

(version en anglais)

Synopsis

The Companions were combatants in the Great War who hoped the **Sacred Union** – obtained through the self-sacrifice of Frenchmen who fought together and gave their blood in the dirty mud of the trenches to serve the nation's interests – would extend its benefits in peacetime by propelling a fundamental change in the *University*, a word then used to designate what we ended up calling the French education system.

A democratic reform, it was supposed to abolish the separation in schooling between two impermeable wholes: the free primary school system and its higher grades conceived for the children of the people and of the lower middle-class; and the secondary system of schools, founded by Napoléon Bonaparte, which offered a humanistic and scientific education for bourgeois children from the lowest to the highest grades and prepared most of them for higher studies. The Companions wanted to establish a fair and efficient *New University*, which would welcome children in a comprehensive school leading only the top students, regardless of their social origins, to higher studies. In their view, social equity was supposed to serve economic efficiency as well as play a key role in rebuilding the nation.

But the Companions changed over time. There were only seven of them in 1917, when their first articles were published. Later on, they were subjected to various influences: some coming from the outside – such as political, union, and associative interest groups – and others from the inside. As the group grew in size, founding members were replaced by new members coming from academia, including psychologists and physicists who would later be close to Jean Zay, the Minister of Education in the government of the Popular Front. At the beginning of the 1930s, the *New University* had thus shifted, sometimes dramatically, on certain key points of its project aimed at democratising schools: on school culture (especially on the position of science and technical courses in the curriculum); on the meaning and function of what would later be called the middle school – between the primary school and the secondary school – with *vocational guidance* (whether geared toward participation in academic tracks or participation in vocational programmes) as its guiding principle; on the emancipation of working-class and lower middle-class children ; on gender equality; and on issues pertaining to the unity and solidarity of the teaching body.

Conference Themes

The conference may be of interest to historians, sociologists, education philosophers, pedagogues, teachers, school administrators and officers, who have studied the evolution – whether old or recent – of those educational issues the Companions of the *New University* deemed fundamental. The Scientific Committee of the conference invites proposals for research papers on the following themes:

I. The history of the period of activism of the Companions (1917-1933), which should not be understood restrictively. Incursions before 1917 – since the beginning of the 20th century – and after – until the end of the 1930s, and even until the end of the Second World War, including Occupation time – are welcome.

Historical writings pertaining to the Companions already exist, but numerous aspects of the movement still remain to be thoroughly studied:

***Prosopographical approaches:** The Companions of the *New University* constituted a large group, involving hundreds of people. What were their most salient traits? Papers in this section would typically aim at analysing the Companions as a group of individuals, highlighting their characteristics.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, papers may focus on the size of the group, or on the age, gender, location, profession, careers, affiliations, and social networks of its members.

***International approaches:** interactions between education systems; international influences felt; original contributions made by the Companions of the *New University* during the time of their campaign (also possibly in earlier decades in order to clarify the emerging conditions of the movement); and possible influence of the Companions on other countries.

Papers with this approach would typically focus on one of the following dimensions and aim at assessing:

- The influence of foreign school models (Anglo-Saxons countries, Germany, Switzerland among others) on the initial project as it was conceived and presented in the two volumes of the *New University* published in 1918 and 1919.

- The influence of foreign models on the adjustments/reworking of the Companions' ideas following the educational debates of the 1920s and early 1930s in France.

- The possible interactions between the propositions made by the Companions and foreign education reform effort aimed at establishing a comprehensive school in other countries.

***Socio-economic approaches:** the reception of the *New University* in political, professional, unionist, religious, and associative circles. Papers with this approach would typically focus on assessing the role of social and economic interest groups (political parties, publishing conglomerate, religious groups, etc.) in the shifting of the Companions' doctrine.

*** Political approaches:** what was the actual impact of the *New University* on school reforms implemented during the time of the Companions' campaign, and up to the period when Jean Zay acted as Minister of Education in the government of the Popular Front?

*** Pedagogical Approaches:** what were the links between the Companions and the pedagogical reform movements during the inter-wars period? What pedagogy(ies) should be used in the comprehensive school?

*** The memory of the Companions.** Contributors are requested to focus their papers around one of the two following sub-themes:

- The memory of the *New University* in the political and unionist discourses: when did the *New University* become a reference in the political, pedagogical, and unionist discourses, since the end of the Second World War? When, for whom and, above all, why did the memory disappear from public awareness?

- The memory of the *New University* in historiography: how historians of education and pedagogical doctrines have progressively constructed the idea of a "*Companions moment*", which became a *doxa* only recently debunked in the historiography?

II. The legacy of the *New University*. A round-table will bring together contributors who will analyse the evolution of the key concepts developed by the Companions, their meaning as well as the subsequent interpretations they received. By re-interrogating issues set forth by the Companions, these contributors will strive to understand why a concept appears and subsequently disappears from public discourse, without seeing this process as a *continuum* that would not be historically justified.

The round-table will address **the issue of vocational guidance for pupils** before they begin their working life. This issue, which lies at the heart of the project of the Companions of the *New University*, is closely related to other important educational ideas such as education continuity and monitoring of students' abilities.

"... at the base, the comprehensive school. It will lead the pupil, on the one hand to discover the humanities, on the other to vocational training, which will both meet in higher education" (Les Compagnons, *L'Université Nouvelle*, 1918, B. Garnier [éd.], Lyon, INRP, 2008, p. 40).

“The teacher will endeavour to detect the abilities of the child, to spy on his natural dispositions. From eleven to fourteen, the child, facing new realities, will reveal himself in the technical as well as in the intellectual field. Let’s take advantage of these precious years to spare the children the trouble of being steered in the wrong direction and help them discover their vocation.” (*Ibid.*, p .205)

“We consider the comprehensive school to be the setting in which all our young minds are trained, not to the practice of a trade, but to the learning of a profession. Its great and beautiful role is to produce intelligences, not instructed, but open-minded.” (Les Compagnons, *L’Opinion, Journal de la semaine*, 8 février 1919, p. 109).

Contributors on this theme would typically focus their research papers on one or two educational ideas the *Companions* campaigned on, questioning the various ways in which these ideas may have been disseminated to widely varying audiences, transformed over time, and sometimes distorted from their initial meaning.

Instructions for authors

Individual paper proposals should include a title followed by a short abstract (1,000 characters maximum, including spaces). Authors should spell out the paper’s focus as well as its link with the overall theme of the conference. Explicit reference should be made to the Companions’ work, public writings, and activities. Individual paper proposals should also include a brief overview of the sources used and a discussion of how the paper relates to other scholarship in the field.

In addition, authors should include their full name, institutional affiliation, telephone number, mailing and e-mail addresses.

Please submit proposals and contact information by e-mail to cuiip@cuiip.fr

All proposals will be anonymously peer-reviewed by the Scientific Committee.

A book will be published after the conference, consisting of selected contributions.

Important Dates

Deadline for submission: **October 15, 2018.**

Notification of acceptance: **November 15, 2018.**

Registration information

To participate in the conference, registration is mandatory.

Registration is open, without charge, to anyone interested in the conference theme, within the limit of the number of places available.

Registration for the conference can be made by sending an e-mail to cuiip@cuiip.fr.

Access to the conference is restricted to registered individuals only.

Accommodation at the CIEP de Sèvres is available for conference participants who request it.