French law students in the Great War

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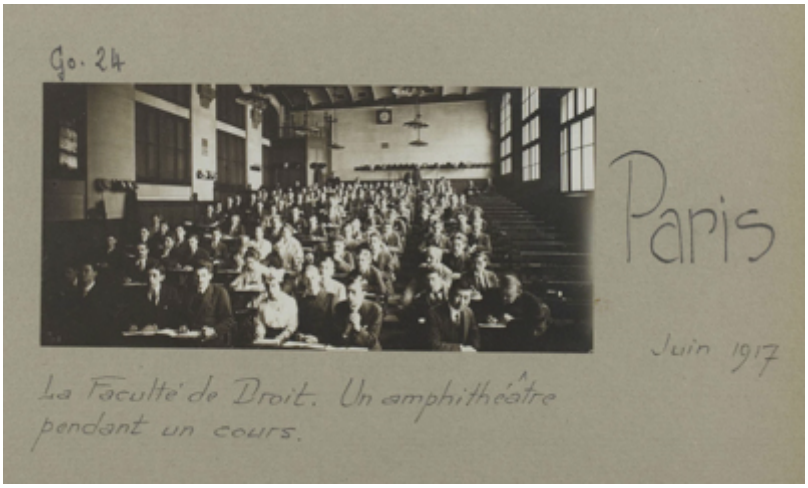

In the 19th century, law students at the Faculty of Paris belonged to the middle or upper classes and, unsurprisingly, a fifth had a father practicing a legal profession (judge, lawyer, notary, etc.); 40% were sons of landowners or annuitants, 13% sons of traders, merchants or manufacturers, 11% sons of civil servants, 4% sons of doctors or pharmacists, and 3.5% sons of teachers. More than their fellow students enrolled in medicine, literature or science, these students are from Paris and the Seine department (22%), and not from a provincial city, which is an indication of material ease. Finally, while at the end of the century, 80% of medical students lived on the left bank and 19.4% on the right bank of the Seine, one third of law students lived on the right bank and two thirds on the left bank, which was less upscale, but where the faculties were located, which was partly explained by the fact that many lived with their parents.

When the general mobilization order was issued on August 1st, 1914, law students, especially those in Paris, were not unhappy: in previous years, under the influence of nationalists, the law faculties had gathered numerous petitions in favor of the law of August 7, 1913 establishing three years of legally mandated military service. Militaristic

sentiments were widespread among many law students.

More than the professors, the students were mobilized in the war, and most of them were incorporated into the fighting units. As young unmarried members of the mobilizable classes, they had no way out, especially since the young classes were all incorporated in advance, including that of 1914 in late August-early September 1914 and that of 1915 in December 1914. Deferred conscripts lost the benefit of their deferment. Those who are already serving in the army were sent directly from the barracks to the front. The mobilized students moved to the front after a quick training in combat. A number of them had undergone military preparation and quickly become officer cadets or deputy lieutenants.

Voided faculties

Starting in the first months of the war, the number of students in French law faculties fell sharply. For example, on November 7, 1914, the council of the Paris Faculty of Law noted that the number of registrations on that date (516) represented ” à peine le cinquième de celles de l’année précédente [barely one fifth of those of the previous year]”. In 1913-1914, the total number of students in France was 42,037, including 16,465 law students (39%). There were only 11,231 in 1915-16, including 3,213 law students (28.6%). After the sharp decline of 1914-1915, student numbers gradually recovered: compared to 1913, the decrease was 73% in 1915 and “only” 66% in 1917. This increase was due to the fact that the number of students who could be mobilized decreased from year to year, and that students released from their military obligations returned to their universities. In addition, the number of female and, to a lesser extent, foreign students did not decrease as much. Compared with 1914, the proportion of women was reduced by only 37.9% in 1915 and by 9.85% in 1917. Here, as elsewhere, the female students were the winners of the war.

The Paris Faculty of Law brought together a large proportion (47%) of pre-war law students. Compared to 1914, its numbers fell significantly, by 85% in 1915 and by another 75% in 1917. Between 1914 and 1920, female Parisian law students (more than 60% of female students in France) increased their number by close to 3,5.

Killed in action

Of the nearly 1.4 million soldiers who died at the front, students represented only a handful of those who disappeared. And yet, they are among the most blighted military classes, including, according to data published after the war, the classes 1912 to 1915, which lost from 27% to 29% of their number, 29.2% for the class 1914. As it was written in 1915 in the *Revue universitaire*, higher education was the most affected, as ” ses élèves sont, pour la plupart, en âge de porter les armes [its students were, for the most part, of an age to bear weapons.]” The Great War decimated the number of students in faculties and grandes écoles. In January 1915, following the example of many institutions and organizations, the Faculty of Law of Paris created a “Livre d’or” to its dead, wounded and disappeared, followed in October by the Faculty of Medicine and in January 1916 by the Faculty of Humanities and the École supérieure of pharmacology. The Livre d’or of the Parisian faculty published in 1925 counts 700 dead and 1,500 wounded among bachelor, doctorate or former students. The Livre d’or of the Faculty of Law of Poitiers gives the number of 114 dead: the number of students amounted to 560 in 1913.

The rearguard: universities in the Great War

The professors and students of the Paris Faculty of Law reacted to the German declaration of war. At the beginning of the 1914 academic year, Dean Larnaude declared: ” Responsables de cette guerre et des abominations qu’y commet le nouveau “fléau de Dieu”, les Universités allemandes le sont, car c’est leur enseignement même qui a empoisonné l’esprit public allemand, détraqué les cerveaux allemands et déchaîné, par la mégalomanie qu’il a engendrée, les convoitises les plus odieuses ! [Responsible for this war and for the abominations committed there by the new ‘scourge of God’ are the German Universities. It is their very teaching that has poisoned the German public mind, disrupted the German brains and unleashed, through the megalomania it has engendered, the most odious greed!]” In a letter to the dean of the Faculty of Law, first-year students said they appreciated the fact that legal studies allowed them ” de mieux comprendre les infamies dont [les ennemis] se sont rendus coupables [to better understand the infamies of which [the enemies] were guilty.]” Law students protested in the press against the denial of law by the Germans under the title “Les étudiants en droit de la Revanche [The law students of the Revenge]”.

The faculties, reduced in their student and faculty numbers, were forced to modify the study regime. From the outset, it was specified that students would be able to resume their education after the end of the hostilities. For the baccalauréat of 1915, a session was exceptionally opened for young people of the 1916 class who would be drafted before the end of the school year. Some called for adjustments, including a reduction in the delay preceding examinations and the organization of special sessions in March 1915 for conscripts in the 1916 class. Since not all courses could be provided, only those of immediate interest would be retained and some would be delayed. Non-essential courses, including optional courses, were canceled.

Female students in the war

In 1916, during a lecture given at the Musée social on “the war and French universities”, vice-rector Louis Liard declared: ” Une partie du vide ouvert par la mort est en train d’être comblée par les femmes [Part of the void opened by death is being filled by women]”. Noting their ” attitude admirable dans la guerre [admirable attitude in the war,]” he added: “« Il n’est pas étonnant que les femmes, celles du moins qui avant la guerre étaient en marche pour conquérir certaines professions jusque-là réservées aux hommes, soient convaincues que maintenant leur ère est arrivée. [It is not surprising that women, at least those who before the war were on the march to conquer certain professions hitherto reserved for men, are convinced that now their era has arrived.]”

Female law students, admittedly few compared to medical and especially in humanities and science students, found it difficult to find a wartime occupation related to their studies, but could volunteer in military hospitals or with female doctors.

Aid to combatants

The faculties set up a university relief service for combatants, which continues the work of the national relief service set up by the State. To feed it, the staff of the Parisian faculties accepted the principle of paying one day’s salary each month from 30 November 1914; half of the sum would be allocated to the National Relief Service, the other to the University Relief Service. Some fighters were prisoners. In June 1915, the dean of the Faculty of Law stated that he had received a letter from students held in the Zossen camp asking him what was being done to help the families of the mobilized, as well as law books so they could study. The dean went directly to publishers for this

service. At his meeting of October 25, 1915, the rector informed the council of the University of Paris of the creation of a charity in favor of professors and student held prisoner in Lausanne, Switzerland, the Swiss Academic Society of Student Prisoners, which claimed to care for 330 prisoners, including some Belgians and Russians. It provides them with books, food and clothing. It had had special correspondents, particularly in France since 1915. The board of the University of Paris delegated to Dean Larnaude of the Faculty of Law the task of organizing the Academic Charity of Students War Prisoners of Paris, which launched a subscription for the sending of books or funds to the committee of Lausanne. This charity was able to reach 228 prison camps. Other charities shared this goal, such as the Franklin Society in Paris and the Victor Committee in Lyon.

Tribute to the Dead and Allies

From the beginning of the war, the faculties made the choice to honor their dead. On July 8, 1915, the Faculty of Law presented the palm offered by the students in memory of their classmates who had died in battle. Student Peretti and Dean Larnaude delivered a speech transcribed in the report of the Faculty Assembly of July 16, 1915. Shortly after the signing of the Armistice in November 1918, the dean of the Paris Faculty of Law delivered a speech in which he declared that 430 law students had died for the motherland, and thanked the students of the allied countries, the Americans, English, Belgians, Italians, Greeks, Portuguese, Romanians and Serbians. Addresses were sent by the faculty of Paris to the faculties of law of the allied countries, as well as to that of Lille. At the meeting of the Faculty of Law on June 4, 1919, the attendees stood listening to the list of the graduates of the faculty who had died in battle. In December 1919, the board of the university decided to organize in Notre-Dame, at the temples of Pentemont and Victoire funeral services in memory of the members of the university and the students who had fallen on the field of honor. Such ceremonies were held in all university cities.

Student associations in the war

The mobilized received the support of their organizations from the rear, including Catholic or Protestant associations, with which ex-members could correspond. The news exchanged between the classmates at the front and the members of the

associations who remained at the rear maintained morale. Sometimes it was the teachers who wrote to their students, but it was especially in the grandes écoles that the bond between students remains the strongest: the classes and the promotions established solid frameworks that withstood the test of the Great War. This was much more delicate with regard to university students, where structures were less important. To the extent that they were still alive, student associations organized charity work in favor of their classmates on the frontline. Religious ceremonies were organized by student associations in university towns. In February 1917, services were organized in Paris, at the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, at the church of Saint-Jean and at the synagogue of the rue de la Victoire at the initiative of the Association générale des étudiants de Paris, the Cercle du Luxembourg, the Association des étudiants de l'Institut catholique, the Association amicale des étudiants en pharmacie, the Fédération française des étudiants catholiques, the Association des étudiants protestants de Paris and a committee of "Israelite" students. After the war, a ceremony to pay tribute to law students who died for France with the unveiling of the plaque of the 700 dead took place on Sunday, March 15, 1925.

The demobilization

Once peace was restored, the resumption of studies for French and foreign students was not immediate. Many remained in the armed forces and, for foreigners hailing from the countries involved in the conflict, transport and communications were not immediately restored. In addition, families were still experiencing budgetary restrictions. At the beginning of the academic year in November 1918, few students found themselves on the benches of the faculties, but veterans and young people who had not fought the war. The report of the vice-rector of the University of Paris on the budget plan for 1919 states that " la démobilisation des étudiants ne paraît pas, d'après les dernières décisions du Parlement, devoir précéder celle des autres incorporés appartenant aux mêmes classes et comme il s'agit des plus jeunes, on ne peut attendre leur retour et la reprise complète des études pour la présente année scolaire [the demobilization of students does not seem, according to the latest decisions of Parliament, to have to precede that of the other recruits belonging to the same classes. As they are the youngest, we cannot wait for their return and the complete resumption of studies for the current academic year.]" Soldiers were returned to their homes by age group. Student soldiers therefore had to wait until their elders had returned home before

being demobilized. Fathers and married men had precedence, which was not the case of many students. Efforts were being made not to demobilize too quickly, and demobilization was a lengthy process. On the understanding that the age of the “class” was the year of their 20th birthday, classes 1887 to 1891, 1891-1906, and 1907-1918 were demobilized in that order. The demobilized receive a salary of 250 francs with an increase of 20 francs for each entire period of six months spent in the armed forces.

This long process angered some of the students. In 1919, a journalist wrote of how ” Les étudiants se plaignent que, malgré les démarches réitérées de leurs représentants, l’Université tardivement s’intéresse à leur sort. Celle-ci les a même abandonnés, nous déclarent-ils, pendant longtemps, à l’autorité militaire. [students complain that, despite the repeated efforts of their representatives, the university was late in taking an interest in their fate. Some of them even claim that the institution has, for a long time, abandoned them in favor of the military system.]” The mobilized students had suffered a long interruption of their education, from four and a half to six years depending on the class they belonged to. Some exceptional measures were taken, admittedly, in favor of medical students, students of grandes écoles and candidates for aggregation.
” Pour les autres, rien, presque rien n’a été tenté. [For the others, nothing, almost nothing has been attempted.]” Over than 40,000 students “wondered” when they could expect to be demobilized or posted close to their faculty. The Paris Students’ Association, becoming a real “students’ union”, was concerned about this situation and a possible strike was mentioned at its last general assembly: the demand was that those students were remembered and assisted. ” Que les étudiants français soient les “étudiants de la victoire” et non les parias de la défaite ! [Let French students be the ‘students of victory’ and not the outcasts of defeat!]” concluded the author.

The resumption of courses

As early as June 1917, the Higher Council of Public Education and Parliament had been concerned with the remedial measures to be taken with regard to young people delayed in their education by the war. However, says the draft of the decree, ” il ne saurait être question de rétablir les facilités qui, dans le passé, avaient conduit à de regrettables abus et l’on ne propose pas d’instituer des dispenses générales de diplômes, mais chacun comprendra que la reconnaissance due aux héroïques enfants

qui ont défendu le pays doit entraîner une exception qui recevra l'approbation unanime de l'opinion publique. D'autre part, l'intérêt supérieur des carrières libérales, où tant de vides cruels se sont produits, le souci de l'avenir de la science dans notre pays, le désir d'assurer aux maîtres éminents de notre enseignement supérieur qui va, durant quelques années, souffrir du manque d'étudiants un auditoire capable de profiter pour le bien public de leur zèle et de leur talent, le sentiment d'équité qui oblige à tenir compte des situations personnelles atteintes par les événements de guerre, commandent d'appliquer les mêmes mesures aux personnes qui ont été contraintes de modifier le mode d'activité vers lequel elles s'étaient d'abord dirigées. Il est bien entendu que, dans ce cas, les dispenses seraient accordées avec beaucoup de réserve et ne s'appliqueraient jamais à des étudiants encore en âge de poursuivre des études entièrement normales [there can be no question of restoring the facilities that in the past led to regrettable abuses, and there is no proposal to institute general exemptions from diplomas, but everyone will understand that the recognition due to the heroic children who defended the country must result in an exception that will receive unanimous public approval. On the other hand, the best interest of liberal careers, where so many cruel voids have been dug; the concern for the future of science in our country; the desire to ensure that the eminent masters of our higher education, who will, for a few years, suffer from the lack of students should have an audience capable of benefiting for the public good from their zeal and their talent; the sentiment of fairness which obliges us to take into account the personal situations affected by the events of war; all of this requires us to apply the same measures to people who have been forced to change the mode of activity towards which they had initially gone. It is understood that, in this case, the exemptions would be granted with a great deal of reservation and would never apply to students who are still of an age to pursue an entirely normal education.]" The decree of July 12, 1917 provided for the possibility of dispensations from the decrees and regulations in force for students who had not been able to pursue their higher education, " jusqu'à l'expiration de l'année qui suivra la signature du traité de paix [until the end of the year following the signing of the peace treaty]": these dispensations related to the degrees and qualifications required for enrollment in faculties and similar schools and to the duration of the education required to obtain the degrees or qualifications issued by these institutions. A circular of March 25, 1918 stated that mobilized students were allowed to take their exams " hors session et individuellement pendant les périodes où la Faculté n'est pas en vacances [out of session and individually, during periods when the faculty is not on seasonal break]". The

decree of January 10, 1919 offered privileged conditions to demobilized students of the 1917 and earlier classes.

At the beginning of the 1919-1920 school year, the courses of the Paris Faculty of Law were congested and the dean had to organize additional examination sessions for demobilized students and mobilize professors for this purpose: in January 1920, over 1,100 bachelor exams were to be taken. The law school therefore decided to shorten the remaining study time for these students without modifying the curricula, but remained reluctant to create special education classes, which would risk lowering the level of teaching at the Faculty. This reduction in study time was be granted to students who had spent at least six months in the armed forces. In 1920-21, law schools regained their cruising speed.

Evolution in the number of students in France during the Great War

	1913-1914	**1914-1915**	**1915-1916**	**1916-1917**	**1917-1918**	**1918-1919**	**1919-1920**	**1920-1921**
Number	42 037	11 231	12 566	14 121	19 381	29 890	45 117	49 931
Including foreign students	6 187	1 885	1 945	2 399	3 238	6 044	5 081	6 477
Including female students	4 254	2 646	3 208	3 835	4 480	4 962	5 981	7 300
Including foreign female students	1 707	478	355	463	497	490	925	1 193

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	1913-1914	**1914-1915**	**1915-1916**	**1916-1917**	**1918-1919**	**1919-1920**
Number	7 569	1 165	1 847	1 887	3 834	6 975
Including foreign students	886	223	456	483	567	897
Including female students	92	58	77	109	197	312

Including female foreign students	46	14	13	14	10	32

Changes in the number of law students during the war in some provincial faculties

Faculties	1913-1914	1914-1915	1915-1916	1916-1917
Aix	330	172	276	283
Alger	350	137	93	107
Bordeaux	875	269	201	N.C.
Dijon	630	127	82	80
Grenoble	265	94	76	49
Lyon	585	184	151	176
Poitiers	505	442	172	193
Toulouse	560	245	205	N.C.

Pierre Moulinier

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