 1. Jean-César Battellier, 2. Joseph Beauchamp, 3. André-Antoine Bernard (de Saintes), 4. Laurent-Martial-Stanislas Boutrouë, 5. Marie-Joseph de Chénier; 6. Gilbert Chevalier, 7. Pierre Cosnard, 8. Edmé-Bonaventure Courtois (de l'Aube), 9. Charles François Dubuse, 10. Jean Johannet, 11. Louis Lobinhes, 12. Jean-Baptiste Meyer, 13. Etienne-François-Sébastien Montégut, 14. André Réa, 15. Jean-Baptiste-Michel Saladin, 16. Gervais Sauvé, 17. Antoine-François Sergent, 18. Emmanuel-Joseph Siéyès, 19. Louis-Jacques-Alexandre Vasse, 20. Jacques-Joseph Viennet, 21. ? Thomas.

118)

About one of them, Thomas, no information at all is available.

Jacques Norvins, in the Biographie Nouvelle des Contemporains, speaks of a deputy called Thomas, remarking that "A la fin de la session conventionnelle, il disparut de la scène politique." 119)

Of the remaining twenty, four are almost equally insignificant.

Cosnard, Vasseur de la Somme, Beauchamp, and Viennet did not engage in any political activities. 120) Three men sat in the

assembly only as substitutes for deputies who had been outlawed (Cosnard, Dubusc, Vasseur). The composition of the Commission

was predominantly middle-class; also, legal experts did by no means predominate. 121)

No member had been actively engaged in politics before the Revolution; but out of the twenty, fifteen

118)

He is one of the five or six deputies not listed in A. Kuscinski, op. cit., since that author was unable to gather even the most rudimentary information.

119)

Biographie Nouvelle des Contemporains (Paris, 1820-1825), XIX, 459. Article "Thomas" by Jacques Norvins.

120)

Cosnard attended meetings of the National Convention only twenty three times. Viennet, who had already been a soldier during the Seven Years' War, was too old to take part in the debates (although he lived to the ripe old age of ninety). Beauchamp, a jurist famous in his day, was so cautious that he absented himself from the assembly, when the vote on the fate of King Louis XVI was taken. Other members were hard more active. Lobinhes took a leave of absence, "for reasons of health, from 7 floréal year II until after the fall of Robespierre. The record of Chevallier, Meyer, Sauvê, and Vasseur are very unimpressive. For all details on these men, A. Kuscinski, op. cit., is reliable.

121)

There was only one worker in the group (Montégut). The rest were, respectively, lawyers (Bernard de Saintes, Meyer, Réal, Saladin); judges (Beauchamp, Chevallier); an artist (Sergent); a notary (Boutrouë); estate owners (Cosnard, Vasseur); a dramatist (Chénier); a tax collector (Courtoi); manufacturers (Dubusc, Johannot); a physician (Lobinhes); a merchant (Sauvê); a professional soldier (Viennet); a member of the clerical establishment (Siéyès); and a watchmaker (Battelier).

had done so between 1789 and 1792, Siéyès serving as deputy of the Constituent Assembly, and six others in the same capacity in the Legislative Assembly (Bernard de Saintes, Courtois, Meyer, Saladin, Sauvé, Viennet). Eleven had voted for the death of Louis XVI, only six against it. Bernard de Saintes had been an Hébertist; Chénier and Courtois friends of Danton; Saladin a promoter of Philippe Egalité. During the Terror, four had been members of Committees of the National Convention (Boutroux, Jehannot, Réal, Siéyès). But Chevallier, Dubussé, Lobinhes, Réal, Sauvé and Siéyès (and probably Vasseur) had always voted with the Plain. Right after the fall of Robespierre, Bernard de Saintes, Chénier, Courtois, and Saladin, the most able men in the Commission, became prominent Thermidorians. A vast majority of the twenty-one men was thus opposed to the Terror on principle. Bernard de Saintes had been an intimate friend of Billaud's since their childhood (he came from Courne-Royal near La Rochelle). But after his cruel measures as representative on mission in Montbéliard and Besançon, he belonged among those extreme radicals

122)

For: Battellier, Bernard de Saintes, Boutroux, Chénier, Courtois, Jehannot, Meyer, Montégut, Saladin, Sergent, Siéyès. Against: Dubussé, Lobinhes, Réal, Sauvé, Vasseur, Viennet. Abstentions: Beauchamp, Chevallier, Comard. Of the eleven Régicides, Battellier, Chénier and Saladin died before 1815, the rest went into exile at the time of the Restoration, but Jehannot, Meyer, Sergent (he lived to the age of 96!), and Siéyès returned to France after 1830.

whom Robespierre and his assistants wished to remove. 123) Similarly  
 Sergent, Billaud's old colleague from the section du Théâtre-  
 Français and an organizer of the September Massacres of 1792.  
 His friendship with Danton forced him to remain in hiding during  
 the Terror. Yet, he declared how that he would support Barère,  
 Billaud, and Collet. 124) Many of the others had personal grudges  
 against the former members of the Committee of Public Safety. The  
 moderate Dubusc had been arrested for protesting the proscription  
 of the Girondists, and had only been released in December 1794. 125)  
 Chénier was eager to avenge the death of his brother, André, although  
 it was said that he had been personally responsible for it. 126)

Courtois feared that his speculations during the Terror would be  
 revealed by the accused. 127) Siéyès, a man of small intelligence

123)

A. Kuscinski, op. cit., p. 50. A Thermidorian pamphleteer, Claude Boyer,  
 in La Grande Colère du Lion Billaud-Varennés, p. 5, called Bernard de  
 Saintes "figure de Christ, cœur d'ignace Loyola."

124)

A. Kuscinski, op. cit., p. 561.

125)

Ibid., p. 217.

126)

Ibid., p. 135. He refuted these charges by his enemies in his Enquête  
 à la calomnie. Chénier became so reactionary that he spoke against the  
 "freedoms", which the other Thermidorians tried to establish. For  
 instance, he wanted to reintroduce censorship of the press and the  
 stage.

127)

Courtois is, of course, best known as the chairman of the Commission  
 which sifted Robespierre's private papers. In that capacity, he managed  
 to suppress evidence, which would have ended his political career. It  
 was only published in 1828, by Derville et Barrière.

and changing convictions, had a grudge of long standing against Barère, who, in 1791, had led a movement against him in the Jacobin Club. <sup>128)</sup> Considered an "elder statesman", he was made President of the Commission of Twenty-One. But since he was <sup>129)</sup> unable to report to the National Convention, Saladin's became the most powerful voice. An exceedingly able jurist, the latter had been in prison ( as an Océanist) between August 21, 1793, and Thermidor and was consequently ill-disposed against the former members of the Committee of Public Safety. On the whole, the Commission of Twenty-One was inclined to assume certain facts, which more impartial judges might have questioned (such as the matter of overwork in the Committee, and the mental strain resulting from it). On the other hand, the number of extreme Thermidorians in the Commission was small; only Chénier, Courtois, and Saladin could be classified as such.

On the evening of 7 nivôse (December 27), when the Commission was chosen, the situation looked serious for Billaud and his colleagues. Collet-d'Herbeis rose immediately to complain

128)

Ibid., p. 566. Siéyès' participation in the Commission is usually ignored by his biographers, who try to discuss only his "constructive" achievements. This is true of Paul Bastid, Siéyès et sa Pensée (Paris, 1939), as well as the more scholarly G.G. van Deusen, Siéyès: His Life and his Nationalism (New York, 1932), who devoted half a page to the Commission of Twenty-One.

129)

During the whole period of the National Convention, Siéyès spoke only once, on 20 brumaire year II (November 10, 1793).

that the Comité des inspecteurs had forbidden printers to accept defense pamphlets of the four men (Vadier was still very much present) without an express authorization by the National Convention. This permission was immediately granted. <sup>130)</sup> The four men consequently produced various writings. Since Billaud had already stated his case ( and that Réponse had not yet been printed), he wrote only the short pamphlet issued by Barère, Collot, and himself collectively under the title Les Membres de l'ancien Comité de Salut Public, Au Peuple Français et à ses Représentans, and a little later the Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles. The first of these two pamphlets is simply a statement of the achievements of the Committee of Public Safety.

After these slight efforts, he wrote another book on political theory. Principes Régénérateurs du Système Social was published in pluviôse. His detachment might be admired, but the work itself hardly deserves much attention. It only repeats the ideas and arguments contained in all of Billaud's previous books. This time, no organization of the material is in evidence; theories are set down on paper without connection or meaning. The chief thesis is that unless the people become "virtuous", tyrants will remain in power. After long diversions on the

130)

Moniteur (9 nivôse an III-December 29, 1794), XXIII, 71.



nature of the absolute state (and several quotations from Rousseau), Billaud presents his chief argument: While primitive man is "virtuous" from birth, civilized man can also achieve that state, but only by education.

" L'art est donc de ramener l'homme, [the states], à son essence primitive; et l'art plus grand encore est de profiter du vrai moment, ou pour mieux dire, est de savoir choisir la meilleure disposition des esprits..." 131) 132)

"Moral" reform should precede political reform, since a person whose character has been trained to respond only to high principles, will naturally select an ideal form of government. 133)

" Détruisez donc, éteignez cette soif de la fortune qui électrise sans toutes les autres passions, en la rendant nulle, ou du moins sans objet, lorsque les sentiments généreux de la nature seront devenus l'unique source du bien-être et de l'estime publiques." 134)

After a number of empty phrases, in which the "virtues" of the Ancients are expounded, 135) Billaud becomes again a man of the eighteenth century.

" Sensibilité enchantée, [he declares], tu varies à l'infini les sensations délicieuses que tu nous fais goûter; et le plus souvent ce n'est que parce qu'on s'y abandonne avec excès, qu'elles se changent en affections pénibles et douloureuses." 136)

131) J[acques]-M[icolas] Billaud, Principes Régénérateurs du Système Social (Paris, pluviôse, an 3), pp. 37-47.

132) Ibid., p. 47.

133) Ibid., p. 54.

134) Ibid., p. 56.

135) Ibid., pp. 58-75.

136) Ibid., 76.



The second part of the book deals with the following assumption: "Si les bonnes mœurs sont les colonnes des républiques, un gouvernement sage est le cachet des bonnes mœurs." 137) In the following 170 pages, Billaud gives a summary of all his previous books and speeches. The following quotations sound familiar in mood and spirit:

" De l'expérience de tous les siècles, il faut conclure que la sûreté, la paix, la prospérité de tous et la liberté civile dépendent des justes bornes qui seront posées par l'égalité elle-même." 138)

" La plus grande des erreurs politique a donc été celle d'associer dans les memes mains les pouvoirs civiles et militaires." 139)

" C'est par des sentimens purs, c'est par cette envie innée chez chacun de nous, de se distinguer pour mériter la considération publique; c'est par le prix qui y est attaché dans une démocratie, par l'espoir d'être à son tour quelque chose dans le gouvernement qu'on électrise les vertus, qu'on stimule des talens et qu'on embrâse tous les cocurs du plus vrai et du plus chaud patriotisme..." 140)

The last published book of Billaud's shows pretty conclusively that, at a certain point, his political development stopped and that he failed to become more original or to elaborate on his own theories. Principes Régénérateurs du Système Social might have been a novelty in 1792, and, at that time, even a source of inspiration. Three years later, after all the events of the early Republic and the Terror, it sounded merely old-fashioned.

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137)

Ibid., p.101.

138)

Ibid., p.131.

139)

Ibid., p.188.

140)

Ibid., p.208.

3. Battle and Defeat: 12 ventôse - 13 germinal year III  
(March 2 - April 2, 1795).

The report of the Commission of Twenty-One was read to the National Convention by Saladin on 12 ventôse (March 2), exactly two months and five days after the beginning of the investigation. Unfortunately, the meetings of the Commission were not recorded. The Commission was also granted the authority to examine material which did not deal directly with the accusations, although this was in direct violation of the Law of 8 brumaire.<sup>141)</sup>

The Commission of Twenty-One accused the four defendants of seven specific crimes: 1. "A avoir convert la France de prisons." 2. Having permitted very loose interpretations of the Law of Suspects, of September 17, 1793. This constituted an usurpation of legislative power, placing the Committee of Public Safety above the Law. 3. Having influenced the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Popular Commission. 4. Having created the latter without specific authorization from the Convention (particularly the Commission of Orange). 5. Having allowed governmental agencies to issue decrees in conformity with the "barbarian" Law of 22 prairial, before the latter had been passed by the assembly. 6. Having made this Law the basis of criminal legislation. 7. Having encouraged bloodthirsty representatives on mission and having made sanguinary

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141)

Moniteur (6 pluviôse an III-January 25, 1795), XXIII, 288. Session of 4 pluviôse (January 23).

142)  
 speeches in Paris. In essence, these were the same charges as those previously made by Lecointre. But now, they were accompanied by documentary proof. It was difficult to deny that Paris had thirty prisons in Thermidor, while only three or four had existed in the capital under the Old Regime. 143)  
 As for sanguinary speeches, did not Billaud's fiery denunciations lead to Clavière's, Lebrun's, and Custine's downfall? Commented Saladin:

" Ces hommes étoient coupables peut-être; je ne veux ni défendre leur mémoire ni censurer leur jugement; mais pouvait-on les présumer tels avant qu'ils fussent jugés?... Le langage impérieux de Billaud-Varennés n'étoit-il pas un ordre au tribunal, une condamnation anticipée, ou du moins un préjugé qui eût pu être fatal à l'innocence?" 144)

And their correspondence showed that the relations between Lebon and the former members of the Committee had been close. 145)  
 The Commission of Twenty-One concluded its report in these words:

" Il est vrai, trop vrai, qu'il a existé une grande conspiration contre le peuple; que la liberté et la République ont couru les plus grands dangers;... En conséquence, votre commission estime qu'il y a lieu à accusation..." 146)

142)

Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un, Créée par décret du 7 nivôse, an III, pour l'examen de la conduite des Représentans du Peuple Billaud-Varennés, Collet-d'Herbois et Barère, membres de l'ancien Comité de Salut public, et Vadier, membre de l'ancien comité de Sûreté générale,... Par le Représentant du Peuple Saladin (Paris, 28 ventôse, an III), pp. 6-7. Long excerpts from report in Moniteur (14 ventôse an III-March 4, 1795), XXIII, 589-591.

143)

Rapport au Nom de la Commission des Vingt-et-Un,... Par ... Saladin, pp. 7-8.

144)

Ibid., pp. 20-21.

145)

Ibid., pp. 67-71.

146)

Ibid., pp. 103-104.

The National Convention agreed with these findings. When Legendre asked for the immediate arrest of the four men, "une immense majorité se lève pour l'adoption; personne ne se lève à la contre-épreuve."<sup>147)</sup> It was decreed that they "seront mis en état d'arrestation dans leur domicile, sous la surveillance de la gendarmerie nationale."<sup>148)</sup> The assembly was evidently disinclined to repeat the pattern of the Terror, by jailing representatives of the people; the accused were consequently only confined to their homes. This order made it possible for Billaud to hide all his private papers, before they could be seized and used in evidence against him,<sup>149)</sup> and for Vadier to flee and thus avoid prosecution altogether.<sup>150)</sup>

Everybody in public life realized that the trial of Barère, Billaud, and Collot meant more than the fate of these three men. Levasseur de la Sarthe stated that "Billaud, Collot

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147)

Moniteur(14 ventôse an III-March 4, 1795), XXIII, 591. See also Ch[arles]Lacretelle, [jeune], Dix années d'épreuves pendant la Révolution(Paris, 1842), p. 218.

148)

Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LVI, 209.

149)

Georges Lenôtre, "Les Deux Femmes de Billaud-Varennnes," in Paris Révolutionnaire; Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 3ème. série (Paris, 1924) p. 279. In front of the two policemen who were around him day and night Billaud dug a hole in a wall of his apartment. The house was torn down early in this century (to make way for the Lycée Fénélon), but nobody seems to have thought at the time of looking for these papers.

150)

It was announced in the National Convention already the day after the "arrest" on 13 ventôse (March 3). See Moniteur (15 ventôse an III-March 5, 1795), XXIII, 509. Sentenced in absentia to be deported like the other three men, Vadier remained in hiding until cleared by the general amnesty voted during the last session of the National Convention. Arrested again in the conspiracy of Babeuf, he was acquitted, but kept in prison illegally until 1799. He died only in 1828, at the age of ninety-two.

n'étaient que les représentans de cette fièvre nationale, leur  
procès était le procès de la France." <sup>151)</sup> And a hostile witness  
 recorded that

" Collet-d'Herbois, Barrère et Billaud-Varenes furent  
 des victimes sacrifiées à la haine et à la sécurité  
 d'un parti impur. Mais tachés eux-mêmes de boue et  
 de sang, il n'éveilleront dans nos âmes aucune  
 sympathie. Nous les regarderons tomber sans leur  
 accorder le tribut de pitié que méritent la plupart  
 des victimes d'une réaction politique." <sup>152)</sup>

According to Levasseur, the leaders of the Center, who had been  
 instrumental in the accusation of the former members of the  
 Committees, became now unwilling to preside at a trial, which  
 might lead to a condemnation of the Revolution. By their  
 neutrality, they gave the Right free rein to eliminate that  
 party's opponents. The latter was also divided. The former  
 Girondists were pitiless in their desire for revenge, while the  
 primary consideration of most Thermidorians was not punishment  
 for the leaders of the Terror, but the clearing of Danton's name.  
 Around these factions hovered men without strong convictions,  
 whose only wish was to profit from the divisions in the assembly. <sup>153)</sup>

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 151)

Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), Ex-Conventionnel (Bruxelles,  
 1832), IV, 225. Levasseur was himself jailed on 16 germinal (April 5). Yet  
 he was one of the few completely honest men in the National Convention,  
 admired for his firmness of character by enemies and friends alike.  
 152)

Albert Maignan, Galérie de la Révolution française (1787 à 1799)  
 (Paris, 1843), III, 35.  
 153)

Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), IV, 239-240. These are only  
 Levasseur's opinions, although he was usually well-informed and a good  
 analyst of the political situation.

It so happened that the Left did not enjoy popular support any more. <sup>154)</sup> Another incident against the three men had occurred on 3 pluviôse (January 22), long before their arrest.

" A six heures du soir, [reported the Gazette française] au Palais-Egalité, un terroriste en mannequin a de nouveau excité la curiosité du public. Un auquel on donnait successivement le nom de Robespierre, de Billaud et de Collot, etc., a été transféré... à la porte de la Convention, pour faire amende honorable et de là on l'a porté devant la salle des ci-devant Jacobins, où il a été brûlé. Cette translation a été accompagnée de trois ou quatre milles personnes, aux cris répétés de "Vive la Convention! vive la République! A bas les Billaud, etc. A bas les Jacobins et les buveurs de sang!" <sup>155)</sup>

Agents Rouchas and Barbarin reported that, when the news of the arrest became known, "ce décret a été fort applaudi et reçu aux cris répétés de "Vive la Convention."" <sup>156)</sup> And the Courrier républicain, one of the most popular newspapers, said, speaking of one of the defense pamphlets: "C'est encore une inconcevable Carmagnole, dont l'absurdité doit faire époque." <sup>157)</sup> The most exaggerated rumor came probably from the pen of one Galotti, who said that the former members of the Committee of Public Safety

154)

Ibid., IV, 240.

155)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., Paris pendant la Réaction Thermidorienne et sous le Directoire (Paris, 1898-1902), I, 415. Incident told in G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 279.

156)

A. Aulard, ed., op. cit., I, 523, 525 (the latter is a similar quotation from the Journal de Perlet, of 14 ventôse).

157)

Ibid., I, 431. Dated 9 pluviôse. The writing in question is probably Les Membres de l'ancien Comité de Salut Public, Au Peuple Français et à ses Représentans.

had ordered shoes and boots made from the skins of those executed during the Terror. The accused refuted this fantastic charge in a poster called Les on dit,<sup>158)</sup> but there were undoubtedly many who believed the story.

In view of the public's reaction, it is quite absurd to assume that Billaud and his colleagues would have been able to organize the popular demonstrations, which started in Paris around the end of nivôse and culminated in the "insurrection" of 12 germinal (April 1). At the same time as Barère, Billaud, and Collet defended themselves against the charges of the Commission of Twenty-One, certain members of the Left prepared a revolt in the sections of Paris. The Right felt that there was a connection between the former members of the Committee of Public Safety and the popular movement, when a mob invaded the assembly on 12 germinal (April 1), just when the trial of the former was progressing favorably for the defendants. To the opponents of the Mountain, it seemed only natural that the Left wanted to organize another May 31 (1793), in order to force the assembly to clear the men on trial. Fréron called it "un dernier effort du terrorisme aux abois;"<sup>159)</sup> and Georges Duval believed

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158)

The police report of 14 vëntôse (March 4), speaking of this poster is reprinted in C.-A. Dauban, ed., Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869), p. 543, and Adolphe Schmidt, ed., Tableaux de la Révolution Française (Leipzig, 1869), II, 295.

159)

Mémoires historiques sur la réaction royale et sur les massacres du Midi par le citoyen Fréron, eds., Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1824), p. 17.

that fear drove Billaud and his colleagues to agitate in the sections. 160) The more reliable Thibaudeau wrote:

" Les députés menacés [Barère, Billaud, and Collet], leurs adhérens et les jacobins convaincus qu'ils étaient perdus s'ils se bornaient à se justifier ou à se défendre, réunissaient toutes leurs forces pour conjurer l'orage et prévenir leurs accusateurs." 161)

But he, at least, did not say that the accused were alone responsible for the popular movement. Thibaudeau also noted that delegations from certain sections of Paris demanded that the accused be punished without a trial. 162) Evidently, popular leaders like Babeuf and other members of the Club électoral were not on the side of the accused. Levasseur de la Sarthe, one of the leaders of the demonstration on 12 germinal, explained that the mob had no secret aims at all.

" Nous désirions, [he said], il est vrai, une insurrection; nos discours, nos actes tendaient à en démontrer la nécessité; nous nous préparions à y prendre part et à la diriger, mais nous ne cherchions à nouer aucune trame pour la faire; nous ne conspirions pas." 163)

Claretie, a radical historian of the nineteenth century, analyzed the feelings of the former members of the Committee of Public Safety during these days, and came to the following conclusion:

160)

Georges Duval, Souvenirs Thermidoriens (Paris, 1844), II, 119-220.

161)

Mémoires sur la Convention, et le Directoire, par A.C. Thibaudeau, eds. Bervièlle et Barrière (Paris, 1824), I, 140.

162)

Idem.

163)

Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), IV, 245.



" Les accusés attendaient sans doute, espérant un réveil du peuple, une émeute, mais ils n'auraient eu garde de les provoquer. L'insurrection étant illégale, ils ne songeaient pas à l'insurrection. d'ailleurs ils se croyaient sûrs de vaincre, de s'imposer à leur juges, et confiants, ils entendaient gronder l'orage sur leurs têtes, et aussi mugir au loin la voix de la foule, qui perdait patience et criait du pain." 164)

The first disorders on a large scale, involving several sections, occurred on 29 and 30 ventôse (March 19-20). The Thermidorian Revère, now a member of the Committee of General Security, declared to the National Convention on 1 germinal (March 21), that

" Le calme commence à renaître. La patrie a été vraiment en danger, ... les principes de cette agitation sont connus. On voulait sauver Collet-d'Herbois, Billaud, et Barère. On a fait dans les groupes la motion de les mettre à la tête du peuple comme Robespierre. C'est en leur nom qu'on prêchait la guerre civile..." 165)

As a result of these remarks, a decree was passed without opposition. The new law on police made any attempt "à la révolte contre les autorités constituées, le gouvernement républicain et la représentation nationale" punishable with deportation. 166) This measure made it possible to dispose of the accused, when the Right felt that such a step was necessary.

As for the trial, it became involved in procedural questions at the very beginning. One of the hostile deputies,

164)

Jules[-Armand-Arsène]Claretie, Les Derniers Montagnards, Histoire de l'insurrection de prairial an III (1795) (2ème.éd., Paris, 1868), p. 6  
165)

Moniteur (5 germinal an III-March 25, 1795), XXIV, 38.  
166)

Ibid., XXIV, 39.

Pierre-Joseph-Denis-Guillaume Faure, challenged the competence of the National Convention to constitute itself into a tribunal. 167) He agreed that the accused were guilty (he implicated even Garnot and Lindet in the acts of the Terror), 168) but also felt that this was neither the proper time nor place to sit in judgment over the Revolution. "Un juge ne peut pas servir l'amitié, [he said], un juge ne peut pas servir la haine." 169) He then requested that the whole case be postponed for one year, so that tempers might cool down. 170) Faure was seconded by Charles-François Oudot, a rather moderate Montagnard, who asked for the establishment of a "People's Court," independent of the assembly, in order to try the three men. 171) He was also one of the chief proponents of the deportation law. Oudot believed that a revision of the case would take place after some years, and that the conviction of Billaud and his colleagues would then be set aside. If the accused were at that time living in exile, they could be asked to return to France, and their property restored to them. 172)

167)

P.-J.-D.-G. Faure, ... Sur le Procès des quatre députés prévenus par acte d'accusation rédigé par la commission des vingt-et-un (Paris, germinal, l'an III), p.1. Faure had held the same opinion during the trial of Louis XVI; it had cost the sixty-seven year old deputy his liberty following the establishment of the Terror.

168)

Ibid., pp.4-6.

169)

Ibid., p.7.

170)

Ibid., p.8.

171)

Motion d'Ordre, Précédée de réflexions sur la garantie de la représentation nationale, et relatives au procès des quatre députés prévenus. Par C.-F. Oudot (Paris, ventôse, an III), p.19.

172)

Ibid., p.17.

The National Convention disregarded all these objections. It debated the question, however, whom to hear first: the accused themselves, or witnesses in their favor. The matter was finally resolved, but only after two days of discussion. The three men on trial had nothing new to say in their defense; they only continued to protest their innocence. In his Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, aux Inculpations qui lui sont personnelles, Billaud refuted three wholly irresponsible charges, the source of which is not known. The first was that, on 8 thermidor, he had prevented the abolition of a law, authorizing the Committees of government to arrest deputies of the National Convention without previous authorization by the assembly. Billaud had no difficulty proving that the subject had not at all been discussed since 22 prairial.<sup>173)</sup> The second charge, which Saladin had also made (independently?), was the reference to the "Réveil du Lion." Billaud's reaction to the storm caused by this speech has already been discussed. Finally, he was accused of having attended, as a member of the Committee of Public Safety, nocturnal meetings with members of the Revolutionary Tribunal, in a house in rue de la Contrescarpe. The charge mentioned neither the number of the house, nor the time of the meetings, nor what had been discussed. These vague insinuations could, of course, be easily refuted.<sup>174)</sup>

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 173) Réponse de J.-N. Billaud, Représentant du Peuple, aux inculpations qui lui sont personnelles (Paris, ventôse) an III, pp. 3-6.

174) Ibid., pp. 26-27.

The accused or their friends addressed the National Convention during the first ten days of germinal. First, members of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security gave testimony. Over Bourdon de l'Oise's objections, Lindet was already heard on 2 germinal (March 22). He spoke of collective responsibility within the Committee, and of the achievements of the Terror. He claimed that the Committee of Public Safety had saved France,

"Faisant triompher la volonté d'une majorité patriote et pure des efforts d'une minorité contre-révolutionnaire." 177)

When the ex-Girondist Isnard tried to answer Lindet, he was interrupted by the Left. He was able to declare nevertheless:

"La nation vous jugera; vous avez tout fait pour assassiner la patrie." 178)

The next speakers all attacked Lindet, accusing him of the establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal, of having been a Royalist at the time of the Legislative Assembly, of having had

175)

Moniteur (6 germinal an III-March 26, 1795), XXIV, 45. Bourdon said: "Savez-vous ce que cela veut dire? c'est qu'après avoir essayé hier une insurrection qui n'a pu réussir, on veut aujourd'hui abuser de la délicatesse de plusieurs collègues, que personne n'incolpe, pour écarter la discussion et faire du procès des prévenus une affaire interminable."

176)

Excerpts from this address, one of the longest of the French Revolution, in ibid., XXIV, 45-46. Short mention in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LVIII, 31-32. Discussion in P.-J.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, eds., Histoire Parlementaire de la Révolution Française (Paris, 1834-1838), XXXVI, 249, and Armand Montier, Robert Lindet, Député à l'Assemblée Législative et à la Convention. Membre du Comité de Salut Public. Ministre des Finances (Paris, 1899), pp. 269-274. In the whole speech, Lindet did not even once mention the accused by name!

177)

Moniteur (6 germinal an III-March 26, 1795), XXIV, 45.

178)

Idem.

agents at the headquarters of the rebel General Wimpffen, of having been a Girondist early in 1793, and finally, of having "institué la boucherie de Robespierre."<sup>179)</sup> Nevertheless, Lindet continued with his speech. It became an extremely detailed description of the operations of the Revolutionary Government. For the first time, the assembly learned the "inside-story" of the Committee of Public Safety.

" Il était six heures. Lindet, qui avait pris la parole à midi et demi, était tellement fatigué qu'on ne l'entendait plus." <sup>180)</sup>

His brother, Thomas, then took over and read the end of the speech, amid loud protests from the Convention floor. The Mountain could barely prevent Lindet's translation before a tribunal (as an accomplice of the accused), and deter the assembly from ordering a full-scale investigation of the Left.<sup>181)</sup>

Now came Carnot's turn. On the next day (3 germinal-March 23), he started his big speech, by praising his own honesty and integrity.<sup>182)</sup>

" J'ai combattu souvent les prévenus eux-mêmes, [he continued], lorsque tout fléchissait devant eux; je les défendrai maintenant que chacun les accable." <sup>183)</sup>

179)

Idem.

180)

Ibid., XXIV, 46.

181)

Idem.

182)

Opinion de Carnot, Représentant du Peuple, Sur l'accusation proposée contre Billaud-Varennes, Collet-d'Herbois, Barère et Vadier par la commission des Vingt-un ... ([Paris, germinal an III]), p.1. Reprint in Mériteur (7 germinal an III-March 27, 1795), XXIV, 49-53. Excerpts in H.N. Rioust, Carnot (Gand, 1817), pp.48-52. Short mention in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, XVIII, p.35. Discussion in P.-J.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Reux, eds., op. cit., XXXVI, 250.

183) Opinion de Carnot, p.2.

Carnot stated furthermore that the "political" crimes were those of "ultra-revolutionaries." The accused had at the time [of the Terror] only followed public opinion, which had then been "ultra-revolutionary."<sup>184)</sup>

" Sur tous les points de la France, [he said], n'etoit-on pas ultra-révolutionnaire? l'égarement n'etoit-il pas tel, que chacun se battoit les flancs pour croître en patriotisme, pour se mettre à la hauteur, qu'on craignoit toujours de rester en arrière; qu'on inventoit des mots nouveaux pour mieux peindre son énergie, ou plutôt l'extravagance dont il falloit être animé?"<sup>185)</sup>

The National Convention had no authority to try Barère, Billaud, and Collet-d'Herbois for their "private" crimes, since that was the function of the regularly constituted courts alone.<sup>186)</sup>

Moreover, the assembly had no right to sit in judgment over the Revolution, since it had produced that Revolution itself.<sup>187)</sup> The

trial would, moreover, show the enemies of the Republic that France was divided; it would be bad propaganda.<sup>188)</sup> Finally,

a representative of the people should have immunity; if he were held responsible for words spoken in the heat of a debate, his initiative would be stifled and good government would be impossible.<sup>189)</sup>

" Si un tribunal peut nous juger, [he declared], sur ce que nous aurons articulé dans le sanctuaire des lois, il peut juger la loi elle-même ... Malheur à qui change en poison ce qui devrait être un aliment salubre! Malheur à qui érige en vertu tantôt la calomnie et tantôt la flatterie, suivant

184)  
Ibid., p. 8.  
185)  
Ibid., p. 9.  
186)  
Ibid., p. 7.  
187)  
Ibid., p. 14.  
188)  
Ibid., p. 15.  
189)  
Ibid., p. 17.

ses intérêts!

Le peuple est toujours grand; ce qu'il vous demande, c'est la paix entre vous, c'est l'oubli de vos haines particulières." 190)

Of all the speeches in favor of the accused, Carnot's was the most effective. Laure Junot held that

" Il n'y eut que Carnot qui, pendant le procès des accusés terroristes, fit preuve d'un beau caractère; tous les autres furent pitoyables." 191)

An American observer, William C. Semerville, believed, on the other hand, that the speech

" proceeded from gratitude for their [the accused] having saved his life, or from a view to self preservation." 192)

Even more unfavorable was the opinion of Vicomte Félix de Conny, who, it must be admitted, wrote during the Restoration:

" Les signes de la plus lâche terreur étoient empreints sur son [Carnot's] visage depuis la chute de Robespierre; sa démarche étoit mal assurée, ses regards sombres et convulsifs ..." 193)

After Carnot, Précur de la Côte-d'Or issued a short statement. 194)

190)

Ibid., pp. 23-24.

191)

Mémoires de Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès. Souvenirs historiques sur Napoléon, La Révolution, le Directoire, le Consulat, l'Empire et la Restauration (Paris, ed. of [1893]), I, 224.

192)

William C. Semerville, Letters from Paris, on the Causes and Consequences of the French Revolution (Baltimore, 1822), p. 180.

193)

[Vicomte Félix de Conny], La France sous le règne de la Convention (3ème. éd., Paris, 1824), p. 368.

194)

Discours de C.-A. Priour (de la Côte-d'Or) ... relatif aux trois membres inculpés de l'ancien comité de salut public (Paris, germinal, l'an III). Also in Moniteur (7 germinal an III-March 27, 1795), XXIV, 53. Excerpts in Georges Bouchard, Un Organisateur de la Victoire: Priour de la Côte-d'Or. Membre du Comité de Salut Public (Paris, 1946), pp. 325-326.



He also complained of anonymous letters threatening his life,  
adding

" J'ai cru devoir sans tarder consigner par écrit  
ce que j'ai dit, afin qu'on ne travestit pas mes  
intentions." 195)

In contrast to every other speaker for the defense, he was not  
so certain about the collective responsibility of all Committee  
members. 196) He only maintained that all the excesses had been  
due to Robespierre's power and his control over the organs of

government. 197) The former members of the Committee of General  
Security (Moïse Bayle, Rühl, Lacoste, Dubarran, Jagot, Voilland,

Amar, Louis du Bas-Rhin) followed Prieur in bearing witness to  
the good intentions and noble character of the accused. 198) David  
and Lavicomterie, the two surviving Robespierrists of that Committee,  
did not ask to be heard (the latter was in hiding); just like  
Jeanbon Saint-André, of the Committee of Public Safety. 199)

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195) Discours de C.-A. Prieur, p.1 n.1.

196) Ibid., p.2: "Eh bien! le oui ou le non absolus de cette proposition  
ne sont pas vrais."

197) Ibid., p.5.

198) Moniteur(7 germinal an III-March 27, 1795), XXIV, 53-54. All these  
addresses dealt in nothing but generalities.

199) L. Lévy-Schneider, Le Conventionnel Jeanbon Saint-André. Membre du  
Comité de Salut Public. Organisateur de la Marine de la Terreur. 1749-  
1813 (Paris, 1901), II, 1042, implied that Jeanbon did not defend his  
colleagues out of cowardice. Neither did he sign the petition for a  
voice vote, circulated on 12 germinal by the Mountain, to prevent the  
deportation of the accused.



Other deputies joined in the defense. Cambon, Ruamps, and  
 Levasseur de la Sarthe each said a few words. 200) Jacques-Antoine  
 Boudin, a radical known for his generosity, proposed to send the  
 accused to the Electoral Assemblies of their departments for trial.  
 For Barère, at least, this would have been tantamount to an  
 acquittal. 201) André Foussedoire, who had been recalled from a  
 mission by the Committee of Public Safety for "disobedience",  
 now said that the Committee had saved the Republic, and that he  
 would not vote against the three accused. 202) But most valuable  
 was the testimony of Nicolas-Sylvestre Maure, who offered  
 documentary proof that the correspondence of Barère, Billaud, and  
 Colliot "a constamment respiré l'amour de la patrie, de la justice,  
de l'humanité, et une philosophie douce et éclairée." 203) The  
 letters in question had been sent by the Committee of Public  
 Safety to Maure, when he had been on mission in the Yenne. 204) In  
 one, Billaud had written:

200)

Moniteur(8 germinal an III-March 28, 1795), XXIV, 57 (these are  
 Cambon's remarks on 4 germinal); (10 germinal an III-March 30, 1795,  
 XXIV, 74 (short speeches by the same and two others, on 6 germinal).

201)

Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p.7

202)

Moniteur(6 germinal an III-March 26, 1795), XXIV, 45. Session of  
 2 germinal. For his courageous stand, Foussedoire was arrested on  
 12 germinal and kept in prison until the final session of the  
 Convention.

203)

Un Mot A la décharge des trois Membres inculpés, de l'ancien comité  
de Salut public;... par Maure aîné (Paris, germinal, an III), p.2. Speech  
 (without documents) reprinted in Moniteur(8 germinal an III-March 28,  
 1795), XXIV, 63.

204)

The letters may also be found in Alphonse Aulard, ed., Recueil, VIII  
 675-676; X, 121-124, 574.

" Réprimez les élans inconsidérés de la force révolutionnaire lorsqu'elle veut prêcher la philosophie des armes à la main; c'est à la raison qu'il appartient de précipiter la chute du catholicisme, ruiné par sa vieillesse, par ses propres excès, et vaincu par la religion de la liberté." 205

And in another:

" L'arme de la persuasion vous a conquis l'opinion publique. Continuez d'être l'apôtre des droits de l'humanité." 206)

Maure was furthermore praised by the Committee for setting free several hundred prisoners, arrested during local disorders. 207)

As for the accused themselves, they did their very best to appear mild and gentle.

" Le teint et la physionomie des députés dénoncés, [wrote the reliable J.-J. Dussault], étaient flétris... L'habitude et la nécessité du secret leur avaient imprimé sur le visage un sombre caractère de dissimulation; leurs yeux caves, ensanglantés, avaient quelque chose de sinistre. Le long exercice du pouvoir avait laissé sur leur front et dans leurs manières je ne sais quoi d'altier et de dédaigneux... Billaud-Varennes tâchait de donner à ses yeux effrayants un caractère plus doux, à sa voix tranchante une inflexion plus moelleuse, à son front pâle et défait plus de sérénité." 208)

205)

Un Mot A la décharge ..., p. 7. Dated 4 frimaire year II. Barère's signature second.

206)

Ibid., p. 8. Dated 9 frimaire year II. Signed also Barère and Prieur 207)

Ibid., pp. 10-13. Dated 19 nivôse year II. Signed Billaud, Saint-Just Collot, and Barère, in that order. These acts of generosity did not earn Maure the gratitude of his colleagues. Ordered arrested after the "insurrection" of 1 prairial year III, he committed suicide in prison 208)

J.-J. Dussault, Fragment pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Convention Nationale, Depuis le 10 Thermidor, jusqu'à la dénonciation de Lecointre inclusivement (Paris, [29 fructidor, an II] 1794), pp. 29-30. Excerpts from this pamphlet in C.-A. Dauban, ed., Paris en 1794 et en 1795 (Paris, 1869 pp. 518-519.

Thibaudeau, not a neutral observer, saw in their features neither pride nor arrogance; and in their speeches only incoherence:

" La contenance des accusés, [he wrote], fut misérable. En adoptant un système de justification ils donnèrent prise sur eux; ils tombèrent dans une foule de contradictions...." 209)

And Madame de Staël found the accused

" Lisant leurs plaidoyers avec une figure pâle et nerveuse, allant d'un côté à l'autre de la tribune de la Convention comme un animal féroce dans sa cage. Étaient-ils assis, ils se balançaient sans se lever ni changer de place avec une sorte d'agitation stationnaire qui semblait indiquer l'impossibilité du repos." 210)

While Barère's, Billaud's, and Collet's behavior showed this strain, their speeches gave the impression of extreme confidence. The National Convention heard from them the full story of the Committee of Public Safety. Barère, the best speaker among the three men, carried most of the burden of the defense; between 2 and 11 germinal (March 22-31), he addressed the assembly five times (as compared to Collet's and Billaud's two each). By mere number of repetition, the unsatisfactory apologies and the half-truths became convincing. Mental strain or good intentions could not excuse the bloodshed, and the accomplishments of the Terror were not as important as the defendants claimed. But the three speakers convinced their audience that they had acted in good faith. They had won their first round, when the Convention

209)

Mémoires ... par A.C. Thibaudeau, eds. Berville et Barrière, I, 151.

210)

Thureau-Dangin, "La Question de Monarchie ou de République du 9 Thermidor au 18 Brumaire", in Royalists et Républicains. Essais historiques sur des questions de politique contemporaine (Paris, 1874),

211)

decided that it would take up the accusations point by point.

Jean Pelet de la Lozère, a Dantonist who presided over the assembly during the early days of germinal, attempted, to turn the tide against the accused. To Barère, he said privately that, in his opinion, all three men should be executed without delay. 212)

When the radical Choudieu declared: "Legendre, qui fait ici le rôle d'accusateur, devrait plutôt être accusé," he was interrupted by the Chair and not permitted to go on. 213) Nevertheless,

many members of the Center and the Right stated that they would support the defendants on specific points. Since the debate dragged on, it was decided on 9 germinal (March 29), to hear the accused without interruption, on even days, between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.; and to leave the odd days open for the other business of the National Convention. 214) Consequently, the trial came to a halt on the next day.

When it started again, on 11 germinal (March 31), a delegation from the section des Quinze-Vingts invaded the assembly hall and prevented discussion. 215) The "insurrection" had begun. Inspired by Lecointre's demand for the proclamation of the Constitution of 1793, and driven forward by sheer hunger, mobs

211)

Moniteur (8 germinal an III-March 28, 1795), XXIV, 61. Session of 5 germinal.

212)

A. Kuscinski, op. cit., p. 478.

213)

Moniteur (10 germinal an III-March 30, 1795), XXIV, 74. Session of 6 germinal.

214)

215) Ibid. (12 germinal an III-April 1, 1795), XXIV, 92.

Ibid. (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 106.

descended upon the National Convention. Even the enemies of the Left had to agree that they were not unjustified in their demands for relief from the famine.

" Mais la constitution de '93, [said one of the reactionaries]. Rien assurément est plus maladroit qu'une semblable demande. Elle éclaire à l'instant sur les véritables intentions des auteurs de cette émeute. La constitution de '93, impossible dans son exécution, était odieuse à tout le monde et par ses principes antisociaux et par le souvenir des hommes à qui elle avait du le jour; et la faire réclamer par cette tourbe ignorante et affamée, qui venait avec tant de justice demander du pain, mais qui n'avait aucun droit d'usurper la puissance du peuple dont elle était à peine une parcelle, c'était réunir subitement toute la portion saine des députés aux Thermidoriens..." 216)

At the moment, when the picture looked rather bright for Barère, Billaud, and Collot, these demonstrations proved to be catastrophic. 217) In the morning of 12 germinal (April 1), only three sections (Homme-Armé, Cité, Unité), sent delegations to the National Convention. The speaker for the first of these (one van Eck or Heck) made an address extremely sarcastic in tone; the section de l'Unité demanded the "épuration" of the assembly. 218)

216)

Joseph Lavallé, Histoire de l'origine, des progrès, et de la décadence des Diverses Factions qui ont agité la France depuis le 14 juillet 1789 jusqu'à l'abdication de Napoléon (London, 1815), II, 268. 217)

The official accounts of the events of 12 germinal in the National Convention are in Moniteur (14, 16 germinal an III-April 3, 5, 1795), XXIV 109-123 (no Moniteur was published on 15 germinal); and Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LVIII, 92-144. Reprinted in P.-J.-B. Buchez et P.-C. Roux, eds., op. cit., XXXVI, 260-300. Victor Barrucand, ed., Mémoires et Notes de Choudieu .... (1761-1838) (Paris, 1897); pp. 300-310, is a copy from the Moniteur. The only good modern account is in J. Claretie, op. cit. pp. 70-89, though hardly an objective interpretation of the events. 218)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 110. Reprint of speeches in Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LVIII, 96-107.

Boissy d'Anglas, Lindet's successor in the Committee of Public Safety, then started on a report on the grain supply.

" La tranquillité était à peine rétablie; [reported Lamothe-Langon, a reliable spectator], lorsque des hurlemens s'élevèrent près de nous; ils couvrent la voix de Boissy-d'Anglas... Le bruit augmente, on lutte dans la salle des pas perdus; notre garde ordinaire, insuffisante, est forcée; elle livre le passage; les portes s'ouvrent avec fracas... Des femmes ivres, des enfans déguenillés, horrible avant-garde de la révolte, débouchent dans l'enceinte en agissant leurs bonnets et en criant: "Du pain! du pain!" Les députés de l'extrême gauche et les gens des tribunes leur applaudissent, et la grande majorité de la convention se lève, et en réponse crie: "Vive la république!" 219)

The Moniteur only mentioned that "la plus grande agitation régnait dans l'extrême gauche." 220) Actually, Merlin de Thionville, an

extreme reactionary, who had been instrumental in the closing of the Jacobin Club, left his seat to join the demonstrators. "Ma place est au milieu du peuple; [he said], les citoyens viennent de me dire, qu'ils n'avaient aucune mauvaise intention." 221) The

assembly then replaced Falet, who had not been able to keep order, 222) by Antoine-Claire Thibaudeau. The new President accused the

219)

[Lamothe-Langon], Histoire pittoresque de la Convention Nationale et de ses principaux membres (Paris, 1833), IV, 246.

220)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 111.

221)

Idem. This sudden move had no great effect, since not one other deputy joined Merlin. Neither was he taken to account for his sudden revolutionary zeal. See also the description of this scene in the good biography, written by his descendent, Roger Merlin, Merlin de Thionville (Paris, 1927), II, 266-467. This is a far better book than Jean Reynaud, Vie et Correspondance de Merlin de Thionville (Paris, 1860).

222)

A moderate Montagnard, Thibaudeau was also a fanatic compromiser. He once proposed that Terrorists and Royalists be both admitted to the Convention in equal numbers. The last survivors of that assembly, he died only in 1854, at the age of 89 (and as a Sénateur of Napoleon III

extreme Left of "conspiracy"; while Sergent charged that  
Feuillant émigrés in England had organized the revolt. In  
 the meantime

" Les meneurs s'aperçoivent que l'émeute ne réussira pas, qu'elle a manqué son coup; alors ils sont les premiers à gourmander les assaillians, à leur imposer silence; ils hâtent eux-même la sortie des femmes et des enfans ... " 224)

Actually, the Mountain had been unable to control the crowd  
 throughout the demonstration. The Center and Right had been  
 terrified at first, but soon gained enough strength to turn to  
 the offensive. Battellier wrote, almost hysterically:

" Pendant quatre heures, le crime a rugi aux pieds des législateurs de la France; mais leur attitude calme et majestueuse a déjoué les criminels... " 226)

After some discussion, André Dumont, one of the most violent of  
 the Thermidorians, rose to speak:

" Ils [the conspirators] ne sont point en Angleterre, [he said], mais dans votre sein; ils font composer des tribunes de gens qui leurs sont affidés, et ils vous empêchent de faire le bien. Ils tiennent des concubines nocturnes, dans lesquels ils tramant des complots. Je sais qu'ils m'ont dévoué aux poignards... .. Savez-vous quel est le but du mouvement d'aujourd'hui? c'est de vous empêcher de prononcer sur le sort de trois brigands qui ont inondé la république de sang (On applaudit)... Vous avez aujourd'hui les preuves de la complicité et de la part que les hommes qui sont en jugement ont eus à cette révolte.

223)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 117.

224)

[Lamothe-Langon], op.cit., IV, 300.

225)

Mémoires de R. Levasseur (de la Sarthe), IV, 249.

226)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., "Les Journées de Germinal an III racontées par le Conventionnel Battellier," La Révolution Française, LXXV (1922), 61. This is a long letter, dated 21 germinal, to the deputy Albert, on mission in Aube and Marne.



Je ne vous proposerai pas de fermer les débats, une telle mesure ne convient qu'à des assassins. Je ne vous proposerai pas non plus de les condamner à mort sans les avoir jugés; mais je vous propose de les chasser du territoire français (Les applaudissements éclatent de toutes parts)... Je demande que les trois brigands qui ont assassiné la patrie soient déportés dès cette nuit." 227)

Laure Junot reported that "la salle avait failli écrouler sous les cris d'enthousiasme." 228) At this point, the accused gave up all attempts to defend themselves. The Mountain circulated a petition asking for a voice vote on the deportation. It was rejected, but also Tallien's proposal that the three men be shot immediately. 229) They were ordered deported, as conspirators against the Republic. 230) Then, Barère, Billaud, and Collet returned to their respective homes to pack their things. Except for their personal guards, they were free to go anywhere they pleased. Laure Junot remarked that they could have attended a theatrical performance in the evening. 231) Indeed, it seems rather surprising that neither tried to escape.

They did in fact, not leave until the late afternoon of the next day, 13 germinal (April 2). By that time, the three men seem to have had no friends left among the people. Why, is not known; it would probably be erroneous to think that the mob

227)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 118. See also Comte Emmanuel de Rougé, Le Conventionnel André Dumont (1764-1838) (Paris, 1911) p. 225.

228)

Mémoires de Mme. La Duchesse d'Abrantès, I, 224.

229)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 119.

230)

Reprint of deportation decree in idem; also Procès-Verbal de la Convention Nationale, LVIII, 127.

231)

Mémoires de Mme. La Duchesse d'Abrantès, I, 224.



was looking for scapegoats because of the failure of the "insurrection" of the previous day. In any event, Billaud, a police commissioner, two agents from the Committee of General Security, and a justice of the peace had to pass an angry mob shouting: "A mort! Le monstre à la guillotine!"<sup>232)</sup> It took them one hour to get from Billaud's residence to the Committee of General Security. Lenôtre thought that the crowd was under the impression that Billaud was being driven to his place of execution; for that reason only, it allowed the coach to pass.<sup>233)</sup> He remained in the Committee for some time, not talking to the members assembled there. At 7 p.m., the three men started on their way, escorted by General Pichegru, who happened to be in Paris and had been appointed for that very purpose Commander-in-chief of all troops in the capital.<sup>234)</sup> Along the Tuileries, 48 000 soldiers stood guard as the six-horse car passed, and 100 cannons were trained on the large crowds which gathered everywhere.<sup>235)</sup> In the Champs-Élysées, the coach was attacked. Billaud said later, that his assailants had been "les égorgeurs

232)

Georges Lenôtre, "Les Deux Femmes de Billaud-Vareennes," in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 3ème. série (Paris, 1924 p. 280.

233)

Idem.

234)

Moniteur (14 germinal an III-April 3, 1795), XXIV, 119.

235)

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 281.

préposés." 236) The Courrier républicain of 14 germinal (April 3),  
noted rather that they had come to "liberate" the three men. 237)

But, to continue Bullaud's account:

" Aussitôt les portières de la voiture furent  
ouvertes. Et cependant, avant de m'en tirer avec  
violence, ces furieux disputèrent entre eux, pour  
décider quel serait le genre de mort qu'ils me  
feraient subir." 238)

On the other hand, the Ami du peuple reported:

" Le peuple étonné s'écriait: "Il faut les juger et les  
guillotiner s'ils sont coupables. Quelques scélérats  
qu'ils soient, ils ne peuvent être condamnés sans  
avoir été jugés." 239)

In any event, the horses were unhitched and the three men taken  
back to the Committee of General Security. General Pichegru,  
who had been thrown off his horse, was rescued by "General"  
Barras and a handful of National Guardsmen, who happened to pass  
by. 240) The angry Battelier wrote:

236)

Charles Vellay, ed., "En Guyane," Revue de Paris, XIX, t. 2 (1912), 852.  
From a letter by Billaud, dated May 18, 1812. In one dated a day earlier  
he said that Pichegru had orders from the Convention to have the three  
men massacred. See, for that, Alphonse Aulard, ed., "Correspondence des  
Conventionnels Billaud-Varennes et Marragon," La Révolution Française,  
VI (1903), 76. Mémoires de B. Barère, ed. Hippolyte Carnot (Paris, 1842), III,  
3-6.

237)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., Paris pendant la Réaction Thermidorienne et  
sous le Directoire (Paris, 1898-1902), I, 635.

238)

Ch. Vellay, loc. cit., XIX, t. 2, 852.

239)

A. Aulard, ed., op. cit., I, 634. From issue of 15 germinal.

240)

Rousselin de Saint-Aubin, author of Barras' memoirs, gave his hero  
all the credit. See Georges Duruy, ed., Mémoires de Barras, membre du  
Directoire (Paris, 1895 ed.), I, 226-227. A serious historian, Colonel  
Ramsey Weston Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic and the  
Rise of the Marshals of Napoleon I (Oxford, 1926-1939), IV, 253, believes  
this also.

" Ce héros du Nord, qui a vu fuir devant lui les généraux et les esclaves de la coalition, a failli périr de la main du crime..." 241)

That "hero", who was to commit suicide during his trial for treason nine years later, arrived at the Convention at 3 a.m. of 14 germinal (April 3). The "prisoners" had left by then. They had remained unmolested in the Tuileries until 2 a.m. and finally been driven out by the barrière de Monceau, without large escort and publicity. 242) Pichegru announced to the assembly: 243)

"Représentans, vos décrets sont exécutés." To hear Thibaudeau:

" Je me préparais [as President of the Convention] à lui faire une réponse appropriée à sa mission et digne d'un guerrier qui était dans toute la plénitude de sa gloire... Surpris par son laconisme, je l'imitai et lui répondis: "Le vainqueur des tyrans ne pouvait manquer de triompher des factieux." 244)

All along the route (to La Rochelle, where they were going to embark), Barère, Billaud, and Collot protested their innocence. The Convention heard that

" ils se flattaient que le peuple ne tarderait pas à revenir de l'erreur dans laquelle il était sur leur compte. Ils disaient que le gouvernement leur avait offert de l'or pour se sauver en pays étranger, mais que la pureté de leur conscience leur avait fait rejeter ces offres." 245)

241)

A. Aulard, ed., "Les Journées de Germinal...", loc. cit., LXXV, 62.

242)

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 281.

243)

Moniteur (17 germinal an III-April 6, 1795), XXIV, 135.

244)

Mémoires... par A.C. Thibaudeau, eds., Merville et Barrière, I, 157.

245)

Ibid., I, 157-158.

However, if there were such appeals, they fell on deaf ears.

In Tours, a mob tried to throw Billaud into the Loire, in Poitiers  
and Niort, the coach was stoned. <sup>246)</sup> In Orléans, the Municipality

had to provide troops to preserve order. Nevertheless, the crowd  
forced the three men to step out of their conveyance and walk  
into the Town Hall (what happened there, was not recorded). <sup>247)</sup>

Finally, they arrived in La Rochelle. After remaining for one  
night in the Hôtel National, they were sent to the near-by  
prison on the island of Oléron (on 21 germinal-April 10). <sup>248)</sup>

Billaud saw his family briefly; their visit was kept a secret from  
the authorities of La Rochelle, to prevent reprisals. <sup>249)</sup> And

for reasons unknown to this day, Barère failed to embark with  
his colleagues, and was transferred to the prison of Saintes.

Billaud and Collot left France only on 7 prairial (May 26),  
never to return. <sup>250)</sup>

Suddenly, the Convention decided to give the three men  
a trial. Their translation before the criminal court of the  
Charente-Inférieure (in Rochefort) was decreed on 5 prairial

246)

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 282.

247)

Moniteur (21 germinal an III-April 10, 1795), XXIV, 166. From a letter  
dated 16 germinal sent by a constituent to deputy Porcher, and read by  
the latter to the Convention.

248)

Philippe David, Un Port de l'Océan pendant la Révolution: La Rochelle  
et son District. 1791-1795 (La Rochelle, 1938), p. 308.

249)

Idem.

250)

An order to execute the decree of deportation is dated on 23  
floréal (May 12). See Moniteur (27 floréal an III-May 16, 1795), XXIV, 453

251)  
(May 24). Billaud might have been acquitted, had he been judged by friends of his father's and so close to his native city. But the order either arrived too late in Oléron, or it was disregarded by the administrators there. Representative Blutel wrote the assembly from Rochefort on 8 prairial (May 27), that nothing could be done, since the "convicts" had already  
252)  
departed.

251)

Ibid. (10 prairial an III-May 29, 1795), XXIV, 547. Also a reprint of this decree.

252)

Ibid. (19 prairial an III-June 7, 1795), XXIV, 615.

## Chapter II

Exile: 1795 - 1819.

## 1. Guyana: 1795 - 1816.

For the trip to Guyana, Billaud and Collot were separated; the former went on the "Expédition," the latter on the "Cerf." At one moment during the forty-five day trip, it looked as if a British frigate might attack the two vessels; Commander Lelarge gave thereupon the rather senseless order to throw his two prisoners into the sea, if it came to a fight. <sup>1)</sup>

French Guyana was not a penal colony at that time.

Billaud and Collot were the first convicts sent there. Consequently, the authorities did not know what to do with these "dangerous" men. Paris did certainly not expect to have any more convicts in Guyana; the Committee of General Security had ordered that the two men be employed only at the "travaux ordinaires de la colonie." <sup>2)</sup> The Commissioner General, acting as Governor of Guyana, was one Cointet. Not knowing what to do, he placed Billaud and Collot in solitary confinement in the fortress of Cayenne. <sup>3)</sup> At the establishment of the Directory, Cointet was recalled; in his place, a man was sent with the title of General

1) Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p. 51

2) Georges Belloni, Le comité de Sûreté Générale de la Convention Nationale (Paris, 1924), p. 425.

3) Georges Lenôtre, "Les Deux Femmes de Billaud-Vareannes," in Paris Révolutionnaire: Vieilles maisons, vieux papiers, 3ème. série (Paris, 1906), p. 282.

Agent (Agent Général). Jeannet-Dudin was a distant relative of Danton. An official in Guyana, he had fled to the United States of America during the Terror, and returned to France after Thermidor.<sup>4)</sup> He had no love for Billaud and Collot. Arriving late in 1795, he had immediately to deal with a difficult situation. Slave revolts broke out everywhere. It became obvious that the large plantation-owners would think that the two "terrorists" had incited the rebellion. Both men behaved unlike colonials; moody men who did not talk, they made no attempts to join in the social life of the white settlers. In Guyana, where a white man was either an administrator or a farmer, Billaud and Collot did not engage in these occupations. They could not become government officials, and did not have enough money to buy a farm. When Jeannet arrived, the Negroes were in open rebellion. They were soon defeated, but public opinion demanded a scapegoat, and the new Agent was only too eager to avenge Danton and ingratiate himself with the planters at the same time. The two men were assigned residence in Sinnemary, in the midst of the

4)

"Notes sur le Séjour de Collot-d'Herbois et de Billaud-Varennés à la Guyane," in Mémoires sur les Journées Révolutionnaires et les Coups d'Etat, ed. de Lescure (Paris, 1875), II, 351. This is an excerpt from Louis-Ange Pitou, Voyage à Cayenne, dans les Deux Amériques, et chez les Anthropophages, etc. (Paris, an XIII-1805). Also, about Jeannet, see Général [Jean-Pierre] Ramel, Journal ou Témoignage de l'Adjudant Général Ramel . . . l'un des Déportés à la Guyane après le 18 Fructidor (4 September) 1797. . . . (Leipzig and Hamburg, 1799), pp. 115-116.

5)  
jungle.

In the meantime, the wives of the two men had tried to join them in exile. Madame Billaud had at first gone into hiding as "citoyenne Rousselet", but at the end of prairial, had come out again. 6) An application to join her husband was passed on to other authorities by the Committee of General Security. 7) While waiting for her passport, she met one Henry Johnson, a Bostonian by birth, and a weapons' manufacturer for the French Republic by profession. Billaud had been his idol since 1793; although he had never met him, he had made an anonymous donation which had paid for the printing of Billaud's defense pamphlets. 8) Johnson proposed to equip and arm a corsair, which would kidnap the ex-deputy from Guyana and bring him to the United States. Billaud himself, when notified of this plan, refused the offer. 9) In brumaire year IV (November 1795), the Directory paid Madame an indemnity (her husband's "back-pay" as a deputy of the Convention, from 12 germinal to the closing session) and promised her also free transport to Guyana. 10) Her correspondence with Billaud was fairly regular until 1798, although it seems that English

5)  
De Lesours, ed., op. cit., II, 351.

6)  
G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 284.

7)  
G. Belloni, op. cit., p. 428. This is dated 28 Floréal year III (May 17, 1795)

8)  
Alfred Bégis, ed., Curiosités Révolutionnaires: Billaud-Varennés. Mémoires Inédits et Correspondance (Paris, 1893), pp. 145-146. Also, G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 285.

9)  
A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., p. 147.

10)  
G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 286.



ships had captured even before then part of their correspondence and some packages. <sup>11)</sup> She waited, but it seems that the political situation made her departure impossible. And Billaud himself was against exposing his wife to the rigors of sea-travel in wartime, and the life of an exile. Finally, she asked for a divorce; under a law of September 20, 1792, it was easy for the wife of a deported person to obtain a decree. It was granted on 29 nivôse an V (January 18, 1797), "par cause d'absence du mari,"

<sup>12)</sup> says the record. Ten days later, on 9 pluviôse (January 28), the former Angélique Doye married Henry Johnson at the mairie of the eleventh arrondissement. <sup>13)</sup> Billaud was not informed of this.

According to Lenôtre, it was merely a marriage "de protecteur et de père adoptif;" the bride had just reached the age of thirty-<sup>14)</sup> one, and the bridegroom was twenty years her senior. Johnson

died on 5 nivôse year VIII (December 26, 1799), and his wife inherited half a million livres. <sup>15)</sup> Again, she attempted to join Billaud. The latter, having heard about the divorce in the meantime, was offended. His friend, General Bertrand, interceded

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11)

Ibid., p. 287. The whole first part of A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., (called "Biographie"), the pp. 59-223, is a reprint of Billaud's correspondence, chiefly between him and his family in La Rochelle, but also between the latter and Mme. Billaud in Paris. These letters are commented upon and interpreted. They are of no particular interest, neither for an understanding of Billaud's character, nor for the history of the French Revolution.

12)

A. Douarache, ed., Les Tribunaux Civils de Paris pendant la Révolution (1791-1800) (Paris, 1905), II, 353.

13)

Record of marriage and license reprinted in A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 153-154.

14)

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 288.

15)

Ibid., p. 290.

on her behalf (after having met her in Paris, in 1806). Billaud said only: "Il est des fautes irrépatables," and refused to be reconciled. <sup>16)</sup> Angélique, who was only forty in 1806, found a third husband. She married one Duparc, a cousin, on April 2, 1808. This man, many years her junior, inherited her not inconsiderable fortune, when she died on February 14, 1815. <sup>17)</sup>

For many years, Billaud lived under very difficult circumstances. Sinnamary, isolated from the coastal settlements by high mountain ranges, was one of the most unhealthy spots in all Guyana. Both Billaud and Collet received an annual pension, variously estimated at between 1200 and 1800 livres, plus free room and board. <sup>18)</sup> This should have assured them a comfortable existence. The two men were assigned a house to live in; but it appears that they could not leave the village without an escort. General Freytag, the military Commander at Sinnamary, was ordered to accompany Billaud and Collet on their daily walk. He refused, was punished with fifteen days house-arrest, and recalled. <sup>19)</sup> Returning after a while, the General seems to have yielded to

16) Général B. Bertrand, "Billaud à Guyane," La Nouvelle Minerve, II (1831) 292-294.

17) G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 304.

18) De Lescure, ed., op. cit., II, 352, gives the sum as 1200 livres; in the same work, II, 346, 1800 livres is mentioned in an excerpt from Honoré Bonhomme, d., Journal inédit de La Villeurnoy. J.-J. Aymé, Déportation et Naufrage de J. J. Aymé, ex-Législateur ... (Paris, [1800]), p. 108, says the pension was 1500 livres.

19) Mémoires du Général J. D. Freytag, Ancien Commandant de Sinnamary et de Conanama, dans la Guyane Française ... (Paris, 1824), I, 202-203.

his sense of duty:

" Mes visites [in the house of the two men] étaient toujours fort courtes, [he wrote], ma conversation... laconique, insignifiante... Billaud comptait sur un prompt changement de gouvernement en France, et il espérait être bientôt rappelé." 20)

When he heard about the failure of the coup d'état of 18 fructidor year V (September 4, 1797), Billaud asked Freytag, when the ship which was to take him back to France, would be ready to sail.

" Cet heureux événement, [he said], me rendrait mon pouvoir et vous apprendrez par la suite, si je puis vous être utile en quelque chose." 21)

At the same time, he complained to Jeannet about the General, despite the fact that the latter was Billaud's only companion, since Collet-d'Herbois had died of a fever on 20 prairial year IV (June 8, 1796).

After the "insurrection" of 18 fructidor year V (September 4) the Directory deported without trial a large number of deputies of the Corps Législatif and politically influential military men. They were sent to Sinnamary immediately after their arrival in the colony, and housed (temporarily) in the fortress there. The most prominent among them were General Pichegru, François de Barthélemy, and François marquis de Barbé-Marbois, the former Intendant of Saint-Domingue. 22)

20)

Ibid., II, 17.

21)

Ibid., II, 18.

22)

Among the chief "conspirators" was Carnot, who saved himself by flight. He and Barthélemy, the other ousted Director, were considered moderates in politics. The Coup d'état of 18 fructidor is generally considered an attempt of the "counter-revolutionaries" to gain power. Pichegru, in any event, was in contact with the Austrian government; Barthélemy, who had negotiated the Treaty of Basle in 1795, may also have had relations with the former enemies of France. Some of the deported men escaped from Guyana; they were not heavily guarded. The other survivors of the tropical climate returned to France after 18 brumaire.

The latter, as well as several others, wrote memoirs, which show almost identical reactions, as far as Billaud is concerned. 23)

The "new" men felt that he was enjoying too much freedom. They hated Billaud and refused all contact with him, except for one abbé André-Charles Brotier, formerly editor of the Royalist 24)

Journal général de France, who shared Billaud's house. According 25)

to one of the exiles, Billaud converted his new friend to the beliefs of the Revolution.

" La conduite de ce prêtre, [wrote General Ramel], nous indignait chaque jour davantage, il ne parloit que de vengeance, de sang, et de la nouvelle terreur, qui devoit selon lui ppérer la contre-révolution." 26)

Ramel was not against Billaud in principle; he declared that "nous évitâmes de l'humilier et d'aggraver son supplice." 27) On his

part, the latter seems to have held similarly aloof; he certainly had reasons enough to dislike these reactionaries. Barbé-Marbois gave a description of Billaud's behavior, which is rather favorable:

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23) The notable ones are J.-J. Aymé, op. cit.; Général Ramel, op. cit.; [François, marquis de Barbé-Marbois], Journal d'un Déporté Non Jugé, ou Déportation en Violation des Lois, Décrétée le 18 Fructidor an V (4 septembre 1797) (2 vs. Paris, 1834); and excerpts from the journals of Louis-Ange Pitou and Charles-Honoré Berthelot de La Villeurnoy, reprint in De Lescure, ed., op. cit. A more modern examination, Le Ch[evalier] de Larue, Histoire du Dix-Huit Fructidor: La Déportation des Députés à La Guyane. Leur Evasion et leur Retour en France (Paris, 1895), is a good analysis of these memoirs.

24) J.-J. Aymé, op. cit. p. 108; Général Ramel, op. cit., p. 115. La Villeurnoy, in De Lescure, ed., op. cit., p. 346, says that Billaud obtained extra rations and special (tropical) food.

25) Ibid., p. 354; General Ramel, op. cit., pp. 140-144.

26) Ibid., p. 172.

27) Ibid., p. 144.

" Je ne lui ai jamais parlé, [he said], mais quatre fois par jour, il passait devant ma case; je l'étais sans éviter et sans chercher ma vue; il me saluait d'un air simple et courtois... Vous voudrez savoir comment il se comporte ici: sa conduite a toujours été réservée, décente, égale, et sans bassesse comme sans arrogance." 28)

This high opinion of the ex-Conventionnel was not shared by Freytag, who had a further reason to dislike Billaud. Having once served under Pichegru, he certainly tried to improve the General's condition. Billaud complained to the General Agent, who replaced Freytag, and sent a commission to Sinnamary to investigate the conditions there. 29) The chairman of that commission,

" ayant été lui-même témoin de la manière affable avec laquelle vous [Freytag] agissiez envers les déportés, ne prit plus d'autres renseignements que de Billaud, qu'il ne quitta pas de toute la journée." 30)

When Jeannet heard about Freytag's behavior, he went "dans une fureur épouvantable," had the latter arrested, and finally sent him to command a small jungle outpost. 31) It is surprising that Jeannet, the Dantonist, who had taken revenge upon Billaud, should all of a sudden be so well disposed toward him. Ramel's explanation

28)

[F. de Barbé-Marbois], op. cit., I, 151.

29)

Mémoires du Général J.D. Freytag .... II, 34. Lieutenant Aimé, the new Commander at Sinnamary, told the General, why he had fallen from grace. Speaking about Billaud, he said: "Vous n'avez pas su le ménager... Ce monstre était votre espion, et la moindre démarche était surveillée par lui." Freytag admitted his sympathy with the "new" arrivals.

30)

Ibid., II, 35. Also Lieutenant Aimé's words.

31)

Idem.

is that the Agent felt uncertain of his position, expected the Restoration of the Left in the French government, and thought that Billaud would once again be in a position to make his influence felt. <sup>32)</sup>

As for Freytag, he returned to Sinnamary only after Billaud's departure. He believed that Billaud had refused to return to France (after 18 brumaire), only in order to spy upon the authorities in the colony. <sup>33)</sup>

In the Summer of 1798, Billaud fell sick. With difficulty, he was nursed back to health by the Grey Sisters, who had a mission near Sinnamary. Forever after, he retained a certain fondness for these women. <sup>34)</sup> In the reflections published by Alfred Bégis as Billaud's "Memoirs", the exile expressed his gratitude and spoke of the Sisters with sentimental affection. Fully recovered, he received permission to leave Sinnamary (November 1798). He was assigned residence in Chevreuril, on the coast. There, he lived the life of a hermit; he did not even communicate with his family any more. <sup>35)</sup> Around this time,

Jeannet was recalled; his successor was Etienne-Laurent-Pierre Burnel. After 1800, Victor Hughes, an old friend of the Billaud family, arrived in Guyana, as the first Governor of the colony. <sup>36)</sup> He and his predecessor reawakened Billaud's interest in civilization

32) Général Ramel, op. cit., p. 164.

33) Mémoires du Général J.D. Freytag . . . ., II, 180 n. 2.

34) A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 94-95.

35) G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 293.

36) Ibid., p. 294; De Lescure, ed., op. cit., p. 354 (only about Burnel); A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 119-120.

Since his pension was obviously not enough to take care of all his needs, Billaud borrowed 1200 livres from a colonel in Cayenne and rented a farm at Orvilliers (prairial year VIII-June, 1800).<sup>37)</sup> This meant that he had decided to settle permanently in Guyana.

Yet, after the turn of the century, he could have returned to France. Twice before, on 16 brumaire year V (November 6, 1796), and on 14 thermidor year VII (August 1, 1799), the question of an amnesty for both Barère and Billaud had been argued in the Conseil des Anciens. It had been rejected both times; in the last instance, after Garat had delivered an impassioned speech, in which he had blamed Billaud for all the crimes of the Terror.<sup>38)</sup> The Consulate granted an amnesty to all political prisoners. General Bertrand, aide-de-camp to Governor Hugues, was sent to Orvilliers to announce this news. He met Billaud still wearing his red wig, but very simple clothes. The only furniture in the house were three chairs, a hammock, and a wooden table. The farm was right in the jungle, and insects so plentiful that the Negroes had to work in a cloud of smoke to keep them away.<sup>39)</sup> When told of his pardon, Billaud replied

37)

Ibid., pp. 120-121.

38)

Ibid., pp. 115-116. Crassous de Médeuil, Billaud's politician-friend from La Rochelle, presented the demand for an amnesty on 16 brumaire an V (November 6, 1796). See, for that, Moniteur (21 brumaire an V-November 11, 1796), XXVIII, 478. For the session of 14 thermidor year VII, see ibid. (19 thermidor an VII-August 6, 1799), XXIX, 767.

39)

Général B. Bertrand, "Billaud-Varenes à Cayenne," La Nouvelle Minerve, II (1836), 289-290.



" Je sais, par l'histoire, que des consuls romains tenaient du peuple certains droits; mais le droit de faire grace que s'arrogent les consuls français n'ayant pas été puisé à la même source, je ne puis accepter l'amnistie qu'ils prétendent m'accorder."<sup>40</sup>

He thus remained in Guyana. Early in the century, his father died and left him 30 000 francs, which were transferred to the colony.<sup>41)</sup>

With this sum, Billaud bought (in 1804) a plantation abandoned a few years before. "L'Hermitage" was located in one of the most beautiful spots in Guyana. There was a good house; Billaud made some improvements and built roads. Slavery had been reestablished in the colonies on 30 floréal year X (May 12, 1802); consequently, eight Negroes who lived in three shacks on the plantation, were included in the purchase price.<sup>42)</sup> There is some irony in the fact that the ardent defender of the Rights of Man should become a slave-owner. Billaud himself saw nothing strange in the situation, which only proves that he had adopted colonial customs and ways of thinking. A white man could, in any event, not have run a plantation by himself.

General Bertrand, who owned the plantation next to "L'Hermitage", became Billaud's good friend. They were in daily contact, but the ex-Conventionnel steadily refused to talk about

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40)

Ibid., II, 290.

41)

Idem. Charles Vellay, "En Guyane," Revue de Paris, XIX, t. 2 (1912), 873, said that Billaud père was still alive in 1812. Since the transfer of money could not have taken place that year (for political reasons), or since Billaud could not have had any savings in 1804, General Bertrand's information seems to be more trustworthy.

42)

Général Bertrand, loc. cit., II, 291.



43) politics. In 1809, a Portuguese army occupied the colony. The new Governor, one Marcel Dacosta, attempted to consult Billaud in various matters of administration, but the latter refused to give assistance. Nevertheless, he travelled often to Cayenne, and his personal relations with the Governor were very close. 44) During one of these trips, he met one Siegert, a Swiss merchant living in Cayenne. The two men became intimate friends. Between February 1812 and May 1816, they engaged in correspondence. One hundred and fifty letters from Billaud's hand (and one reply from Siegert) have been preserved; they are the most valuable source of information on Billaud's last years. 45)

It appears that Billaud's chief preoccupation was with his slaves. Like most employers, he felt that his workers did not produce enough.

43)

Idem.

44)

Ibid., II, 294.

45)

Siegert's descendants sold the letters to Benjamin Fillon, whose collection was, in turn, sold in 1877. Around the end of the nineteenth century, one hundred were in possession of Victorien Sardou. The famous playwright did not permit historians to consult them; Alfred Bégis, for one, did not know their contents. The remaining fifty-one turned up in the sale of the Charavay Collection, on June 15, 1903. Alphonse Aulard wrote about them in "Correspondance des conventionnels Billaud-Varenes et Marragon," La Révolution Française, VI (1903), 76-79. They were acquired by Charles Vellay. That historian also came in possession of the others, after Sardou's death in 1908. They have remained in his family to this day. Vellay published the most important one in "Billaud-Varenes aux Etats Unis (5 mai-18 juillet 1816)," Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, II (1911), 219-227; "Billaud-Varenes esclavagiste," ibid., VI (1914), 275-280; "En Guyane," Revue de Paris, XIX, t. 2 (1912), 848-873. "Billaud-Varenes en Guyane," Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse, CXXI, t. 83 (1916), 276-308, 536-544, t. 84 (1916), 150-162, 347-356. The letters published by Hector Fleischmann, as "Billaud-Varenes Négrier," Revue de Curiosités Révolutionnaires, I (1910-1911), 354-359, are not of any importance.

" Exerçant depuis plus de quatorze ans la profession d'agriculteur, [he wrote to Siegert in 1813], qui, pour ma tranquillité, m'a placé trop près des nègres, et ayant eu le temps de les observer et de les étudier, je crois donc bien les connaître. Malheureusement, je n'ai que trop appris que ces gens-là, nés avec beaucoup de vices, et mal élevés, devenaient d'autant plus difficile à conduire que manquant à la fois de raison et de sentiments, il n'est que le ressort contractif de la crainte qui soit capable de les contenir et de les activer. Partant de là, et sans être avec eux d'une sévérité outrée, je les tiens dans le devoir, autant qu'il dépend de moi, parce que le désordre devient une source de perte infaillible. Mais je suis juste, ne voulant point qu'ils soient fondés à se plaindre, leur accordant, à cet effet, même au delà de ce qu'ils peuvent prétendre." 46)

Billaud complained particularly about Jean-Baptiste, his overseer.

He characterized the latter as

" étant pourvu de l'aptitude nécessaire pour mener atelier. Vous pouvez m'en croire, il n'a ni les qualités, ni les connaissances requises, il est même démuné de la capacité et de l'envi de les acquérir!"

This Jean-Baptiste seems to have had the sleeping-sickness (Billaud described the symptoms correctly), but a "tisane très spécifique"

48) alleviated the suffering. One of the Negroes finally went to

Cayenne and filed a complaint against Billaud in the courts

(September, 1813). Since he was unable to offer evidence that he

had been mistreated, he was jailed as a run-away slave. Billaud

46)

Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varennes esclavagiste," Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, VI (1914), 276. Letter of June 16, 1813 (no. II). The numbering concerns only the fifty-one from the Charavay collection; the others are unnumbered.

47)

Charles Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varennes en Guyane," Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse, CXXI, t. 83 (1916), 302. Same letter as the one quoted above.

48)

Ibid., CXXI, t. 83, 302-303; the same author's "Billaud-Varennes esclavagiste," loc. cit., VI, 276. Same letter as above.

tried to get him back, but the authorities refused to let him go before he had served his sentence. <sup>49)</sup> Shortly after, the

remaining seven slaves refused to work, and Billaud sent them all to Cayenne, to fare for themselves. They landed also in prison, but Jean-Baptiste and one Michel were immediately released.

(November 1813). <sup>50)</sup> After this experience, Billaud sold the whole lot, and, on Siegert's recommendation, bought five new men, two women and one little girl. All of them escaped, before the purchase had been concluded (November 27, 1813). <sup>51)</sup> For the

next six months, Billaud worked the large plantation all by himself. Finally, Siegert loaned him two men, and, in June 1814, Billaud bought Etienne for 3 800 livres. After two months, he asked his friend to procure a companion for the latter, "je la désirerais d'environ quinze à seize ans, étant plus facile à former dans le jeune âge." <sup>52)</sup> The girl, called Brigitte, arrived

on August 26.

"D'ailleurs, son extérieur très agréable, [Wrote Billaud], prévient assez en sa faveur, et même, quant au moral, elle paraît très douce et très docile, ce qui est toujours une indication de bon augure." <sup>53)</sup>

Soon, she was given her freedom, took the name of Virginia, moved in with her master, and ran the household. Etienne was not at all

49) Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varennnes en Guyane," loc. cit., CXXL, t. 83, 537; Letter of September 30, 1813 (no. IV).

50) Ibid., CXXL, t. 83, 538. Letter of November 28, 1813 (no. V).

51) Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varennnes escalavagiste," loc. cit., VI, 277. Letter of December 5, 1813 (no. VI).

52) Ibid., VI, 278. Letter of August 26, 1814 (number not given).

53) Ibid., VI, 279. Same letter as above.

pleased that the girl, who had been selected as his wife, should instead become his master's mistress. He tried to poison Virginie, stole money, and incited seven other slaves ( whom Billaud had just bought) to rebellion.<sup>54)</sup> It can be seen from these instances that Billaud really had worries.

The remainder of the correspondence between Billaud and Siegert is mostly concerned with literatures. The latter owned a good library. In the first letter, Billaud expressed his thanks for the loan of an edition of Milton's works.<sup>55)</sup> He also read an incomplete ten-volume edition of Rousseau, "dont les erreurs même font étinceler des jets de lumière."<sup>56)</sup> But he disliked Mallet's History of Switzerland, since the philosopher from Geneva was not mentioned in it.<sup>57)</sup> On the other hand, he enjoyed the poems of the abbé Delille,

" des chefs-d'oeuvre, principalement ceux qu'il a eu l'art d'adapter si ingénieusement à d'autres chefs-oeuvre ." <sup>58)</sup>

But most of all, he was impressed with a travel book, Description des cols ou passages des Alpes, by one Bourrit (2 volumes, Genève, 1803). Billaud became so enthusiastic over this work, that he set

54)

Ibid., VI, 279-280. Letter of May 21, 1815 (no. XXXVII).

55)

Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Vareennes en Guyane," loc. cit., CXXI, t. 83, 29/ Letter of February 29, 1812 (no. I).

56)

Ch. Vellay, ed., "En Guyane," Revue de Paris, XIX, t. 2 (1912), 862. Date of letter not mentioned.

57)

Ibid., XIX, t. 2, 868. Date of letter not mentioned.

58)

Ibid., XIX, t. 2, 867. Date of letter not mentioned.

down his impressions on paper. These are the "memoirs" published in 1893 by Alfred Bégis.<sup>59)</sup> One historian at least found them highly useful in an analysis of the minds of the French revolutionaries.<sup>60)</sup> These "memoirs" are philosophical reflections, disorganized and repetitious. They are rambling thoughts about love. As mentioned before, the Grey Sisters are highly praised. At one point, he says that to help "fallen" women to resume their place in society, is the most praiseworthy object of philanthropy.<sup>61)</sup> After love, "friendship" is extolled; and family life is encouraged as the most desirable social manifestation.<sup>62)</sup> The work ends with a description of nature in Guyana.<sup>63)</sup> Nowhere does Billaud state that he regrets the actions of his political career; in fact, in his one remark on the subject to Siegert, he defended the work of the Committee of Public Safety during the Terror.<sup>64)</sup> Yet, the "memoirs" are but an admonishment to practice love and charity.<sup>65)</sup> They are without value as a piece of literature and unclear in their philosophy; they confirm only Billaud's agreement with the eighteenth century concept of Man's innate goodness.

59)

A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 291-455. Full title: Le Pour et le Contre, ou Réflexions morales et politiques sur un passage de la description des Alpes, par M. Bourrit.

60)

Pierre Trahard, La Sensibilité Révolutionnaire (1789-1794) (Paris, 1936). He quotes nine times from this work.

61)

A. Bégis, ed., op. cit., pp. 324-326.

62)

Ibid., p. 348.

63)

Ibid., pp. 445-448.

64)

Ch. Vellay, ed., "En Guyane," loc. cit., XIX, t. 2, 869. Date of letter not given.

65)

This is also the opinion of G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 300. He says that Billaud wrote a "dissertation" on love, by which he means these

## 2. Haiti: 1816 - 1819.

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Guyana was given back to France. The return of the Bourbons had an unpleasant consequence for Billaud, insofar as his pension was cut off. He also feared other measures of retaliation and therefore decided to emigrate. Someone who knew him during his last years, wrote that General Andrew Jackson had advised the ex-Conventionnel to move to Saint-Domingue,<sup>66)</sup> but Billaud never mentioned to Siegert that he was in contact with the American, and there is no evidence of correspondence between the two men. On the other hand, Billaud thought of settling in the Southern part of the United States. Already in 1815, he had asked Siegert for a study on Louisiana by the abbé Raynal.<sup>67)</sup> He also prepared a manifesto: Billaud-Varenes aux Américains, et particulièrement aux habitants de la Louisiane.<sup>68)</sup> He finally sold "L'Hermitage" for 40 000 francs,<sup>69)</sup> and embarked on or about April 5, 1816, accompanied by Virginie, and the dog Patience.

The ship went to Newport, Rhode Island; from there Billaud and his "family" were to travel to New Orleans by land. The trip was very hard; he recorded that Virginie and the dog were near-dead from sea-sickness.<sup>70)</sup> And, after so many years in a tropical

66) [Anon.], "Les Dernières Années de Billaud-Varenes," La Nouvelle Minerve, I (1835), 352.

67) Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varenes en Guyane," Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue Suisse, CXXI, t. 84 (1916), 156. Letter of May 8, 1815 (no. XXXVI).

68) Ibid., CXXI, t. 84, 348. Letter of March 28, 1816 (no. XLVII).

69) Ibid., CXXI, t. 84, 159. Letter of November 12, 1815 (no. XLI).

70) Ibid., CXXI, t. 84, 350. Date of letter not mentioned.

climate, Newport seemed cold, even in late Spring. Billaud explained his disappointment to Siegert:

" Newport est une très jolie petite ville, [he wrote], dont les maisons très propres ont un aspect très riant. La principale rue, qui a deux milles de longueur, est d'un bel effet, et très vivante. Mais la campagne est une, et par conséquent triste; ... Malgré les prévenances que je reçois, vous concevez bien, ... que la vie que je mène n'est nullement de mon goût. Qu'on ait faim ou non, il faut manger aux heures du repas, s'habiller pour paraître à table, s'y trouver tous les jours avec de nouveaux visages, et être parmi des gens dont on n'entend point la langue: tout cela n'a sûrement rien de fort amusant." 71)

He had to remain in Rhode Island for fifteen days; arriving in New York only three days later, on May 31. He had nothing to say about that city, except that it is "une grande et belle ville, qui plairait encore davantage, si ses rues étaient généralement plus droites." 72)

Billaud now heard rumors that New Orleans had been ravaged by floods and a yellow fever epidemic. He seems to have been afraid to go there, yet also unable to stay in New York. Not only was the cost of living in that city very high, but his acquaintances from former years living in New York had all been unsuccessful in business. 73) Consequently, Billaud spent

71)

Ibid., CXXI, t. 84, 351. Date of letter not mentioned; probably the last one (no. CL) from the Charavay Collection. Also in Ch. Vellay, ed., "Billaud-Varennnes aux Etats-Unis (5 mai-18 juillet 1816)", Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, II (1911), 221.

72)

Ibid., II, 224.

73)

Ibid., II, 222-223.

his last savings on passages for himself and his companions to Haiti, where, he had been told, business opportunities were good. He left the United States on July 18, 1816.

In Port-au-Prince, he rented a two-room house, and took up the legal profession again. He went into partnership with Colembel, a mulatto educated in France, who was also the secretary of Pétion, the President of the Republic of Haiti. These two men, as well as High Judge (Grand Juge) Sabourin, tried to assist Billaud in all possible ways. For instance, he was appointed editor of an "official" history of the Revolution in Haiti. <sup>74)</sup>

It should be noted that the man, who had been a slave-owner of late, was now wholly dependent on the favors of three colored men. Even with a fairly comfortable life, Billaud was in bad health; he suffered from chronic dysentery. A visitor described him as extremely pale, meager like a skeleton, with white hair and calm blue eyes. <sup>75)</sup>

On June 7, 1819, he left Port-au-Prince, on his doctor's recommendation. This trip, to a country-house he had rented, produced a fever. Soon after his arrival, he went into a coma. He died a few days later, on June 13, at the age of sixty-three years, one month, and eleven days. <sup>76)</sup> One of his doctors reported that his last words were

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74) [Anon.], loc.cit., I, 352.

75) Idem.

76) Ibid., I, 354. G. Lenôtre, op.cit., p. 304.



those of a true revolutionary and that he did not repent his  
sins:

" Mes ossemens, du moins, reposent sur une terre qui  
veut la liberté; mais j'entends la voix de la  
postérité qui m'accuse d'avoir trop ménagé le sang  
des tyrans d'Europe." 77)

Virginie inherited all of Billaud's possessions. In Saint-Domingue  
on a research trip in 1874, Jules Claretie heard that an old  
colored woman, who had been Billaud's wife, was still living in  
Port-au-Prince. 78) This is quite possible; Virginie would then  
only have been in her middle or late seventies.

In France, nobody was much interested in the death of  
the ex-Conventionnel. Throughout the periods of the Directorate,  
Consulate, and First Empire, rumors had circulated that he had  
been drowned, assassinated in a slave-rebellion, or even returned  
to Paris incognito. 79) After 18 fructidor year V (September 4,  
1797), Billaud's file in the police department in Paris was  
closed. An addition from the period of the Restoration says that  
he had not been heard from since the above date, but that he may  
still be alive. 80) Billaud's brother had died in 1817, and

77)

[Anon.], loc. cit., I, 358.

78)

G. Lenôtre, op. cit., p. 305.

79)

See, for these rumors, Alphonse de Lamartine, Histoire des Girondins  
(3ème. éd., Paris, 1848), VIII, 194; A.-C. Thibaudeau, Mémoires sur la  
Convention et le Directoire, eds. Berville et Barrière (Paris, 1824), I, 96  
Adolphe Schmidt, ed., Tableaux de la Révolution Française (Leipzig, 1869)  
II, 514 (Report of Ministry of the Interior, of 16 frimaire year IV).

80)

Archives Nationales, F 6710, Plaqu. 5.

Gabriel Bellon, a bookdealer in Troyes, adopted Benjamin's young daughter, Clémentine. Bellon wrote to the Ministry of the Interior in Paris to determine Billaud's whereabouts (for some legal matter in connection with the adoption).<sup>81)</sup> But since the French Government did not know, where Billaud had gone after his departure from Cayenne,<sup>82)</sup> it could not assist Bellon.

In 1821, a literary hack, whose name has remained unknown, thought that "memoirs" of Billaud might become a best-seller. Consequently, he wrote the Mémoires de Billaud-Vareennes, Ex-Conventionnel, Ecrits au Port-au-Prince en 1818, Contenant La Relation de ses Voyages et Aventures dans le Mexique, Depuis 1805 Jusqu'en 1817; Avec des notes historiques et un précis de l'insurrection américaine depuis son origine jusqu'en 1820; Par M.\*\*\*\*\*, published in two volumes by Plancher et Domère, in 1821. The inventive author of this fantasy says that no Frenchman ever penetrated into the interior of Mexico before Billaud.<sup>83)</sup> The whole two volumes, in fact, are an adventure story of the most amazing kind, with the hero triumphing over savage tribes, wild animals, and bad climate. In the preface,

81) Archives Nationales, F76710, Plaqu. 5. Letter of November 20, 1819. The adoption order, in the same file, is of March 28, 1817.

82) Archives Nationales, F76710, Plaqu. 5. Letter probably of July 3, 1817.

83) [Anon.], Mémoires de Billaud-Vareennes ... (Paris, 1821), I, III.

"Billaud" writes that he was born in 1763, as the son of the "Gerbier de la Rochelle." He calls his own writings "écrits assez nerveux,"<sup>84)</sup> and says that Vadier, "l'homme aux soixante ans de vertus,"<sup>85)</sup> was also deported. "Billaud" furthermore claims that he escaped from Guyana on the American ship "Ruby" on 15 floréal year X (April 27, 1802), that he went first on his Mexican trip, and finally settled in the United States.<sup>86)</sup> The fact that a work of the imagination such as this one could be passed off as authentic, shows that the leaders of the Terror had been practically forgotten. Prieur de la Côte-d'Or, still alive at the time, doubted that his former colleague would have written in such a "style bas et dégoûtant,"<sup>87)</sup> but he was one of the few sceptics.

84)

Ibid., I, 2.

85)

Ibid., I, 6.

86)

Ibid., I, 9; II, 194.

87)

"Révélations Sur le Comité de Salut Public de la Convention Nationale," in Georges Bouchard, Un Organisateur de la Victoire: Prieur de la Côte-d'Or. Membre du Comité de Salut Public (Paris, 1916), p. 447.

## Chapter III

## The Voice of Posterity: A Historical Appreciation.

## 1. Seven Contemporaries.

On most of his contemporaries, Billaud made no impression at all. He was not one of the most colorful personalities of the Revolution; his forbidding nature repelled those, who wished to know him better. Friends, as well as enemies, felt no inclination to record their opinions of the man.<sup>1)</sup> After his deportation, he was practically forgotten. The seven detailed testimonies by his contemporaries are all unfavorable to Billaud in one way or another.

" Insolent et audacieux, [wrote Mallet du Pan in 1794], cruel par insensibilité, consommé dans les ruses, les complots, les forfaits révolutionnaires, il se fait remarquer par la recherche de son costume, de sa propreté et de ses goûts. C'est le petit-maitre de la sans-culotterie. Paris l'ayant formé, il y a acquis l'expérience des liaisons, de la conduite dans le gouvernement des intrigues, des opinions des bandits mercenaires, expérience qui manque aux députés provinciaux." <sup>2)</sup>

J.-J.-A. Roussel, another Royalist, only expressed an opinion shared by the majority of historians since his time:

1)

See, for instance, Jacques Necker, De la Révolution Française (Paris, an V-1797), II, 54, speaking about the former members of the Committee of Public Safety (on trial): "Laissons-les; laissons-les. L'Histoire peut-être ne les regardera pas; elle ne voudra signaler que les crime du tems, et comme elle pourra les réunir avec profusion au souvenir du chef des brigands [Robespierre], elle laissera périr tous les autre noms."

2)

Mémoires et Correspondence de Mallet Du Pan pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution Française, ed. A. Sayous (Paris, 1851), II, 43. Letter of March 8, 1794 to "Milord" (?).

" Billaud-Varennes, [he wrote], était billeux, perfide et hypocrite, caché et implacable; il méditait avec lenteur le crime et l'exécutait avec promptitude et énergie; morne, silencieux, le regard vacillant et convulsif, le teint pâle, la figure froide et l'air sinistre; on l'aurait pris pour un homme dont l'esprit était aliéné." 3)

In contrast, the opinion of Pierre Paganel should be read. It is the best analysis made of Billaud-Varennes, surprisingly close to conclusions which might be drawn from the events by a modern historian. Paganel was a deputy of the National Convention, a moderate Montagnard, who knew Billaud well. Always objective in his judgments, he recognized the aspirations of his party, even when not in sympathy with its methods. His book was first published in 1806, but banned immediately. Baudot said of the third edition (1815): "Il n'y a rien à prendre dans son livre que des erreurs." 4) Yet what Paganel had to say about Billaud seems based upon accurate observation:

" Billaud étoit doué d'un esprit étendu et d'une en forte. Sa manière de parler et d'écrire déceloit de bonnes études et beaucoup d'instruction... Il imposoit à ceux de son parti par la sévérité de sa physionomie pâle, lugubre et concentrée.... Le contraire craignoit de le voir et l'entendre. Dans les discussions graves, il prenoit une attitude hostile; son geste étoit menaçant, son regard farou et son silence inspiroit le même effroi que le roulement de la foudre au fort de la tempête..."

3) [J.A. Roussel], Histoire Secrète du Tribunal Révolutionnaire ... par M. de Proussinalle (Paris, 1815), II, 255.

4) Auguste Kuscinski, Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), p. 474.

Il seroit téméraire d'affirmer que Billaud de Varennes ait vu dans le gouvernement révolutionnaire un but auquel dussent s'arrêter les législateurs de la république; il n'est pas plus permis de croire qu'il ait considéré ce régime violent comme un passage à l'état de repos, de bonheur et de liberté après lequel nous soupirions... Il est plus probable que Billaud, engagé sur les pas des jacobins et des municipaux dans une route où tout homme marchoit moins qu'il n'étoit entraîné, cessa de se rendre compte à lui-même de ses anciennes opinions, et qu'il embrassa des opinions plus exagérées, un régime tranchant et subversif de toutes choses, parce que ce régime avoit plus de rapport avec ses inclinations et son caractère. Moteur de tant de désordres, il se retrouvait tout-à-fait avec lui-même, et pouvoit par conséquent, non-seulement prévoir un avenir plus favorable, mais encore le préparer au gré de son ambition..." 5)

After these long remarks, it is refreshing to read the impression of one Babié de Bercenay, given here in its entirety:

" Billaud-Varennes, Républicain-exalté... L'exaltation, sans doute, ne maîtrise plus son ame.. le temps et l'expérience doivent avoir désillés ses yeux..." 6)

Joseph Lavallée, in the second year of the Restoration, returned again an unfavorable judgment:

" Son [Billaud's] caractère sombre, taciturne, dissimulé [he wrote], le rendait redoutable même aux hommes de son parti; et sa figure triste, sévère et farouche, repoussant également et ceux qui le connaissaient et ceux dont il n'était pas connu. Pendant long-temps il se montra impénétrable, et comme je l'ai dit ailleurs on crut qu'il était seulement animé par

5) [Pierre Paganel], Essai historique et critique sur la Révolution française, ses causes, ses résultats... (3ème. éd., Paris, 1815), II, 394-395

6) [Babié de Bercenay?], Dictionnaire des Braves et des Non-Girouettes Nomenclature curieuse, intéressante et impartiale des Français royalistes ou patriotes, républicains ou bonapartistes, qui,.... ont montré un grand caractère, ont été fidèles à leur parti, et ont tout sacrifié pour la défense de leurs opinions et de leurs principes. Par une Société de Non-Girouettes (Paris, 1816), p. 34. The points are the author's.

l'amour du bien public, et que l'exagération de ses principes n'était qu'une erreur de son esprit... quelle forme de gouvernement désirait-il? A quel rang aspirait-il? mettrait-il un terme au régime de la terreur, ou le poursuivrait-il? voilà ce qu'on ignorait, et c'est un secret qu'il a emporté dans la tombe ..." 7)

As for Napoleon, he said to Dr. O'Meara in St. Helena:

" Robespierre, bien que ce fût un monstre altéré de sang, n'était pas si méchant que Collot-d'Herbois, Billaud-Varenes, Hébert, Fouquier-Tinville et tant d'autres." 8)

" Robespierre a été un honnête homme... Marat, Billaud de Varenes, Fouché, Hébert et plusieurs autres étaient infiniment plus féroces que lui... Billaud de Varenes est le plus exécration des hommes qui aient figurés dans la Révolution." 9)

Remarks such as these would influence a whole school of Bonapartist historians, who accepted these opinions without further examination of the facts. Finally, Hippolyte Carnot, who had heard in his youth his father and Prieur de la Côte-d'Or discuss their colleagues during the Terror, wrote

" Carnot regardait Billaud-Varenes comme une forte tête.... Mais il les avait l'un et l'autre [Billaud and Collot] en horreur; "C'étaient des hommes exécrables," disait-il .....

7) Joseph Lavallée, Histoire de l'origine, des progrès et de la décadence des Diverses Factions qui ont agité la France depuis le 14 juillet 1789 jusqu'à l'abdication de Napoléon (London, 1816), II, 192-19 Notice that the author was convinced, in 1816, that Billaud had died.

8) Docteur Barry O'Meara, Complément du Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène (Paris 1897), I, 242.

9) Ibid., II, 249-250. A similar statement by Napoleon is quoted in Charles F. Warwick, Robespierre and the French Revolution (Philadelphia 1909), p. 351.

Prieur... s'exprimait beaucoup moins sévèrement sur le compte de Billaud et de Collot: "On peut leur reprocher une grande exagération démagogique," disait-il, "mais ils ont servi la cause républicaine avec un parfait dévouement et sans aucune vue personnelle." 10)

## 2. The Nineteenth Century.

The large number of memoirs of the years 1789-1795, which were published during the nineteenth century, pointed out with few exceptions that Billaud had been responsible for the September Massacres and that he had advocated bloodshed and murder. The result was that when historians bothered about him at all, their comments were unfavorable. In the large-scale histories of the French Revolution (Thiers, Mignet, Cabet, Quinet, Blanc, Taine, etc.), he is hardly mentioned. Michelet devoted some time to Billaud's responsibility for the events of the Terror, yet his approach was as hostile as that of more conservative historians. He found that

" A cette terreur fantasque [of Collot] le Comité opposa la terreur fixe, gouvernementale et mathématique, Billaud-Varenes. Il s'adjoignit le patriote Rectiligne Billaud; c'était la ligne droite, le proscriptionneur inflexible de toutes les courbes. La courbe, c'est la ligne vivante; Billaud, sans sourcilier, eût proscrire toute vie." 11)

10)

[Hippolyte Carnot], Mémoires sur Carnot par son fils (Paris, 1861),

II, 511.

11)

Jules Michelet, Histoire de la Révolution Française (Paris, ed. of 1878), VIII, 98-99.



Certain of Michelet's colleagues emphasized all the anecdotes, rumors, and myths surrounding Billaud. The article on him in a much-respected work of reference, the Biographie Universelle Ancienne et Moderne, edited by Michaud, contained all the unproved charges.<sup>12)</sup> The editor was evidently interested in collecting evidence against Billaud; he invented incidents, which never took place. This was by no means an isolated case; practically all the well-known publications of the nineteenth century dealing with the Revolution accepted some of the legends. As a matter of fact, Billaud was interesting to the conservative historians only as a "leader" of the September Massacres or as a conspirator in Thermidor. Both these events were, for a long time, the subject of much speculative writing, particularly since nineteenth century historians used rather indiscriminately all the "memoirs" regardless of their authenticity.

There was also a group of the Left (including Gabet, Quinet, and Ernest Hamel), who felt that since Billaud had "betrayed" their idol Robespierre, he should be condemned as a "traitor" to class and country. Others believed that it was necessary to revive the ideas of the father of French Socialism. Billaud's writings, particularly Elémens du Républicanisme, appealed to these scholars. If a "legend" of Billaud was ever created (such as the "legends" of Danton or Robespierre), its author was one B. Hauréau, an extreme

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12)

[L.-G.] Michaud, ed., Biographie Universelle Ancienne et Moderne (2ème. éd., Paris, 1842-1865), IV, 327-334. The article is by Michaud junior

radical. In his collection of biographies of leaders of the Mountain, he devoted 14 pages to Billaud.<sup>13)</sup> This most laudatory appraisal of the man is, in fact, just as exaggerated as the defamations of the Right. In most sentimental prose, he is compared to the heroes of Antiquity. Yet, even the most ardent radical of today must admit that Plato's writings are of a higher quality than Billaud's. It must be added that this effusion remained unique. But in the 1830s, the Saint-Simonians tried to reawaken interest in the "forgotten" men of the Revolution. Their periodical, "La Nouvelle Minerve", featured two articles: one by a man (who remained anonymous), who visited Billaud in Port-au-Prince during the last year of his life,<sup>14)</sup> and another by General Bertrand, his neighbor and friend in Guyana.<sup>15)</sup> Unquestionably, they provided authentic pictures of the man Billaud, but they do not permit to draw conclusions of any kind.<sup>16)</sup>

After these efforts at the time of the July Monarchy, little was written about Billaud until the 1880s. The leading historians of the Second Empire, such as Mortimer-Ternaux, Ernest Hamel, and Henri Wallon, were only interested in him as an example

13)

B. Hauréau, La Montagne. Notices historiques et philosophiques sur les principaux membres de la Montagne (Paris, 1834), pp. 49-63.

14)

[Anon.], "Les Dernières Années de Billaud-Varenes," La Nouvelle Minerve, I (1835), 351-359.

15)

Général Bertrand, "Billaud-Varenes à Cayenne," ibid., II (1836), 288-294.

16)

[Anon.], loc. cit., I, 355-356.

of radical aberration. Slowly, "objective" historians began to emerge, but they were not yet prominent. H. Morse Stephens, in the late 1880s, attempted to give an impartial characterization of Billaud in his unfinished History of the French Revolution.<sup>17)</sup> But since he lacked access to the documents in Paris, he was only partly successful in his task.

Alphonse Aulard was really the pioneer in research on Billaud. He once mentioned that it would be useful to write Billaud's biography.<sup>18)</sup> It is almost possible to write an account of Billaud's political career on the basis of the documents which were published under Aulard's supervision during his long career. This is true despite the poor editorial work (the omissions of signatures to documents, lack of indices, etc.). More important yet are the appraisals in L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française<sup>19)</sup> and in the introduction to the "memoirs" of Billaud's early years.<sup>20)</sup> Aulard certainly had no sympathy for "Danton's killer," and his analysis is hostile in all respects. But he did not repeat unconfirmed rumors; in fact,

17)

H. Morse Stephens, A History of the French Revolution (New York, 1886-1891), II, 306-307.

18)

Alphonse Aulard, ed., "Mémoires de Billaud-Vareannes," La Révolution Française, XIV (1888), 745.

19)

Alphonse Aulard, L'Eloquence Parlementaire pendant la Révolution Française: Les Orateurs de la Législative et de la Convention (Paris, 1885-1886), II, 477-501.

20)

A. Aulard, ed., loc. cit., XIV, 745-752.

he denied vigorously that Billaud addressed the massacreurs of  
 21) September 1792 in person.

One more nineteenth century author should be considered. Alfred Bégis, a conservative, published a volume of Billaud's writings in 1893. 22) In an attempt to be objective ( he obviously disliked Billaud), Bégis concentrated on Billaud's early and last years. The result is an unclear picture of two rather unimportant periods in his life. For some reason, the book was widely acclaimed in its time. But it certainly contributes nothing at all to a scholarly evaluation of its subject.

### 3. From Jaurès to Our Time.

Jean Jaurès' Histoire Socialiste was published in 1900. The great socialist leader, in the Leftist tradition, emphasized Billaud's philosophy, rather than his political career. Jaurès made no effort to correct former misinterpretations, although he was scrupulous enough to mention only established facts. On the other hand, he analyzed the Eléments du Republicanisme in great

21) Alphonse Aulard, Histoire politique de la Révolution Française. Origines et Développement de la Démocratie et de la République (1789-1804) (5ème. éd., Paris, 1913), p. 254.

22) Alfred Bégis, ed., Curiosités Révolutionnaires: Billaud-Varennes. Membre du Comité de Salut Public. Mémoires Inédits et Correspondance (Paris, 1893).

23) detail. Billaud had not been praised so highly since Hauréau's efforts seventy years earlier. Jaurès wrote that "son système ... est le plus suprême effort du socialisme avant qu'il se transforme en communisme;"<sup>24)</sup> and also "que la pensée de Billaud-Varenes

dépasse sensiblement le niveau de la pensée révolutionnaire en 1793."<sup>25)</sup> These two short sentences also point to the noncommittal character of contemporary historiography. The scholar knows exactly how Jaurès felt about Billaud, but the above quotations may be interpreted in a variety of ways. To a "neutral" observer, they hardly indicate approval of Billaud's theories. In fact, if Jaurès' interpretation is accepted, it becomes evident that the "suprême effort" was not so great, lasting merely until 1797, when Gracchus Babeuf's "communist" program was put forth. From Jaurès' time on, the Left Historians have, in general, taken the following position: Babeuf was the first "Socialist" theoretician; those before him may have expressed liberal ideas, but they were still tied too strongly to concepts of eighteenth century

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23) Jean Jaurès, Histoire Socialiste (1789-1900): IV. La Convention. II<sup>ème</sup> partie (Paris, [1900]), pp. 1502-1511. This is the first edition of the work, not the revised one by Albert Mathiez, published in the 1920s.

24) Ibid., p. 1510.

25) Ibid., p. 1511.

26) rationalism. One of the most recent Leftist studies of the regime of the Terror is as hostile to Billaud as a reactionary polemic of the early nineteenth century. 27) To Daniel Guérin, he was but another bourgeois who, at critical moments, betrayed the working class.

The work of Albert Mathiez stands apart from these trends. He was not greatly interested in the theories of the Revolution, nor even Socialism as such, but only in personalities. While not dealing specifically with Billaud, the latter is mentioned in many of Mathiez' writings, either as the enemy of Danton or the opponent of Robespierre. The historian must be grateful to Mathiez for bringing to light numerous details of Billaud's life. It appears (but is by no means stated clearly or emphasized), that Mathiez considered Billaud chiefly responsible for Robespierre's downfall and the reaction, which was the result of Thermidor. Mathiez disciples have stressed this point even more; sometimes, 28) they have emphasized it disproportionately. It seems that Mathiez was less objective in his writings than Aulard, and that he never attempted to give an "impartial" characterization of Billaud. Despite the little-known facts he brought to light,

26)

For instance, Maxime Leroy, Histoire des idées sociales en France. I. De Montesquieu à Robespierre (5ème.éd., Paris, 1946), pp. 54, 327, 366. That author's opinion is that Billaud was but an imitator of Rousseau, without original ideas.

27)

Daniel Guérin, La Lutte des Classes sous la Première République. Bourgeois et "bras nus" (1793-1797) (2 vs., 3ème.éd., Paris, 1946).

28)

Notably Arne Ordning, Le Bureau de Police du Comité de Salut Public (Oslo, 1930); Lina Uhlbaum, Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Sturzes Robespierres (Hamburg, 1933); Wilfrid B. Kerr, The Reign of Terror, 1793-4. The Experiment of the Democratic Republic and the Rise of the Bourgeoisie (Toronto, 1927).

he actually deterred many historians (who had been his students) from engaging in a sound evaluation of Billaud.

The early years of our century saw, nevertheless, the publication of several of Billaud's writings. The rather "unknown" editors of the Archives Parlementaires, L. Lataste, Constant Pionnier, Louis Claveau, and André Ducom, published the speech on the judgment of Louis XVI in 1900,<sup>29)</sup> and Elémens du Républicanisme five years later.<sup>30)</sup> It should be added that these "reprints" were sponsored by the French Government, like certain of Aulard's collections. Since neither of those in the Archives Parlementaires has an introduction, nor critical annotations, the contribution of the editors remains unclear (they were attacked by Aulard and his followers for their selections).

The contributions of Charles Vellay should also be mentioned. He edited his own periodical, the Revue Historique de la Révolution Française, between 1910 and 1919. His interest in Billaud arose when he purchased the correspondence between the exile and his friend Siegert. He published the most important of the letters, which deal largely with life in Guyana, as well as (first in his periodical and later as a separate pamphlet)<sup>31)</sup> Billaud's first defense pamphlet.

29) Archives Parlementaires de 1787 - à 1870, 1ère. Série, LVII, 128-131.

30) Ibid., LVII, 220-246.

31) Charles Vellay, ed., "Mémoire Inédit de Billaud-Varenne sur les Evénements du 9 Thermidor," Revue Historique de la Révolution Française I (1910), 7-94, 161-175, 321-336. Printed separately in the same year.

Since the first decade of this century, a lag has set in. No recent study of Billaud has been made, no attempt to publish his other works. Pierre Caron cleared his record, as far as the September Massacres are concerned.<sup>32)</sup> The present-day tendency is not to judge him at all, but to present only the facts which have actually been established.<sup>33)</sup> This objective evaluation has been particularly well accomplished by André Martin in his article in the Dictionnaire de Biographie Française.<sup>34)</sup> It is a model of impartial, yet sound historical writing, although it must also be said that this approach is conducive neither to original research nor to stimulating writing. It remains for the historian to combine this tendency with further study of the Archives. Since it is unlikely that new documentary material will be discovered, the incentive to study Billaud's life is not very great.

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32) Pierre Caron, Les Massacres de Septembre (Paris, 1935), pp. 315-316.

33) The first to use this approach was probably Auguste Kuscinski, in his Dictionnaire des Conventionnels (Paris, 1916), pp. 56-58. Unlike in his treatment of other revolutionary leaders, the author remained strictly neutral in his analysis of Billaud's life. Nobody would ever recognize from this article that Kuscinski was one of the most ardent disciples of Mathiez.

34) M. Prévost et Roman d'Amat, eds., Dictionnaire de Biographie Française (Paris, 1929- ), VI, 464-465. Article "Billaud-Varennes" by André Martin, in fasc. XXXII (1952). In English, R. R. Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled. The Committee of Public Safety during the Terror (Princeton, 1941), is similarly unbiased.



#### 4. Conclusions.

Billaud's personality can be analyzed without great difficulty. If this is done, it becomes evident that historical circumstances formed his character and that his rise and fall are typical of larger trends and patterns, to which he conformed. He might have possessed exceptional talents, but he used them only on rare occasions. The story of his political career is one of gradual development. He started at the bottom, and remained an obedient servant of a political "machine" for a long time. With few exceptions, his writings and speeches are unremarkable, of interest only insofar as they affected other persons and events. On the other hand, the "original" writer Billaud, the author of L'Acéphocratie and Elémens du Republicanisme, was far ahead of his times. These two books permit him to occupy a prominent place among the French political theorists of the second half of the eighteenth century.

His ideas were novel indeed, but in the last analysis only abstract philosophical concepts which could not be put to the test at any time. But as a predecessor (by some thirty years) of the Utopian Socialists, Billaud assumes some importance as a philosopher.

In other respects, he was a product of his time. The student of his personality realizes that his was a strong mind, which became increasingly inflexible. As a liberal Royalist,

a moderate Republican, and, finally, a fairly extreme radical, he followed always the same ideals. Billaud never deviated from his belief in "virtue" and "perfection", as these terms were understood by Rousseau and other eighteenth century philosophers. It was possible for him to advocate the establishment of a "perfect" society, since the turmoils of the French Revolution invited political experimentation. For over thirty years, he had been indifferent to politics; then, he made a career of it. After slow initial progress and several periods of uncertainty and mental confusion, he accepted co-responsibility for directing the government of his country during a critical period. He came to believe that the "Republic of Virtue", of which Rousseau had spoken, might be established in a not too remote future, if only peace could be made and the undesirable elements of society eliminated. If people were not prisoners of their private emotions, but would all work for the common good, it would be easy to accomplish this social and political transformation.

This belief was the chief incentive for Billaud's activities. He had a sense of patriotism of the most exalted kind. He sacrificed all normal social relationships and rejected wealth and public acclaim in the service of the state. In fact, he avoided all personal publicity, never seeking to advertise his own accomplishments. He did not believe in the people, but claimed to be their champion. Obsessed with the idea of complete transformation of the political and social structure, a true fanatic

who was blind to the consequences of his actions, he had only the stimulus of a higher sense of mission. When the system, which he and his friends had established, collapsed (due to the differences and limitations of human nature), he was also ruined, since he could conceive of none other. Billaud was indeed the kind of person who plays a leading part in the establishment of totalitarian governments. He was invaluable as long as the revolutionary movement was in its infancy. A prominent theorist, he was needed in the formulation of a party program; an able speaker and organizer, he was valuable in influencing public opinion. He also had one brief moment of glory, when his faction took over the administration of the state. But when the first period of revolutionary fervor was over, when stabilization became more important than destruction, he had outlived his usefulness and was removed from his position of leadership. His career followed a pattern which has been repeated in all modern revolutions. It would be no more than an interesting diversion and serve no definite purpose to draw comparisons between his rise and fall and that of certain personalities, who played a similar part during the early stages of the great revolution of this century. The fact that history repeats itself, is, after all, neither a discovery of striking originality, nor does it mean much in the specific case of one particular individual.

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Bibliography.

This Bibliography is divided into the following sections:

- I. Bibliographies and Manuals.
- II. Contemporary Documents.
  - A. Manuscripts.
  - B. Printed Collections.
- III. Writings by Billaud-Varennes.
  - A. Books.
  - B. Pamphlets.
  - C. Speeches.
  - D. Correspondence.
  - E. Miscellaneous.
- IV. Writings of the Contemporaries.
  - A. Speeches and Reports.
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  - C. Books and Articles.
    - 1. General Subjects.
    - 2. Memoirs.
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      - b. Individual.
  - D. Newspapers of the Revolution.
  - E. Thermidorian Pamphlets.
- V. Studies on the French Revolution.
  - A. Books.
    - 1. General Subjects.
    - 2. Biography.

## B. Articles.

1. General Subjects.
2. Biography.
3. Periodicals Dealing Exclusively with the French Revolution.

Some 480-odd titles are listed. Over twice as many books, articles, pamphlets, newspapers, and other writings were consulted in the preparation of this thesis. But lack of space prevented their inclusion. Consequently, only titles mentioned in the text have been listed here, except for the works in the first section ("Bibliographies and Manuals"). Some "classics" of the historiography of the French Revolution (such as Hippolyte Taine's Origines de la France Contemporaine), and many excellent and valuable monographs will not be found in this bibliography, as a result of this process of selection. It only means that such works contain neither specific references to Billaud nor original or controversial interpretations of his activities.

In the case of documents, the names of editors are listed in the most commonly encountered form (for instance, Collection Générale des Décrets. ed. Baudoin; but Alphonse Aulard, ed. Société des Jacobins). But as far as other contemporary writings are concerned, the name listed first is that of the author; the editor's follows the title. Exception is made for the collections of memoirs, which are all of a later date. All sections but that listing Billaud's own writings are arranged

alphabetically. Logic demands that the chronological order should rather be followed in that instance. Several newspapers (such as the Journal des Débats et des Décrets), which featured only documentary materials, are listed among the collections of documents, and not among the newspapers of "opinion". In all these matters, logic and convenience alone decided the procedure.

Only full and complete reprints (of speeches, memoirs, articles, etc.) are mentioned. All efforts have been made to give complete information about each work; particularly, none have been spared to list first names of authors and editors (one of the characteristics of French scholarship being the extensive use of initials, or their omission altogether) and full titles (unless these are exceptionally long). Bibliographical information is contained in the parentheses following the date of publication. If the work was a thesis (and if it says so on the title-page), that fact is indicated. Collections are only mentioned when the volume listed forms part of a series which is an entity in itself (thus Collection "Clio", or Collection "Peuples et Civilisations"; but not the numerous volumes published by Payot as "Bibliothèque Historique"). If the sponsor of a work was or is an agency of the (state or local) government, or a learned society, or an academy, or a university, it is listed. The following abbreviations have been used for certain collections:

1. Ministère de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts

for

"Collection de Documents Inédits sur l'Histoire de France, 4ème. série: Documents sur la période révolutionnaire".

56 vs. 1889-1933.

2. Ville de Paris

for

"Collection de Documents Relatifs à l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française et l'Époque Contemporaine publiée sous le Patronage du Conseil Municipal". 45 vs.

1889-1914.

3. (Coll. "Mémoires").

for

"Collection des Mémoires Relatifs à la Révolution Française." eds. Berville et Barrière. 60 vs. Paris,

1820-1828.

4. (Coll. "Barrière").

for

"Bibliothèque des Mémoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de France pendant le XVIIIème. Siècle, avec avant-propos et notices par M. François Barrière". 37 vs. (the last 12

"Nouvelle série" ed. de Lescure). Paris, 1846-1880.

I. Bibliographies and Manuals.

Caron, Pierre. Manuel Pratique pour l'Etude de la Révolution Française. 2ème.éd. Paris, 1947.

Catalogue Général des Imprimés de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Auteurs. 178 vs. (Series not completed). Paris, 1897 - (1950) (Bibliothèque Nationale).

Catalogue Général des Manuscrits des Bibliothèques Publiques de France, Départements. 48 vs. Paris, 1888-1933 (Ministère de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts).

Martin, André, et Walter, Gérard, eds. Catalogue de l'Histoire de la Révolution Française: I. Ecrits de la Période Révolutionnaire. 5 vs. Paris, 1936-1943 (Bibliothèque Nationale).

Tourneux, Maurice, ed. Bibliographie de l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française. 5 vs. Paris, 1890-1913 (Ville de Paris).

Tuetey, Alexandre, ed. Répertoire Général des Sources Manuscrites de l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française. 11 vs. Paris, 1890-1914 (Ville de Paris).

Villat, Louis. La Révolution et l'Empire (1789-1815): I. Les Assemblées Révolutionnaires (1789-1799). 3ème. éd. Paris, 1946 (Coll. "Clio", Introduction aux Etudes Historiques", no.8).



Walter, Gérard, ed., Répertoire de l'Histoire de la Révolution Française: Travaux Publiés de 1800 à 1900:  
I. Personnes. II. Lieux. 2 vs. (Series not completed). Paris, 1941-(1951). (Bibliothèque Nationale).

II. Contemporary Documents.

A. Manuscripts.

Archives Nationales. BB2 18. Information regarding Citizen

Laribeau, Billaud's secretary during his mission to Châlons-sur-Marne.

C II 60. Cart. 180. Election returns to the National Convention.

C II 430-31. Cart. 251. Letters of Billaud and Sevestre from mission to Côtes-du-Nord and Ille-et-Vilaine.

DXL 17. Correspondence from Châlons-sur-Marne.

F 7 6710 Plaqu. 5. The matter of adoption of Billaud's niece by Gabriel Belion (in 1817).

Also Billaud's police file.

F 7 4599, 4600 (Papiers saisis chez Billaud - Varennes). The big files. Contain the early "memoirs", the correspondence with his family, and the manuscripts of most of his speeches at the Jacobin Club.

## B. Printed Collections.

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into Annales Historiques de la Révolution  
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Portrait of Billaud-Varennés

by

F. Bonneville

from François Bonneville. Portraits de Personnages  
célèbres de la Révolution (4 vols., Paris, 1796-1802),

volume I.

This is the only authentic portrait of Billaud-Varennés.



*L. Bonnaud del et sculp*

BILLAUD VARENNES

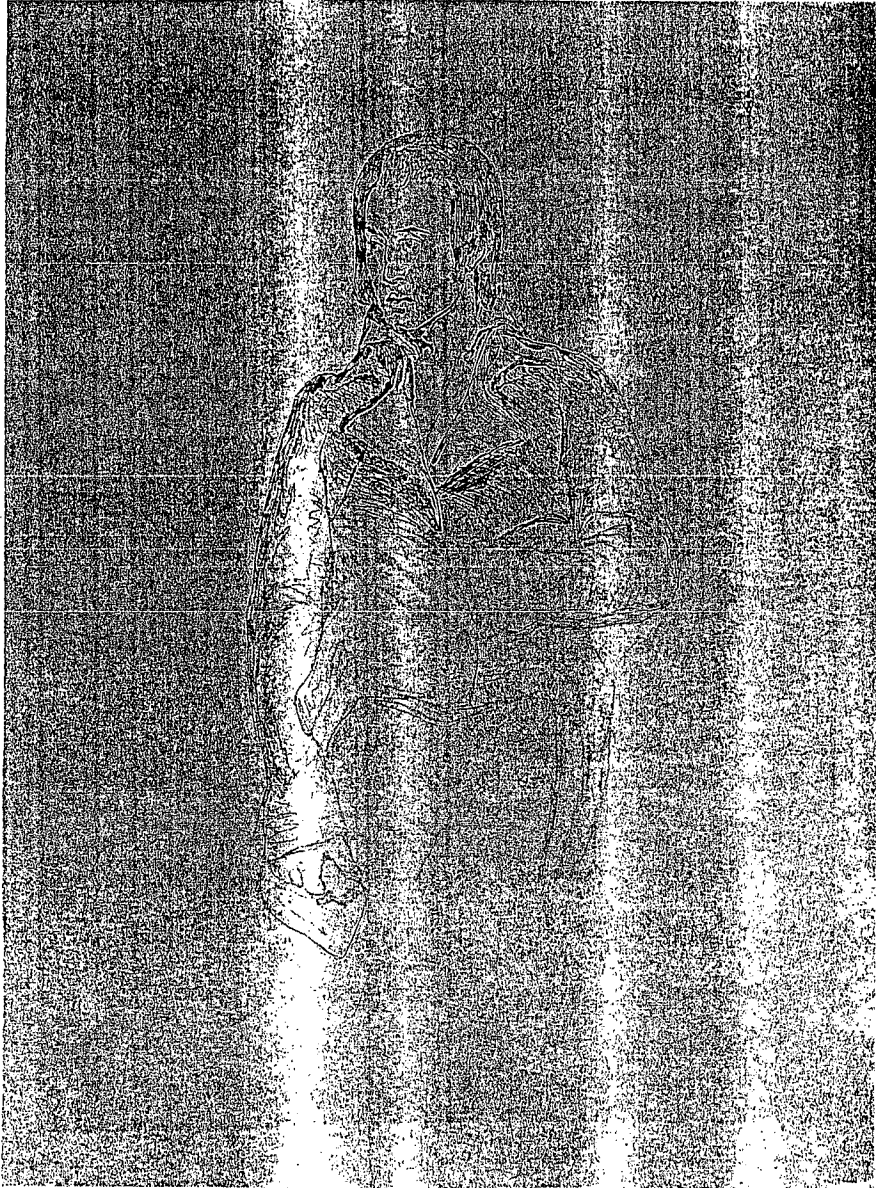
*Deputé pour le Dept<sup>s</sup> de Paris à la Conv.<sup>on</sup> Nat.<sup>le</sup>  
Condamné à la deportation l'art 4 de la Const.*

Portrait of Billaud-Varennés

by

Jeanron

Source: B. Hauréau. La Montagne. Notices historiques et philosophiques sur les principaux membres de la Montagne (Paris, 1834), opp.p.49.



Billaud-Varennés' certificate of baptism.

(La Rochelle, Archives de la Ville, Mss.355-358).

Transcript:

" L'an de grace mil sept cens cinquante six le vint  
troisième d'Avril a été Baptisé Jacques Nicolas, né  
le même jour du Mariage legitime entre Mtre Nicolas  
Simon Marie Billaud Avocat au présidial et De.  
henriette Susanne Marchand: son parrain Mo Maître  
Jacques Rougier, Escuyer[?], ancien Assesseur du  
presidial, Seigneur Des Tourettes et cousin de  
l'enfant, sa Mareine De. Jeanne Tessier, ve. de Mtre.  
Simon Billaud, Avocat au parlement et au presidial  
de cette ville, -Ayeuls de l'enfant, et ont signé avec  
le père:

Billaud at.            Rougier            Roscine[?]Billaud  
A. Espina [one word illegible] de l'orat    Curé de St.  
Barthélémi    "

Charles Gaboret, scribe, et ont signé avec les pères:

La Mairie a déclaré nulle l'union: *Nipercall*

La demoiselle mariée jeune masson gaboret  
A Espinay près de L. oras. Curé de St. Barthélemy.

B.  
Jacques Nicolas  
Billaud

L'union grave mil sept cent cinquante six le vingt  
troisième d'Avril a été baptisée Jacques Nicolas,  
né le même jour du mariage légitime entre M. Nicolas  
Nicolas, surnom Marie Billaud Avocat au présidial  
et de Henriette Susanne Marchand: son beau-père  
M. Meistre Jacques Rougier, Conseiller, ancien  
Maire de la ville, surnom de St. devettes de  
cours de L. enfants, la Mairie de L. surnom  
Felicite de M. Simon Billaud, Avocat  
au parlement et au présidial de cette ville,  
surnom de L. enfants, et ont signé avec les pères:  
Billaud: Rougier, Meistre Billaud

A Espinay près de L. oras Curé de St. Barthélemy

Despotisme des Ministres de France

by

Billaud-Varennés  
(1789)

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Title Page

# DESPOTISME

DES MINISTRES

## DE FRANCE.

*Combattu par les Droits de la Nation, par les Loix Fondamentales, par les Ordonnances, par les Jurisconsultes, par les Orateurs, par les Historiens, par les Publicistes, par les Poètes; enfin par les Intérêts du Peuple & l'Avantage Personnel du Monarque.*

---

Rabaissez donc ces hommes dont tout le talent ne consiste qu'à plaire, qu'à flatter, qu'à éblouir, qu'à s'influier pour faire fortune.

M. DE FÉNELON, *Directions.*

---

TOME TROISIEME.



A AMSTERDAM.

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MDCCLXXXIX.



Les Crimes de Sept Membres des Anciens  
Comités de Salut Public et de Sûreté Générale

by

Laurent Lecointre  
(1794)

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Title Page

Notice Lecointre's signature at the bottom,  
in order to forestall misuse of his name in connection  
with the book.

**LES CRIMES**  
DE SEPT MEMBRÉS  
DES ANCIENS COMITÉS  
DE SALUT PUBLIC  
ET  
DE SURETÉ GÉNÉRALE,  
OU DÉNONCIATION FORMELLE  
A LA CONVENTION NATIONALE;

CONTRE

BILLAUD - VARENNES, BARERE, COLLOT - D'HERBOIS,  
VADIER, VOULAND, AMAR ET DAVID,

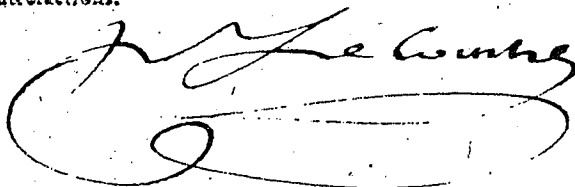
Suivie de pièces justificatives, indication d'autres pièces originales  
existantes dans les Comités, preuves et témoins indiqués à l'appui  
des faits;

PAR LAURENT LECOINTRE, Député du département  
de Seine et Oise.

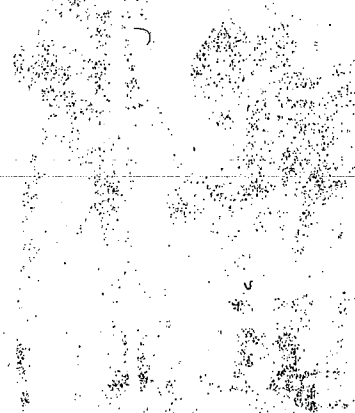
PRIX : trois livres pour le Public.

Se trouve chez MARET, Libraire, Cour des Fontaines,  
Maison Egalité, et chez les Marchands de nouveautés.

Je signe chaque imprimé, parce que s'agissant d'une dénonciation  
grave et importante, je dois me mettre en garde contre toutes  
contrefaçons.



Contemporary caricature on  
Billaud-Varennés' deportation



The Jacobin in the picture weighs the evidence against Billaud, while a ship in the background takes him to Guyana. In the artist's opinion, the punishment (left side of scales) was much too light for his crimes (right side of scales).



**QUELLE PROPORTION**

*Estampe de l'époque de la réaction thermidorienne.*

*Allégorie à la déportation de BILLAUD-VARENNE.*

(Collection de M. le baron de Vinck.)