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Mona L. Siegel. *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914-1940.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. vii + 317 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-83900-6.

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The Lesson for Today: Peace is Patriotic

In the period between the two World Wars, French school teachers had to examine and sometimes reshape their views of war and peace, nationalism and patriotism, militarism and republicanism. In this well-written and carefully researched study of French public school education in the interwar years, Mona Siegel explores the various facets of the process by which teachers incorporated the experience of World War I into their curricula. In doing so, she challenges the charge, coming from as diverse a company as Vichy leader Philippe Petain and Resistance hero and leftist historian Marc Bloch, that educators in the period were "defeatists" who raised a generation of French people unwilling to defend the nation and were therefore responsible for France's "strange defeat" in 1940. Instead, Siegel argues, while French teachers did teach the students about the horrors of war, when the mobilization orders came in September 1939, French teachers supported the war effort nearly unanimously and many died in the ensuing combat. Moreover, during the 1920s and 1930s, pacifist teachers stressed pacifism and international cooperation as the only way to strengthen the values of democracy and liberty upon which the French Third Republic (1870-1940) was based. Far from seeking to destroy their country, teachers saw peace as the only sure way to save the nation and its values. War and militarism, by contrast, threatened to destroy all the ideals that had been fought for in the revolutionary wars of the 1790s. "Interwoven and inseparable," Siegel writes, "the values of pacifism, patriotism, and republicanism were the triple moral legacy that teachers bequeathed to the French nation in the critical years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War" (p. 17).

Siegel draws upon a wide array of sources relevant to education, including lesson plans, textbooks, memoirs and interviews with former teachers, student essays and assignments, publications of teacher organizations and official papers of teachers' unions, including the ardently pacifist Federation nationale des syndicats d'instituteurs (National Federation of Teachers' Unions, FN) and the larger, more mainstream, but still liberal Syndicat national des institutrices et des instituteurs de la France et des colonies (National Union of Schoolteachers of France and the colonies, SN). She focuses particularly, though not exclusively, on education in the departments of the Somme, Seine, and Dordogne. She selected those three to provide a diversity of war experiences and socio-economic profiles: rural and urban, north and south, wealthy and poor, capital and provincial, directly involved in the war and more isolated from it. She acknowledges the limitations of her sources. One cannot know, for example, precisely how a particular teacher used a textbook in a classroom, nor how individuals might respond to an official position taken by the union leadership. And as all of us who have ever taught know, one rarely sees the full impact that one class lesson may have on individual students. Nonetheless, Siegel uses her sources to paint a complex picture of primary school education in interwar France and the variety of ways teachers responded to the moral implications of the Great War.

The book is structured chronologically to reflect the transformation that took place in many teachers' attitudes and lessons over the twenty-plus-year period. Siegel argues that a majority of French school teachers supported World War I. Despite several highly celebrated trials, such as that of Helene Brion, a pacifist educator accused of teaching "defeatism," only seven teachers lost their jobs during the war because of pacifist actions and only a few more received official reprimands for such actions. Moreover, eight thousand male teachers lost their lives in the fighting.

Once the war was over, teachers saw themselves as the caretakers of the national memory. But in the highly nationalistic period following the war, the question became what exactly *was* that memory and how should it

be shaped? How should one teach about the events of 1914-1918? Textbooks published between 1918 and 1924 tended to portray the war as a triumph of French courage and unity. The books stressed German atrocities and French heroism and urged French schoolchildren above all, "Do Not Forget!" Ironically, what did get forgotten in these texts were casualties, the participation of women, and the grim realities of four years of bloodletting.

But these texts began to trouble some teachers who had themselves experienced the war firsthand. Prominent members of teachers' unions began to criticize "bellicose" texts, urging revision. They also began to debate whether history should be taught at all if it simply celebrated war. At the same time, other factors were at work, influencing education. Within a few short years, fewer and fewer primary school children had any direct recollection of the war. That, along with the prominent place children were expected to have in war commemoration ceremonies, made it increasingly urgent that children be given an accurate and honest view of what war really was. Although pacifism was not the automatic or unanimous response to World War I, by the mid-1920s a growing number of French school teachers questioned the war. They were influenced by socialist internationalism and feminine and feminist pacifist movements. Organized within the powerful SN, pacifist teachers sought to transform education to teach peace and reconciliation. They launched a national campaign to revise triumphalist textbooks. As a result, texts published after 1925 were far less anti-German. They stressed the suffering not the heroism of soldiers, the tragedy not the glory of war. And they taught that "being French" did not preclude being pacifist. Although getting revised texts adopted by schools was harder, by the 1930s most militant texts had been purged or revised.

School teachers also challenged prevailing definitions of patriotism. Patriotism had been an essential value of French education throughout the Third Republic, but its definition varied considerably in the postwar era. Conservatives saw it as related to nationalism, militarism, and authority. Pacifist teachers, conversely, connected it to international solidarity, national defense, and France's "civilizing mission" (i.e., to transform its colonies into "little Frances"). France, they believed, was a harbinger of peace. By spreading the republican values of democracy and liberty to others (including particularly, French colonies), the whole world would benefit. While it was important to be prepared to defend the nation, pacifist teachers resisted attempts to "militarize" education by requiring students to engage in military drills (for boys) or nurse's training (for girls).

By the mid-1930s, domestic and international events put pressures on the assumptions of pacifist teachers. The economic depression and the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain all caused teachers to struggle with whether war or fascism was the greater enemy. The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) proved a turning point for many teachers who concluded that it might not be possible to both avoid war and defeat fascism. Interestingly, at that time the vocabulary of World War I returned to describe the soldiers' "valor and honor" and to urge a fight *jusqu'au bout* (to the finish).

Although many in the SN (National Union of Schoolteachers) supported the 1938 Munich Agreement, by 1939, while most teachers were not eager for war, they believed it might become necessary. Once mobilization orders came, most teachers went to war without a murmur. After the defeat, many joined the Resistance. Despite this, the Vichy government quickly blamed school teachers for the 1940 defeat and engaged in reprisals against them, especially those active in the SN. But, Siegel concludes, Vichy officials misplaced their blame, for the teachers in the late Third Republic sought to teach children about the realities of war in order to bring about a more peaceful and secure world. At the same time, they tied pacifism to a sense of French national identity and the need to defend the nation if necessary. "The origins of France's 'Strange Defeat' of 1940 ..." Siegel writes, "... do not lie in the classrooms of the late Third Republic" (p. 10).

Reflecting on the concerns of French teachers in the interwar years reveals a number of striking parallels to the concerns of our own time. First, the concern over militarization of the classroom and textbooks is related to the current controversy in the United States as military recruiters find themselves increasingly hard pressed to meet their quotas and seek entry into our public schools. Second, the debate over the relation between pacifism and patriotism is played out again and again at peace vigils all around the United States, as critics see calls to end war as somehow treasonous and "defeatist." Finally, the evolution of the memory of World War I is part of a larger question about how we remember the past and shape it and then pass it on to the next generation who may have no direct memory of a particular event or time. Those memories are powerful because they shape what will become "reality." Will a war become "the good war" or "the national tragedy" or something else altogether? Those labels then determine how people will respond to future events that they believe to be similar.

Mona Siegel has written an important study that re-

veals the complexity of teachers' views of the war and relates directly to some of the pressing issues of our own place and time. As such, like all good histories, it prompts us to reflect on the ways the concerns of the past illuminate our current condition.

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