

# From popular to unpopular education? The open-air school(s) of «Pont-Rouge», Roubaix (1921-1978)

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## *Introduction: empowerment through awareness?*

In this paper it is aimed to investigate how discourses on popular education, hygiene and leisure characterized by local political-ideological particularities crystallized in the open-air school of Pont-Rouge, and particularly in its everyday practice. The present study does not place «popular» (at times hyped) source material such as (motion) pictures, oral testimonies and children's autobiographical documents in the forefront, simply because it was either not encountered or could not be used due to copyright issues. The few images that do figure in the paper are only intended to trigger the reader's interest and imagination; by no means are they considered as «illustrations» that simply show what everyday practice in the school(s) looked like. Much could be written about the images, but that would go entirely beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>1</sup> Here it is attempted to make the best of the written material available, a task that historical researchers are likely to face most often.

The paper has been inspired by the September 2009 European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in Vienna, but even more so by the August 2009 International Standing Conference for the History of Education, the theme of which was: «Educating the people, the history of popular education». The organizers of

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of what could be done with visual images, see, for instance: G. Thyssen, *Visualizing discipline of the body in a German open-air school (1923-1939): retrospection and introspection*, «History of education journal», 36/2, 2007, pp. 243-260.

the conference last mentioned suggested that the concept of popular education could be stretched almost at will and thus understood as something «more than education for all», for instance, as a project of «empowerment through awareness» aimed at various target groups such as «the poor and needy». It was thereby left open to one's own interpretation whether the «locus of control» over such an endeavour was best put in the hands of illustrious individuals or rather attributed to collective organisations.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to this, it is expected that whoever takes on the challenge of writing a history about Roubaix's social politics of hygiene and urban development and its correlatives like the «Pont-Rouge» open-air school(s), will find it hard to withstand socialist self-rhetoric and distinguish local historiography from hagiography.<sup>3</sup> Even the former tends to stress the city's (or better, municipality's) «exemplary» role in such fields as education, public health, welfare, housing, sports and leisure.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it usually ascribes results achieved in these domains to members of the city administration, lay or catholic friendly associations and – less often – industrial patrons. In particular, the open-air school studied here is most often described as a weapon in the personal crusade of Jean-Baptiste Lebas (1878-1944), mayor of Roubaix from 1912 until 1941,<sup>5</sup> and Doctor Léandre Dupré (1871-1951), deputy

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<sup>2</sup> See: «Conference Theme», <<http://edugate.fss.uu.nl/ISCHE2009/>> (accessed: May 16<sup>th</sup>. 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The work of Jean Piat certainly is to be situated on the borderline between the two genres. Apart from being an erudite and renowned historian, Piat clearly was a militant socialist. He personally knew several of the leading figures connected to the municipality of Roubaix and the open-air school. He was also a member of the editorial board of the socialist weekly «La Bataille», which generally praised municipal initiatives, and during the Second World War he was in charge of the city's provisioning service, together with Victor Provo, who allegedly drew him into the service from the beginning, in January 1941. See: J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Époque à la résistance*, Roubaix, Maison du Livre, 1994, p. 206; J. Piat, *Victor Provo, 1903-1983. Roubaix témoigne et accuse*, Dunkerque, Editions des Beffrois, 1985, p. 19. See also: J. Piat, *Événements mémorables de Roubaix*, Saint-Étienne, Horvath, 1984. Numerous works contain less hagiographic, though chiefly more general accounts of Roubaix, including historical ones. Among those are the following: Y.-M. Hilaire, *Histoire de Roubaix*, Dunkerque-Westhoeck, Beffrois, 1984; P. Pierrard, *Histoire du Nord*, Paris, Hachette, 1992; T. Delattre, J.-P. Popelier and P. Waret, *Roubaix. Mémoire en images*, Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire, Alan Sutton, 1999; O. Canneva-Tetu and A. Lefebvre, *Roubaix, une ville née de l'industrie* (series: *Itinéraires du patrimoine*, vol. CCV), Lille, La Voix du Nord, 2000; *Roubaix. Musées, monuments, promenades*, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine/Centre des Monuments Nationaux, 2008. Most often they mention the open-air school and holiday camp of Pont-Rouge in passing.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g.: T. Delattre, J.-P. Popelier and P. Waret, *Roubaix. Mémoire en images*, cit., p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> In 1941 Jean(-Baptiste) Lebas was arrested by the Gestapo, imprisoned in France and deported to Germany. During the First World War Lebas had already been imprisoned as a hostage in Rastatt and deported to Gustrow in 1915. He died of exhaustion in the concentration camp of Sonnenburg in 1944, but he was actually re-elected in 1945, as it was not known until June 1946 he was deceased. In his absence, he was replaced successively by Fleuris Vanherpe, Marcel Guislain, Alphonse Verbuergt, Charles Baudoin and Victor Provo. The latter, who was appointed by the Vichy regime, would be reinstated as mayor of Roubaix after the war and govern the city from 1944 until 1977.

councillor for hygiene and public instruction,<sup>6</sup> against illnesses such as tuberculosis (TB). These were responsible for high rates of child mortality and seen as a result of malnourishment, lack of hygiene, and poor working class conditions.

As part of a political and social-hygienical offensive, the school is nearly always bracketed together with Roubaix's school canteens, organized as of 1892 and generally described as the heritage of «France's first socialist mayor», Henri Carrette (1846-1911), the municipal holiday camps and sports centre, equipped between 1928 and 1935, and since 1942 the arrival of Paris-Roubaix, the city's Art Deco swimming pool – a true temple of hygiene built between 1927 and 1932, and now a famous national monument and Art and History Museum – and its low-cost housing programme (of «habitations à bon marché», otherwise known as H.B.M.).

### 1. *An accumulated body of knowledge*

Only rarely, so it seems, are the «wholesome» and «emancipatory» effects these public health and urbanisation projects were intended to produce questioned and their presumed role «in the vanguard» of social reform put into perspective.<sup>7</sup> Yet however particular the social political conditions that generated these parascholastic initiatives may have been, the projects themselves were by no means unique. Even if the school canteens, for instance, at the time met resistance from the prefecture of the North Department and a lack of cooperation from the part of the central government, neither from a national nor international perspective were they «genuinely revolutionary».<sup>8</sup> A French pre-school canteen had been operating since 1844 at Lamnion (Côtes-du-Nord) and perhaps in spite of both institutional and familial resistance as well as non-committal «encouragement» of prefects by the government via the circular of 14 June 1869, canteens for school children, together with school funds («caisses des écoles») and offices of hygiene («bureaux d'hy-

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<sup>6</sup> Apart from hygiene and public instruction, deputy councillor L. Dupré had other responsibilities as well. After the Second World War he was appointed 'supplementary deputy' before retiring from office. In December 1923 he had been awarded France's Legion of Honour by the Minister of Hygiene. At the time he was honorary president of several parascholastic associations, president of the recommending committee of a (higher) primary school, president of the Board of Directors of several technical schools and a cantonal primary school inspector. He had already been awarded the Academic Palms («Palmes Académiques») and a medal for his hygienic action during the First World War, on the occasion of which he was imprisoned in Germany as a hostage for fifteen months, just like Lebas. See: «Journal de Roubaix», Sunday 2 December, 1923, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> There are, of course, exceptions. See, e.g.: R. Lefèbvre, *Le socialisme saisi par l'institution municipale (des années 1880 aux années 1980). Jeux d'échelles*, Doctoral dissertation in Political Sciences, Université de Lille II, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> This was the opinion of Jean Piat. See J. Piat, *Victor Provo, 1903-1983. Roubaix témoigne et accuse*, cit., p. 103. The same may go for the distribution of clothing and perhaps even for the Henri Carrette's plan of providing drugs at cost price via a municipal pharmacy.

giène»), started appearing all over the country between the 1870s and the 1890s, for instance in Pont-Audemer, le Havre, Saint-Étienne, Toul and Paris.<sup>9</sup>

Extending the practice of free and/or nearly free provision of meals to school children soon took place all over the world, taking on more or less particular forms of expression in each country, region and city. In Britain, for instance, where advocates of school meals envied the advance of some French municipalities in this regard, initiatives like these only left the sphere of private charity with difficulty – a city such as Bradford being an exception – as resistance to national provision of school meals persisted even after the introduction of the Education Act of 1906.<sup>10</sup> In France, a canteen for school children – incidentally, run by religious – might already have operated since 1870 in Pont-Audemer (Eure).<sup>11</sup> Not that this, or any priority question at that, is of much importance, but the same may apply to the holiday camps («colonies de vacances»), which usually preceded open-air schools, as was also the case in Roubaix. Since 1881, more precisely, Protestant evangelicals from Levallois-Perret organized holiday camps in Nanteuil-les-Meaux (Seine et Marne) – admittedly small-scale holiday camps («colonies familiales») at first that would only gradually be accompanied by those based on more collective models rooted in popular education («colonies scolaires») and Catholic youth clubs («patronages»).<sup>12</sup>

From an international viewpoint, the initiative with regard to holiday camps is most often ascribed to Swiss pastor Walter Bion in Appenzell (1876), after which there allegedly followed similar experiences in Germany (1878), Austria (1880) – two counties that, together with Switzerland, would be involved in the first international conference on holiday camps («Ferienkolonien») in Berlin, 1881 – and, later in the decade, in countries such as France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and the United States.<sup>13</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, this also applies to «open-air schools», institutions that were little more than other configurations of existing knowledge in the field of popular education, hygiene, and leisure that circulated, for instance, at (inter)national conferences on tuberculosis, school hygiene, child protection, and so

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<sup>9</sup> See: D. Nourisson, *Manger à l'école: une histoire morale*. «Food & history», 2/1, 2004, pp. 228-229. In each case, the charitable and municipal initiative prevailed in France until the Second World War.

<sup>10</sup> Compare L. L. Downs, *Childhood in the promised land. Working class movements and the colonies de vacances in France (1880-1960)*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 294-295; and J. Vernon, *The ethics of hunger and the assembly of society: the techno-politics of the school meal in Modern Britain*, «The American historical review», 110/3, 2005, p. 693. See also: K. Layborn, *The issue of school feeding in Bradford, 1904-1907*, «Journal of Educational Administration and History», 14/2, 1982, pp. 30-39.

<sup>11</sup> L. L. Downs, *Childhood in the promised land. Working class movements and the colonies de vacances in France (1880-1960)*, cit., p. 230. In each case, the charitable and municipal initiative prevailed in France until the Second World War.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 35.

<sup>13</sup> More international conferences were held, e.g. in Bremen (1885) and Zurich (1888). France hosted national conferences on holiday camps in Bordeaux (1906), Saint-Quentin (1908), Toulouse (1909), Paris (1910), etc., of which the ninth was extended to the «first» international conference on «colonies de vacances et oeuvres de plein air», in Paris (1929). See, e.g.: J. A. Cambeiro, *Summer camps: historical analysis of a pedagogical adventure (1876-1920)*, «Educcació i història: revista d'història de l'educació», 9-10, 2006-2007, p. 195; and P. L. M. Martínez, *The hygienist movement and the modernization of education in Spain*, «Paedagogica historica», 42/6, 2006, p. 812.

on.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in France, one of the initial figure heads of open-air education, Jacques Jozeph Grancher (1843-1907), professor of child medicine at the Paris medical faculty since 1885 – who, incidentally, suffered from tuberculosis himself for thirty years –<sup>15</sup> had learnt about open-air schools («Waldschulen») while presiding at a session at the second international conference on tuberculosis in Paris, 1905.<sup>16</sup> Allegedly at his instigation, and with support of Eduoard Herriot, mayor, and Paul Vigne, head of the office of health of Lyons, respectively, an open-air school was set up in 1907. The experiences having proved to be satisfactory, more schools followed quickly in various arrondissements of Paris.<sup>17</sup> To this a newly founded «French league for open-air education» (1906) added considerably. This was supported by both the Ministry of Public Education and War and would help organize a first international conference on open-air schools in Paris, 1922.<sup>18</sup> On this occasion, among others, Gaston Lemonier, a teacher and one of its most militant members, set himself up as a pioneer amongst pioneers having after all had the brilliant idea of opening the classroom windows of his school in Saint-Ouen as early as 1890.<sup>19</sup>

In each case, by the time the school of Roubaix was conceived, a considerably long tradition had already established itself. Granted, moreover, that it was praised

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<sup>14</sup> For a selective enumeration of conferences that dealt with educational themes – undoubtedly several of which with open-air schools – see: E. Fuchs, *Educational sciences, morality and politics: international educational congresses in the early twentieth century*, «*Paedagogica historica*», 40/5, 2004, pp. 757-784. An in-depth study on the reception of open-air schools within other educational currents such as the New Education Fellowship remains to be undertaken. One person, who seems to have bridged the currents of «new» and «open-air» education – albeit with ambivalence –, is Adolphe Ferrière. See, e.g.: A. Ferrière, *L'éducation dans les écoles de plein air au point de vue pédagogique*, in *Congrès International de Protection de l'Enfance*, Paris, 1928, pp. 255-256.

<sup>15</sup> C. A. Connolly, *Saving sickly children. The tuberculosis preventorium in American life, 1909-1970*, Newark, Rutgers University Press, 2008, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> *Congrès international de la tuberculose, tenu à Paris du 2 au 7 octobre 1905*, Paris, Masson, 1906, p. 349. Incidentally, the first international congress on tuberculosis was held in Napels (1900). See: *Congresso internazionale contro la tubercolosi. Napoli, aprile 1900. L'arte medica* (special issue of «*Giornale Settimanale Illustrato*»), Milano, Vallardi, 1900. In 1908 the sixth international conference on tuberculosis was the first one to be held outside Europe, even if American conferences on tuberculosis organized before, e.g. in St. Louis (1904), occasionally called themselves «international».

<sup>17</sup> A.-M. Châtelet, *Des idées aux bâtiments: l'essor des écoles de plein air en France (1907-1940) / From ideas to buildings: the rise of open-air schools in France (1907-1940)*, in A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (eds.), *Open-air schools. An educational and architectural venture in twentieth-century Europe*, Paris, Éditions Recherches, 2003, pp. 168-169, 182-183.

<sup>18</sup> In total, five international congresses were held on open-air schools: the one in Paris, a second one in Brussels (1931), the third in Bielefeld-Hanover (1936), the fourth in Florence (1949), and the last one in Basel-Zürich-Zoug-Leysin-Geneva (1953).

<sup>19</sup> Compare: [Ligue française pour l'éducation en plein air,] *Premier congrès international des écoles de plein air en la faculté de médecine de Paris (24-25-26-27-28 juin 1922)*, Paris, Maloine, 1925, p. 12 ; G. Lemonier, *Les Écoles de Plein Air Françaises. Préparation et Formation d'Éducateurs Spécialisés*, in K. Triebold (Ed.), *Die Freiluftschulbewegung. Versuch einer Darstellung ihres gegenwärtigen internationalen Standes*, Berlin, Richard Schoetz, 1931, p. 11.

to the sky at the opening of the Paris congress<sup>20</sup> by Academy Inspector, Mr. L'Hôpital on behalf of Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Léon Bérard, it was curiously enough listed as having been realized in 1924, two years after the conference.<sup>21</sup> In addition, L'Hôpital had presented it as if his colleague Pierre Capra, then director of primary education of the North Department, had needed some time to convince the city of Roubaix, whereas the latter would later suggest the opposite.<sup>22</sup> Be this as it may, neither Léandre Dupré, who issued a brochure about the school in July 1922,<sup>23</sup> nor Jean Lebas were listed as the school's founders.<sup>24</sup> Again, this is trivial, but it does illustrate that the school, paraded as a paragon of municipal energy, was easily forgotten. Roubaix seems to have soon quit the international scene. Neither the city nor the school was represented at the second international congress in Brussels, and not one issue of the «bulletin of the international committee on open-air schools» between 1935 and 1949 mentioned either of them thereafter.<sup>25</sup>

The same does not apply to the open-air school of Suresnes; at least the one designed by Eugène Beaudoin and Marcel Lods between 1931 and 1933, and built in 1935. The latter was after all preceded by a far more modest «seasonal» open-air school accommodated in a farm at Harras de la Fouilleuse and opened in the same year as the open-air school of Pont-Rouge (1921). It comprised two classes at first, then three from 1929 onward and finally four in 1930, when a section was added for children suffering from «serious mental deficiencies»,<sup>26</sup> thereby catering pre-

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<sup>20</sup> A.-M. Châtelet and J.-N. Luc, *L'école de plein air en France au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle: politique municipale et prévention de la tuberculose*, in Yannick Marec (Ed.), *Villes en crise? Les politiques municipales face aux pathologies urbaines (fin xviii<sup>e</sup> -fin xx<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, Creaphis, 2005, p. 308.

<sup>21</sup> [Ligue française pour l'éducation en plein air.] *Premier congrès international des écoles de plein air en la faculté de médecine de Paris (24-25-26-27-28 juin 1922)*, cit., p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Compare: *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; and *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille, Imprimerie Ouvrière Administrative et Commerciale, 1932, p. 288.

<sup>23</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, Lille, Camille Robbe, s.d. [July, 1922], p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> [Ligue française pour l'éducation en plein air.] *Premier congrès international des écoles de plein air en la faculté de médecine de Paris (24-25-26-27-28 juin 1922)*, cit., p. 150.

<sup>25</sup> Of course, international competition (and personal ambitions) may have been involved. Thus, the proceedings of the second international congress for the most part contained contributions on German open-air schools. They were assembled by Karl Triebold senior, who was setting himself up as the standard bearer of open-air education in Germany, a country excluded at the first conference because of the First World War, and thereby improved his chances of being allowed to organize the third international conference in his native town, Bielefeld. See: K. Triebold (Ed.), *Die Freiluftschulbewegung. Versuch einer Darstellung ihres gegenwärtigen internationalen Standes*, cit.. Similarly, the minutes of the second conference consisted largely of Belgian contributions. See: *Second congrès international des écoles de plein air. Bruxelles 6-11 avril 1931. Rapports et comptes rendus*, Brussels: Ancienne Librairie Castaigne, 1931. This supports Anne-Marie Châtelet's claim that the «international» conferences were in fact national conferences, aiming to establish each host country's leading role. See: A.-M. Châtelet, *Des idées aux bâtiments: l'essor des écoles de plein air en France (1907-1940) / From ideas to buildings: the rise of open-air schools in France (1907-1940)*, cit., pp. 173, 185.

<sup>26</sup> Florence Laufman, «Sauver la graine, redresser l'homme». *Les écoles de plein air de Suresnes (1921-1944) / «Look after the seed, and the man will grow straight»*, in A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (eds.), *Open-air schools. An educational and architectural venture in twentieth-century Europe*, cit., pp. 385, 390.

sumably for some 100 to 120 children. Given the precariousness of the building and its location, it was soon decided that a more adequate and permanent solution was essential. From this, resulted a «palatial» school, a flagship of modern architecture made up of glass and concrete, which reportedly was not admired only for its «sheer architectural beauty», but for ‘the bold alacrity with which the staff applied the «active methods» of Decroly, Montessori, and Freinet’ as well.<sup>27</sup> Granted this was indeed the case – in whatever fashion these «methods» may have been applied – even then the Suresnes school was in this respect considered as an exception.<sup>28</sup> In other matters, however, the Suresnes experience seems very similar to that of Roubaix, although important differences are not to be neglected.

## 2. Roubaix: an amalgam of particularities

Both Roubaix and Suresnes long upheld the appearance of a rural town. But while Suresnes by 1850 was still no more than an urban village counting just over 2000 inhabitants, Roubaix was already a city inhabited by 35,000 people. Thus, even if Suresnes by 1911, like many French rural villages, had rapidly become an industrial suburb as a result of the second industrial revolution, with a population having expanded nearly tenfold to some 16,000 people, while Roubaix’s population in that period increased only about three and a half times, considered in the long run, Roubaix had exploded from an oversized village of 8000 people to an overcrowded city of some 124,000 citizens in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> As in the case of Suresnes, the steep population growth in Roubaix was largely accounted for by immigration. However, whereas in the former city people poured in from surrounding villages and small towns to find jobs as factory workers in the munition and metalworking trades or as office workers, in the latter the «manpower» to be employed for the most part in the textile trades came mainly from abroad.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, chiefly Belgians invaded the city in several waves. By the late nineteenth century the majority of Roubaix’s population was Belgian, which had led scholars to suggest it was then practically a Belgian

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<sup>27</sup> L. L. Downs, *Childhood in the promised land. Working class movements and the colonies de vacances in France (1880-1960)*, cit., p. 125.

<sup>28</sup> Compare, e.g.: A.-M. Châtelet, *Des idées aux bâtiments: l’essor des écoles de plein air en France (1907-1940) / From ideas to buildings: the rise of open-air schools in France (1907-1940)*, cit., pp. 179, 188; and P. Lefevre & R. Delchet, *L’éducation des enfants et des adolescents handicapés en milieu scolaire et para-scolaire* (vol. IV: les enfants malades), Paris, E.S.F., 1973, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Compare, e.g.: C. Petillon, *La population de Roubaix. industrialisation, démographie et société, 1750-1880*. Villeneuve d’Asq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2006, p. 14; *Roubaix. Musées, monuments, promenades*, cit., p. 29; and P. Waret and J.-P. Popelier, *Roubaix de a à z*, Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire, Alan Sutton, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> About 75% of the working population was still employed in the textile industry by the beginning of the 1960s. Becoming a white-collar clerk equalled climbing the social ladder. Employee positions remained scarce and highly sought after, at least until the Second World War. See: L. Hossepied, *Métiers vécus à Roubaix de 1920 à nos jours*, Éditions de l’encre vive, Roubaix, 2003, pp. 16, 18, 36.

city. Families from Poland, Italy, Portugal and Spain subsequently came in search of a better future there, followed, in the 1960s, by people from the Maghreb.<sup>31</sup> Roubaix's swift industrialisation helped build its reputation as the «Manchester» of France. No other city in the country and few abroad (such as those in south Lancashire and Bradford) witnessed such a dramatic change.<sup>32</sup>

Along with it came a wide range of problems. First of all, labourers were required to huddle together with their children in «forts» and «courées» (courtyards), much-too-small and unsanitary dwellings located near the factories. These «genuine formicaries» or «human rabbit hutches», in the words of Dupré,<sup>33</sup> were built as of the 1820s and 1840s, respectively, chiefly by estate agents, landlords, grocers and other tradesmen, sometimes also by industrial patrons and even physicians. All of them thus ensured themselves of their own clientele.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, men and women had to work hard and long in unhygienic, sometimes degrading conditions. Children were not always spared from heavy labour either, not even well into the 1920s when such practices had already been illegal for over fifty years.<sup>35</sup> In times of genuine or proclaimed crisis, patrons tended to recruit fewer adult men and more women, youngsters and immigrants, who were generally paid less. Such practices led to xenophobia and so much tension and uproar between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, that Roubaix instead of «city of thousand chimneys» per-

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about Belgian immigration in the North of France, see, among other works: K. Van Isacker, *Mijn land in de kering, 1830-1980* (vol. I: *Een ouderwetse wereld 1830-1914*), Antwerp: Nederlandse Boekhandel, 1976, pp. 68-71; L. Schepens, *Van vlakutsjer tot Franschman: Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de Westvlaamse plattelandsbevolking in de negentiende eeuw*, Brugge, Westvlaams Economisch Studiebureau, 1973; C. Strikwerda, *France and the Belgian Immigration of the Nineteenth Century*, in C. Guerin-Gonzales and C. Strikwerda (Eds.), *The Politics of Immigrant Workers*, New York, Holmes and Meyer, 1993; M. David, A. Guillemin and P. Waret, *L'intégration des Belges à Roubaix. Rapport de synthèse*, «Les cahiers de Roubaix», 3, s.d. [1995]; J.-P. Popelier, *L'immigration oubliée. L'histoire des Belges en France*, Lille, La Voix du Nord, 2003; R. Penninx, K. Kraal, M. Martiniello, and S. Vertovec, *Citizenship in European cities. Immigrants, local politics and integration policies*, Aldershot/Burlington, Ashgate, 2004; and the contributions in the following special journal issue: «Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis / Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine», 37/3-4, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> See also D. Paris and J.-F. Stevens, *Lille et sa région urbaine: la bifurcation métropolitaine*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2000. For a more exclusively industrial history, see: G. L. Fontana and G. Gayot, *Roubaix-Tourcoing et les villes lainiers d'Europe. Découverte d'un patrimoine industriel*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presse Universitaires Septentrion, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Compare: *Roubaix. Musées, monuments, promenades*, cit., p. 31; P. Waret and J.-P. Popelier, *Roubaix de a à z*, cit., p. 90; T. Delattre, J.-P. Popelier and P. Waret, *Roubaix. Memoire en images*, cit., p. 20; J. Piat, *Victor Provo, 1903-1983. Roubaix témoigne et accuse*, cit., pp. 107-108; J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Epoque à la résistance*, cit., p. 407.

<sup>35</sup> See: J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Epoque à la résistance*, cit., pp. 45, 222; *Roubaix. Musées, Monuments, Promenades*, p. 37. Children in the 1840s started working from the age of 8 to 9. Around that time some 143,000 children worked in the industry, of whom 93,000 in the textile trade, and women and children represented 75% of «manpower». The latter was encouraged by industrials, as they could be paid 3 to 4 times less. Often parents themselves helped get their children employed as they could not manage to survive from their sole pay check. Between 1841 three laws would gradually impose some restraints on child labour.

haps had better been nicknamed city of thousand strikes.<sup>36</sup> In response to condemnation and selective blindness on the part of industrial employers, as of the late 1840s, and especially from the 1870s onwards, workers' associations and trade unions started to come into existence, although it would take until 1884 for the Parliament to allow some degree of syndical freedom. This, however, did not prevent strikes from taking place in 1848, 1867, 1870 and 1880.<sup>37</sup>

By that time, in the whole of France class consciousness had increased, leading to the creation of the Marxist socialist party («Parti Ouvrier», POF) by Paul Lafargue (1842-1911), elected as the first Socialist deputy in the parliament in 1891, and Jules Guesde (1845-1922), elected deputy for Lille in 1893 as well. Soon divided, the Marxist socialists would reunite in 1905 (as the «Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière», SFIO), only to encounter a new split in 1919, with the creation of the communist Party («Parti Communiste Français», PCF). Similarly, trade unions, although gaining strength as of 1884, would end up divided by the beginning of the 1920s, chiefly in the form of the socialist union («Confédération Général du Travail», GT), the communist union («Confédération Général du Travail Unitaire», CGTU) and the Catholic one («Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens», CFTC). Added to this were cooperatives such as «La Paix», stimulated by the leaders of the Belgian Socialist party and organized after the example of the Ghent «Vooruit», as well as numerous Catholic or lay societies and philanthropies. All of these were players on the field of popular education, hygiene and leisure, and constituted the somewhat peculiar social and political culture of Roubaix, which at the turn of the nineteenth century was only beginning to shift away from paternalism as an answer to the city's working classes' perceived needs. Thus, the first school canteens of Roubaix, for instance, depended heavily on subscriptions of the socialist party and collections at variable charitable events.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. *A politics of education, hygiene and leisure*

The aid provided by the school canteens was not disinterested: not only did it recruit pupils for the «école laïque», but with «healthy and invigorating» food it also aimed to prepare generations of «battalions» for the «social revolution».<sup>39</sup> The ever increasing number of meals offered, most of which were free of charge, furthermore had a highly symbolical function: they became a signboard of new, socialist municipal governance, of which the day nurseries and sanatorium stays or-

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<sup>36</sup> Between 1901 and 1903 alone already 104 strikes took place, not all of which, admittedly, were major ones. The most infamous strikes occurred in 1921, 1930 and 1931. See: J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Epoque à la résistance*, cit., pp. 42, 392-393.

<sup>37</sup> *Roubaix. Musées, Monuments, Promenades*, p. 38; J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Epoque à la résistance*, cit., p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> J. Piat, *Victor Provo, 1903-1983. Roubaix témoigne et accuse*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> *Roubaix. Musées, monuments, promenades*, cit., pp. 83-84.

ganized under Carrette also had to testify.<sup>40</sup> Due to poor housing and working conditions and malnourishment workers' families were ravaged by illnesses such as tuberculosis and diphtheria. Child mortality in these social environments was therefore very high. If this had aroused the concern and indignation of the previous administration and of industrial and Catholic do-gooders, in the spirit of those times, they did not immediately seem inclined to look for structural solutions. However, after France's defeat in the war against Prussia, the issue of health could not remain unaddressed, as not only the needs of individuals were at stake, but also the future strength of the race. Hence, parascholastic activities such as the «*cantines scolaires*» and the «*colonies de vacances*» were – even from an etymological viewpoint – intrinsically interconnected with militarism, eugenics and social hygiene.<sup>41</sup>

In this discursively charged atmosphere clerical and philanthropical initiatives, such as the «patronages» (Catholic youth groups that as of 1897 gathered on free afternoons and from 1903 onwards were expanded to include holiday camps run by priests and seminarians) and breast-feeding campaigns (set up by the «Comité Patronal» of local industrialists), competed with the day nurseries and sanatorium sojourns of the newly installed socialist administration. This rivalry would continue under Eugène Motte, who primarily defended the interests of the bourgeoisie, industrial patrons and the Catholic Church, and Jean Lebas, whose government heralded an all-embracing municipal politics of popular education, urban development, hygiene and social welfare. Although less grand when considered in proportion to the city population, the latter bore considerable resemblance to the programme conceived by Henri Sellier, mayor of Suresnes from 1919 to 1941, with whom Lebas would later cooperate in the Popular Front government of Léon Blum as Minister of Work.<sup>42</sup> Thus, in Roubaix too, the open-air school was just one link in a chain of socialist machinery. From a material viewpoint, it was part of a project that, in the frame of the 1919 Cordunet Act of urban embellishment was consigned to Jacques Gréber, who had made a name for himself in America and France as a landscape and urban architect and subsequently as a designer of health institutes.<sup>43</sup> The programme's scale was rather small, as the outline plan for Roubaix had already been chalked out in 1864 and the city had run out of space for

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>41</sup> Compare the contributions on Belgian, French, Italian and German open-air schools in A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (eds.), *Open-air schools. An educational and architectural venture in twentieth-century Europe*, cit.; and L. L. Downs, *Childhood in the promised land. Working class movements and the colonies de vacances in France (1880-1960)*, cit., p. 3. See also: R. Nye, *Crime, madness, and politics in Modern France: the medical concept of national decline*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Like Sellier, Lebas would operate on various political levels: as mayor, as councillor or president of the North department, as deputy in the Chamber or as Minister. Sellier was perhaps celebrated even more than Lebas for his realizations. See e.g.: H. E. Meller, *European cities, 1890-1930s. History, culture, and the built environment*, Chichester/New York, Wiley, 2001; P. G. Hall, *Cities of tomorrow. An intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*, Oxford/New York: Blackwell-Wiley, 2002; L. L. Downs, *Childhood in the promised land. Working class movements and the colonies de vacances in France (1880-1960)*, cit., pp. 114-145; and R.-H. Guérard and C. Moissinac, *Henri Sellier: Urbaniste et réformateur social*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g.: A. Lortie, *Jacques Gréber (1882-1962) et l'urbanisme. Le temps et l'espace de la ville* (2 vol.), Doctoral dissertation in Architecture, Université Paris XII Val-de-Marne, pp. 142-143; and P. Lavedan, *Jacques Gréber, 1882-1962*, «La Vie Urbaine», 1, 1963, p. 2.

ambitious plans.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, bureaucracy and financial obstacles did not improve matters, to which were added inflation and economic crisis during the 1920s and 1930s affecting Roubaix with its subsequent strikes (often supported by the council) perhaps more than other cities.

The municipality therefore had to settle for the implantation of a housing estate called «Nouveau Roubaix» and a number of individual houses,<sup>45</sup> a public swimming pool that was to replace the rather poorly attended «école de natation» built around 1880,<sup>46</sup> and a sports park that would be situated on a 23 hectare site at the outskirts of town bordering on the territory of Lys-lez-Lannoy, in an area called Pont-Rouge, reputed to be ideally ventilated by pure air of the surrounding fields. The creation of the sports centre, like the other projects, had already been decided before the outbreak of World War I.<sup>47</sup> However, the latter shifted the focus of attention to more urgent deprivations from which the population suffered. Food provisioning became a central issue that was dealt with, for instance, via a local provisioning committee that served soup free of charge to the city's indigent population («soupes populaires»). At the same time, an «anti-tuberculous preventorium» was organized that separated adults suspected of being infected from their relatives, subjected their children to daily observation and offered them special care.<sup>48</sup> In the months following the liberation modest rations of meat and other foodstuffs were supplied, among which were 10,000 litres of wine, something without which the people had been forced to get along for four long years.<sup>49</sup>

In the meanwhile, the city reopened the school canteens, as well as the public baths it had installed in the *rue de Longues Haies* and the *rue de Rome* in 1897 and 1911, as the baths and swimming pool of the *rue Pierre Motte* set up in 1894 served primarily for the middle and upper classes.<sup>50</sup> Physical education complemented the action, for which special monitors of the «Centre de culture physique» of Lille were seconded to initiate all pupils of the municipal schools in open-air

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<sup>44</sup> Roubaix. *Musées, monuments, promenades*, cit., p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> In a session proceeding of October 1920 the city approved the creation of a low-cost housing office to this end, the «Office Public Municipal d'Habitations à Bon Marché». See: *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> T. Delattre, J.-P. Popelier and P. Waret, *Roubaix. Memoire en images*, cit. p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> The first «établissement de bains-douches» of the *rue Saint-Antoine* dated from 1862. They were in conformity with the hygienic concerns of Napoleon III, who passed a law in 1850 aiming to popularize public hygiene. The «bains roubaisiens» of *rue Pierre Motte* served in both World War I and II as a prison for hostages and members of the resistance. See: P. Waret and J.-P. Popelier, *Roubaix. Ville de sport*, Saint-Cyr-Sur-Loire, Alan Sutton, 2004, pp. 24, 25, 27; and C. Fouret, *Air et eau* (series: *Aux sources de l'histoire du Nord, Dossiers pédagogiques des archives départementales du Nord*), Villeneuve d'Ascq, Ravet-Anceau, 2008, s.p.

respiratory gymnastics on a daily basis as part of a «new, scientific, methodical and rational education».<sup>51</sup> As soon as the most urgent needs were fulfilled, the city also picked up the thread of its sports park project and in 1919 started equipping the terrains it possessed with provisional football fields and a running track.<sup>52</sup> After the summer of 1920 when Dupré had improvised a first holiday camp there, equipped with two large «Bessoneau» (military) tents, the city council in November 1920 decided to extend and intensify its action. According to Jean Piat, the socialists had demanded such a centre since February 1907 but at the time their request had fallen on deaf ears. The then mayor, Eugène Motte, had been keener on installing military facilities at Pont-Rouge. The government, however, probably in the person of Minister of War Georges Picquart, blew the whistle on him.<sup>53</sup>

Be this as it may, the holiday camp was presented as a necessary measure to prevent working-class children from being affected by the «social plague» of tuberculosis and joining Roubaix's already substantial group of «social misfits».<sup>54</sup> Thus, over 6000 school children were brought to Pont-Rouge – the youngest by trams – by their teachers to enjoy (or endure) a regime of a «well conceived» physical education.<sup>55</sup> The latter included first and foremost games of all sorts: football, tennis, cricket, basketball or play on roundabouts, seesaws etc., intended to attract as many children to the holiday camp as possible. Secondly, a «whole new athletic and sportive education» was offered,<sup>56</sup> at least for those for whom it was not contraindicated. Occasionally, this resulted in competitions for which prizes were awarded. Those who performed best were referred to local sport clubs, among which were perhaps «La Roubaisienne», «L' Ancienne» or the militantly working-class «Sport Ouvrier Roubaisien».<sup>57</sup> Thirdly, excursions in the vicinity of the domain took place, with flags, drums and trumpets in front. Finally, for a few hours per week each group, divided by seniority, went swimming, probably in the swim-

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<sup>51</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 6-7. Intrinsicly connected to this centre of physical education were Albert Debeyre, a professor at the Academy of Medicine, and Pierre Capra, then inspector of the North Academy of Education. See: C. Fouret, *L'Échappée sportive. Sport, gymnastique et éducation physique dans le Nord. Du Moyen Âge à 1945*, Lille, Archives Départementales du Nord, pp. 86-88; and C. Fouret, *Air et eau*, cit., s.p.

<sup>52</sup> P. Waret and J.-P. Popelier, *Roubaix de a à z*, cit., p. 166.

<sup>53</sup> J. Piat, *Jean Lebas. De la Belle Epoque à la résistance*, cit., pp. 63, 95, 404.

<sup>54</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 6. See also: Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. Année 1921*, Lille, Imprimerie Ouvrière Administrative et Commerciale, 1931, pp. 835-836, which speaks of the open-air school as «un nouveau moyen de se défendre contre les fléaux sociaux»; and «Roubaix, 1926», Roubaix, Chevallier, s.d., s.p., which terms tuberculosis as an «illness of the poor» and a «plague worse than the war».

<sup>55</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 9-12.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> The former two were founded at the end of the nineteenth century; the latter at the beginning of the twentieth century. See: P. Waret and J.-P. Popelier, *Roubaix. Ville de sport*, cit., pp. 50-51.

ming school near the canal. Apart from that «appropriate talk», intended as moral education, was held.<sup>58</sup>

For those pupils who at the end of the school year obtained their «Certificat d'études primaires» – the only diploma to which most working-class children could aspire – yearly sea trips were also organized by the school office («bureau des écoles»), which were often attended by members of the municipal administration like Dupré.<sup>59</sup> *Journal de Roubaix*, the most read but distinctly centre-right and pro-Catholic and pro-industrial newspaper, critically observed such events. It rather reported about the «patronages» that coincidentally in the same summer of 1920, had started organizing themselves in a federation, which first included 16 Catholic youth clubs and later 25. The latter claimed to cater for at least as many children as the municipal holiday camps and to offer, moreover, the only «true» moral education, which it also disseminated through an advertising leaflet called «Nos patros». <sup>60</sup> Probably in reaction to this, a similar leaflet about the municipal holiday camps, called «Pont-Rouge», would appear. <sup>61</sup>

#### 4. The open-air school(s) of Pont-Rouge

##### 4.1. First years of operation (1921-1926)

As in the case of other open-air schools like that of «Diesterweg» in Kalmthout or «Trotter» in Milan,<sup>62</sup> the official story was that after a trial period (in this case of two years) it was «proven» necessary to allow the most «needy» (la-

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<sup>58</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 10-12. For more information on the holiday camp, see: *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., pp. 295-296; *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix pendant les Années 1931 à 1933 Inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille, O.S.A.P., 1934, pp. 226-227; *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix pendant l'année 1934. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille, O.S.A.P., 1935, pp. 198-199; *Rapport sur l'administration* [1936], pp. 202-203; *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix pendant l'année 1936. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille, O.S.A.P., 1937, pp. 202-203; *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix pendant l'année 1937. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille: O.S.A.P., 1938; pp. 204-205; *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix Pendant l'année 1938. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, Lille, O.S.A.P., 1939, pp. 211-212.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g.: «*Journal de Roubaix*», Friday 30 July 1920, p. 2. In the summer of 1920 487 children enjoyed this treat.

<sup>60</sup> Compare, e.g.: «*Journal de Roubaix*», Sunday 22 August 1920, p. 3; «*Journal de Roubaix*», Thursday 2 September 1920, p. 2; «*Journal de Roubaix*», Thursday 7 July 1921, p. 2; «*Journal de Roubaix*», Thursday 4 August 1921, p. 3; «*Journal de Roubaix*», Sunday 30 July 1922, p. 2; «*Journal de Roubaix*», Friday 18 August 1922, p. 3; and «*Journal de Roubaix*», Monday 6 September 1926, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g.: «Pont-Rouge. Journal du Camp Municipal de Vacances de Roubaix», 1, 1951 (Archives Municipales de Roubaix (henceforth AMR), Inventory Sous-Serie IV M, a.e.).

<sup>62</sup> See: G. Thyssen, *New Education Within an Architectural Icon? A Case Study of a Milanese Open-Air School (1922-1977)*, «*History of Education & Children's Literature*» 4/1, pp. 243-266.

belled as «latently tuberculous», «anaemic and meagre», or «apathetic and suffering from tracheo-bronchial adenopathy») the benefit of a longer stay than just some Thursday afternoons or weeks during the holidays, as well as more «substantial nourishment» and «scientifically conceived physical education», a «more rigorous hygiene» and a «stricter surveillance».<sup>63</sup> Thus, in June 1921 the tents of the holiday camp at Pont-Rouge were hastily organized as class rooms – five for boys, and five for girls – but they would soon be replaced by discarded military barracks, after a fierce summer storm had blown them away. In total five barracks each measuring 10 by 60 metres were installed; three of them lodged a kitchen, a refectory, and a cinema, the latter of which in bad weather was turned into a gymnasium. The other two barracks were opened from the south side and subdivided into class rooms with partitions.<sup>64</sup> It was mentioned with some pride that the classrooms contained the same school furniture as in the city's regular schools, including wall charts.<sup>65</sup> A rabbitry, dovecote and goat pen, intended to be used for «practical demonstrations» of hygienic upbringing of animals and experiences in selling animal food products completed the installations.<sup>66</sup> If it was, perhaps, intended to equip the school with a swimming pool, as *Journal de Roubaix* seemed to suggest, it was never actually realized.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Compare L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 16; and Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1923*, Roubaix, Foconié, s.d., pp. 782, 784. Dupré, like many doctors at the time, knowing that TB was caused by a bacterial infection still believed that some children – especially working class children – had a hereditary predisposition toward tuberculosis. Diagnosis, moreover, still depended largely on doctors' personal assessments of children's health on the basis of such outward signs. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. Année 1921*, cit., p. 836; and *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., p. 288.

<sup>65</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> See: «Journal de Roubaix», Thursday 24 August 1922, p. 2; and «Journal de Roubaix», Friday 27 August 1926, p. 2.



Fig. 1. [Léandre Dupré, *L'Oeuvre Antituberculeuse Scolaire*, 1922, p. 17].

The school's target groups were selected twice a year – in September and March – by medical school inspectors who probably recruited actively only in the city's public primary schools. Nevertheless, children from free schools, if they were presented by doctors or parents themselves and proved to meet the criteria, were unlikely to be refused, contrary to what some hinted at. At least in the beginning, the school was occasionally accused of excluding children whose sole shortcoming consisted in having Catholic parents, yet they were tax payers like all citizens of Roubaix, as *Journal de Roubaix* would have it.<sup>68</sup> However, discourse that enabled rhetoric promoting 'the regeneration of the race' did not allow for too harsh criticism. When it came to children's health, ideological differences were thus gradually concealed with the cloak of charity, at least to some extent. Incidentally, the target groups neither included «children with advanced tuberculosis», otherwise «contagious pupils», nor – at least at this stage – «the abnormal».<sup>69</sup>

As the open-air school was first and foremost considered as an instrument of health, children were subjected to an arsenal of medical and hygienic interventions. Of each child a health booklet («carnet sanitaire») was compiled that assembled data with regard to their age, weight, length, case history, eventual results obtained at the holiday camp, etc., to which were added reports made by dispensary nurses about the family's «hereditary disposition», «potential contagiousness», housing

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<sup>68</sup> Compare: «Journal de Roubaix», Thursday 7 July 1921, p. 2; and «Journal de Roubaix», Saturday 7 January 1922, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 19.

conditions and economic status.<sup>70</sup> In the booklet it was furthermore indicated whether sessions such as «radiotherapy» (exposure to ultra violet rays) were required on top of the usual treatments of «heliotherapy» (meticulously dosed sunbaths). Incidentally, in May 1923 an experiment was made with a «special medicinal treatment» by Professors Letulle and Petit, two members of the Paris Academy of Medicine. Forty of the school's pupils thereby served, willingly or not, as guinea pigs. After two months, the doctors were conducted to the school accompanied by Dupré, a local pharmacist and a Maecenas to establish the effects of the drug that, if deemed satisfactory, would be distributed by the city's Dispensaries. Apparently the experiment was succesful; however, no further reports of it were encountered.<sup>71</sup>

Apart from the medical apparatus, a more broadly conceived hygiene programme was imposed on the children. Upon their arrival, each child's state of cleanliness was inspected, after which it had to undress and put on a uniform.<sup>72</sup> In addition, children had to wash their hands and face regularly, and at least once a day brush their teeth and wash their entire body. As the school originally possessed only rudimentary showers, they were conducted to an apposite bathhouse once a week.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, they were offered a carefully balanced diet (including buttered bread and drinking chocolate in the morning, a copious lunch made up of vegetables, fish or meat, pasta or potatoes and diluted wine at noon, and bread, marmalade and grenadine in the afternoon) complemented, if needed, by a blood enforcing serum («sérum hémopoïtique») produced at the city's hygiene laboratory.<sup>74</sup> Physical exercise, moreover, occupied quite some time of the school's timetable, for instance, in the form of play, gymnastics and manual instruction, consisting of gardening for the boys and domestic science for the girls.<sup>75</sup> As a former pupil of the school later recalled, meals were sometimes coupled with intellectual activities. At lunch recitations were held, and at breakfast one or two children by turns had to drill verses into their classmates' heads, for instance, of fables like «La Fontaine» that would most probably have been stripped of references to religion.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> «Journal de Roubaix», Friday 13 July 1923, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> See: [J. Piat,] *Mes Écoles*, «Nord Éclair», Sunday 24 and Monday 25 May 1981, p. 8. «Croix du Nord» fiercely criticized the practice of cleaning up such fables. See: «Croix du Nord», Wednesday 28 September 1921, p. 1 For a copy of *La Fontaine*, see e.g.: N. R. Shapiro, J. de La Fontaine and A. J. Robinson, *Fifty Fables of La Fontaine*, Illinois, Illinois University Press, 1997.



Fig. 2. Léandre Dupré, *L'Oeuvre Antituberculeuse Scolaire*, 1922, p. 33.

In terms of educational methods (and related features), it was claimed that the school provided an environment that stimulated «the child's instinct of freedom» while adopting a «modern educational programme» that encouraged the child's observation skills, formed its «spirit» and «character» and developed its ability to judge and reason «healthily» (read: non-religiously).<sup>77</sup> Education was said to be livelier, more concrete and therefore easier and more attractive, which was particularly required for the «weakly», whose attention span was «naturally» more limited. Cinema, the modern carrier of enlightenment, occupied a prominent position in this programme. The «slow motion mode», in particular, proved to be a handy feature: it allowed children, after some explanation, to imitate the movements unrolled before their eyes in the open air and under surveillance of physical education monitors. On this and other occasions, they «learned by doing» – a casual reference to Dewey? – while «teachers did not teach but guided, if needed», thus stimulating «personal initiative», «sense of responsibility» and «the habit of order, and a set of general and universally accepted principles, such as the love of what's good, beautiful and true», which constituted the «rational basis of [...] lay morality».<sup>78</sup> The latter clearly indicates that the open-air school, like all open-air schools, was not just a preventative but perhaps at least as much a political instrument.

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<sup>77</sup> Compare L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 18, 26 ; and *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., p. 291.

<sup>78</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 18, 26-27, 32-34.

However hygienic and experimental the school's programme was, it was insisted that «the regular studies proceed[ed] normally»<sup>79</sup> The results of this were believed to be conclusive from a physical, intellectual and moral perspective. A true «restoration of the race» unfolded at Pont-Rouge, thereby demonstrating that the open-air school was a genuine «breeding ground where the human plant could retrieve all its virility, energy and elasticity».<sup>80</sup> Children were also reported to have become «calmer, more docile, in one word more suited for school life.»<sup>81</sup> Whether the children, in fact, all adapted easily to the school's regime, as was contended and at the end of their three, six, or twelve month (and sometimes even more extended) stay indeed ended up showing remarkable «exuberance» and «gaiety»,<sup>82</sup> is far from certain. Similarly, it remains to be seen whether the hygienic principles put into practice on a daily basis, were indeed internalized to «a real need, love itself of hygiene», and whether girls and boys actually «acquired a taste» for sewing and gardening, respectively, that outlasted the somewhat competitive system of rewards given, for instance, to pupils who had best cultivated their personal garden lot.<sup>83</sup> The only written testimony found with regard to this time period suggests that at least some pupils came to like certain aspects of the school influenced by such people as Victor Sengier, the school's first principal, and apparently «both a father and an educator».<sup>84</sup>

Yet, for all the satisfaction that the programme brought and however hygienically the school's barracks – chiefly furnished with second hand equipment – may have been organized, the experience could not come up to the socialists' wish to be seen as the perfect example for others. Therefore, on 30 December 1921 the municipality decided to build a more permanent open-air school – or actually two, each of which governed by a separate principal –<sup>85</sup> as co-education in the strict sense of the word, remained unthinkable in France up until the late 1960s, not just in Catholic schools, but in virtually all except nursery schools. The plans for the new building were drawn up by the aforementioned Jacques Gréber and, according

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<sup>79</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. Année 1921*, cit., p. 834.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 834-835.

<sup>81</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1923*, cit., p. 785.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*; and L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>83</sup> L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., pp. 27, 32-34.

<sup>84</sup> [J. Piat.] *Mes Écoles*, cit., p. 8. Articles in the pre-war newspaper, «Journal de Roubaix», refer to him as Victor Sangier. The first female school principal seems to have been a Miss Pesière. The following two school principals were most likely Louis Mahu (1877-1946) and his wife (whose name was not encountered). Louis Mahu also ran the city's school canteens in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. Incidentally, he was Jean Piat's uncle. Other school principals were probably Messrs Maniette, (Charles) Bouckenooghe, Miannay, Fourage and (Claude) Cap. Compare: «Journal de Roubaix», Monday 25 September 1922, p. 2; «Journal de Roubaix», Friday 13 July 1923, p. 2; «Journal de Roubaix», Wednesday 24 September 1923, p. 3; «Nord Éclair», Wednesday 1 August 1956, p. 6; «Nord Éclair», Wednesday 26 July 1961, p. 6; «Nord Éclair», Wednesday and Thursday 27 and 28 August 1961, p. 6; «Nord Éclair», Friday 1 Oktober 1981, p. 10; J. Piat, *Victor Provo, 1903-1983. Roubaix témoigne et accuse*, cit., p. 18; and Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. Année 1921*, cit., p. 836.

to André Lorie, were inspired by Tony Garnier's 1917 project of a «French-American» sanatorium for the city of Lyons, which was, however, never realized. As Grégory Vallot points out, they showed great resemblance to Gréber's earlier plans of a hospital in Grange-Blanche built in 1933, as well. It was on the basis of Gréber's experience in this field and his participation at a building competition organized in Lille, that he was selected.<sup>86</sup>

The first plans were designed between August 1922 and October 1923 and adapted on 28 February 1924 and 3 March 1925, according to decisions and suggestions by the city council and the Minister of Public Instruction, respectively.<sup>87</sup> The former abandoned the idea of a sickbay and isolation rooms on the first floor of the main building, the project of a pavilion for domestic science education and for manual instruction in the girls' and boys' school respectively, as well as the whole second story intended to accommodate dormitories. Thus the initial plan to equip the school with a boarding facility did not go through.<sup>88</sup> The new buildings were to be constructed on land belonging to the hospices of Roubaix that were held on lease by the «Espierre» farm. Obtaining it did not go smoothly, as it was still cultivated by a certain Alfred Dubois, who – after various unsatisfactory estimates – ended up filing (and losing) a lawsuit against the city over the level of compensation to which he was entitled.<sup>89</sup> Incidentally, the school was built partly with American money.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal*. 1923, cit., p. 787; A. Lortie, *Jacques Gréber (1882-1962) et l'urbanisme. Le temps et l'espace de la ville*, p. 212; and G. Vallot, *L'École du Pont Rouge à Roubaix (1931). Une Conception Particulière de l'École de Plein Air* (vol. 1), Term paper in architecture, École d'Architecture de Versailles, 2000, pp. 23, 30.

<sup>87</sup> See: J. Gréber, *Ville de Roubaix. Avant-projet d'école-préventorium, plan du rez-de-chaussée*, Paris, 1922 (Archives Départementales de Lille (henceforth ADL), file X210, signature 77311). Several plans of 1922, 1923 and 1924 (the latter concerning primarily the sports centre) are to be found in this file.

<sup>88</sup> Compare: Ville de Roubaix, *École de plein air. 2<sup>e</sup> additif au devis descriptif, en conformité avec les corrections apportée aux plans, suivant la décision du conseil municipal de Roubaix*, 8 February 1924 (intended as an annex to the Council meeting of 26 March 1924)(ADL, file X210, signature 77311); and L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>89</sup> Compare: Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 25 Février 1927* (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air). and Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 1 Juin 1927* (*Ibid.*).

<sup>90</sup> Most part of the funds were provided by the Ministry of Hygiene, the Ministry of Public Instruction and the city of Roubaix. The sum of 250,000 francs was provided through the organisation «L'École pour l'École» by a certain Mrs. Sartoris, a «generous Maecenas» who had been «so kind to remember the little corner of Flanders in which she was born». In a letter from «L'École pour l'École» to Jean Lebas the «French Restoration Fund» is mentioned as the source of supply. Possibly, Mrs. Sartoris was associated to this fund. Incidentally, it was first announced that she had appointed 500,000 francs, an amount that was later halved. Compare: L. Dupré, *L'Oeuvre antituberculeuse scolaire à Roubaix*, cit., p. 21; «Journal de Roubaix», Wednesday 12 July 1922, p. 2; and «Journal de Roubaix», Friday 23 November 1923, p. 2; Letter, From G. Couloz, vice president of «L'École pour l'École» to the Maire of Roubaix, Paris, 26 February 1924 (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air). Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 21 Mars 1924*. (*Ibid.*); Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 21 Mars 1924*. (*Ibid.*); Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 17 Avril 1925*. (*Ibid.*); Ville de Roubaix, *Ecole de plein air. Aliénation de deux parcelles de terrain en bordure de la voie d'accès. Cahier des charges, 10 janvier 1928* (*Ibid.*); and Letter, From M. Jouvenau the Prefect of the North Department, Lille, le 13 Janvier 1930 (ADL, file X210, signature 77311).

#### 4.2. A school for “backward” children (1926-1955)

In one other important way the school entered a new phase after its first years of operation. In its meeting of 17 April 1925 the city council had decided to request the school’s recognition by the Minister of Public Education and Fine Arts as a special school for «backward children» («établissement communal de perfectionnement pour enfants arriérés»), like the prefect of the North Department had suggested in a letter of 25 February that year. It was not only felt that the open-air school indeed fitted the criteria of the 15 April 1909 Act that allowed for the creation of special education classes annexed to elementary schools as well as autonomous special schools for (either) «backward» or «abnormal» children. This recognition, moreover, would be accompanied by significantly higher subsidies, which were useful, given the fact that the costs had increased beyond the council’s earlier expectations. By the ministerial decree of 15 March 1926 the school was indeed recognized as such, retrospectively as of January 1926.<sup>91</sup>

As of October 1927, the new buildings were eventually occupied, even though the school was still far from completed. Incidentally, the school’s workmanship would be criticized in the years following the Second World War. As an engineer had established that the school had been constructed on poorly drained ground, a communist council member suspected the architect and former administration of incompetence and suggested that unacceptably low paid outsourcing had occurred; a «bitter reproach» that was refuted by Dupré and other council members. During the war the school had suffered from its occupation by the French, German and English armies and due to more urgent concerns and lack of resources could no longer be maintained.<sup>92</sup> The school, in each case, had been inaugurated twenty years earlier, on 14 July 1928. Although praised by its adherents as the most modern and beautiful open-air school in France, architecturally, it was a hybrid: it had both innovative and conservative features, including a radical division into two sections, one for each sex.

More innovative features could be found in the school’s classrooms, which were larger than the (1887) regulations prescribed and the conception of the showers (later becoming a national heritage) whose mere presence could be regarded as a sort of novelty.<sup>93</sup> Incidentally, the shower ritual was minutely timed and orches-

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<sup>91</sup> See: Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 17 Avril 1925* (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air); and Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 26 Mars 1926* (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air). In subsequent council meetings the school would be referred to as an «open-air school and perfecting school for backward children», although in reality no distinction was made whatsoever. It was a pure formality. Compare: Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal 1927*, Roubaix, Boittiaux & Delplace, s.d.

<sup>92</sup> See: Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1948*, Roubaix, Boittiaux, s.d., pp. 1018-1024; and Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal. Séance du 4 octobre 1948* (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air).

<sup>93</sup> Compare: G. Vallot, *L’École du Pont Rouge à Roubaix (1931). Une conception particulière de l’école de plein air* (vol. 1), cit., pp. 2, 25-29.

trated: the 90 cabins were used in such a way that while 30 children were showering, 30 children were undressing themselves or being helped in that by the «dames de service», while 30 other children were already re-dressing themselves. A child was intended to pass through the whole stage in 12 minutes flat.<sup>94</sup> A better example of how it was attempted to «school» children's bodies could hardly be found.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the presence alone of rooms especially equipped for «radiotherapy» and «remedial gymnastics» could perhaps be seen as an innovation. Other than that, however, the school seems to have differed in nothing from «regular» schools whose architectural conception, incidentally, was changing also in respect of the regulations dating from the end of the nineteenth century, as a socialist propaganda film of the municipality (made between 1939 and 1945) demonstrated.<sup>96</sup>

The question then arises as to whether the education offered at Pont-Rouge was equally hybrid? It was suggested that the school's environment represented all «space [and] open air», and that thus «naturally» a different kind of discipline installed itself there that was «liberal», «voluntary», «spontaneous» and «affective» and therefore «tempered the child's caprices and the youngster's impetuosities».<sup>97</sup> In this «laboratory of new theories», it was contended, «one did not impose oneself» but «engaged» the children.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, it was pointed out that a more «individualized» or «personalized» approach was adopted than in regular schools, not in the least because children were not by definition subdivided into classes according to their age but in accordance with their abilities established by tests upon their arrival. Nevertheless, the usual (official) school curriculum seems to have been followed as closely as possible.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the school prided itself on the fact that, while there were pupils who apprenticed themselves to someone after their stay at Pont-Rouge, a considerable number of them also were admitted to the exam for the «certificat d'études», which proved they had not learnt any less at the open-air school than they would have elsewhere.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. Vallot in turn cites: E. de Pomiane, L'hygiène infantile dans une école de plein air, «*l'Hygiène par L'Exemple*», 6, 1937.

<sup>95</sup> D. Kirk, *Schooling bodies: school practice and public discourse, 1880-1950*, London, Leicester University Press, 1998.

<sup>96</sup> [E. Rombeau and J. Piat,] *Rythmes et Lumières, 1939-1945* (Médiathèque de Roubaix, Service du Patrimoine, signature I Patrim A 28).

<sup>97</sup> *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., pp. 291-292.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*; and Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>100</sup> *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Roubaix de 1914 à 1930 inclus. Présenté par le M. Le Maire au conseil municipal*, cit., pp. 291-292.

Visual images of the school, including the above-mentioned film, do not contain any representations that suggest children learned any differently from usual;<sup>101</sup> they seem to have been taught according to the regular system of «frontal» education. Even if it were true, as Vallot suggests, that the children were taught in turns outside (right below) the classrooms,<sup>102</sup> the little evidence available indicates that the typical «school culture» and «materialities of schooling» characterized the teaching and learning process.<sup>103</sup> Insofar as the school gradually adopted other methods, such as a type of Freinet system, it did so in a «veiled» form, as the school inspection did not allow them to be fully stretched.<sup>104</sup> Thus, even if the school indeed possessed its own printing press and pupils to some extent assembled their school textbooks, etc., such programmes probably never reached the scale at which it was applied in open-air schools like «Casa del Sole» (Trotter) in Milan, and perhaps that of Suresnes in France.

#### 4.3. *An institute for «deficient» and «retarded» children (1955-1978)*

For lack of sources and works as well as oral testimonies with regard to the latter period of the school's existence, it is difficult to make decisive conclusions. Yet, while no fundamentally new educational methods seem to have been developed at the school of Pont-Rouge, this neither excludes that more attention was given to subjects that at least initially were rather neglected within regular schools (notably, physical education and practices such as gardening, the latter of which had to keep future workmen out of pubs),<sup>105</sup> nor that over time some significant changes could have affected the school's working. What is evident is that the school went through series of changes from the mid 1950s onwards. In 1955, indeed, the open-air school was equipped with a (higher) nursery school class («classe d'adaptation») and – more importantly – with four additional classes («classes the perfectionnement») for «retarded» children («enfants retardés», «des attardés»). The latter differed from the «backward» («weakly», «pre-tubercular») children who already populated the school and similar «physically deficient» ones (having problems of the spine, for instance) who had come to join them, in that they were «mentally deficient».<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> See also the photographs of Roger Poulain, *Écoles* (vol. 2). Paris: Vincent et Freal, 1931-1933, reproduced in the following works: Anne-Marie Châtelet (Ed.) *Les écoles de plein air. Génèse d'une certaine modernité*, Paris, 2001 (Proceedings to the International and Interdisciplinary Conference held at the Sorbonne in the same year); and G. Vallot, *L'École du Pont Rouge à Roubaix (1931). Une conception particulière de l'école de plein air* (vol. 2), cit., p. 27

<sup>102</sup> G. Vallot, *L'École du Pont Rouge à Roubaix (1931). Une conception particulière de l'école de plein air* [vol. 1], cit., p. 28. No evidence was found that could substantiate this claim.

<sup>103</sup> M. Lawn and I. Grosvenor, *Materialities of schooling. Design, technology, objects, routines*, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2005.

<sup>104</sup> Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>105</sup> C. Fouret, *Air et eau*, cit., s.p.

<sup>106</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1954*, Roubaix, Verschave, s.d., pp. 860-861, 1015-1016.

The «Centre Dupré», as the school was often called, henceforth consisted of twelve classes for the regular open-air school (six for boys, six for girls), one (mixed) nursery school class, and four classes (again divided evenly among both sexes) for children with «mental behaviour problems». The latter were seen as annexes to the open-air school that shortly after the War had also been endowed with a special physical re-education centre («centre de rééducation physique», later: «centre d'éducation physique spécialisé»), for which physical educators were appointed who provided «methodic gymnastics» – apparently needed particularly for girls – and later also physiotherapist and speech therapists.<sup>107</sup> The change of target groups and the new, «delicate» task of guidance were welcomed by the staff, perhaps in part because the initial target groups were depleting due to increased vaccination and new antibiotics against TB.<sup>108</sup>

The rare accounts providing insight into how the «open-air school» and the (annexed) «special school» for children with intellectual impairments functioned indicate that the two sections of Pont-Rouge indeed operated quite autonomously. The children of the «classes de perfectionnement» were not integrated in the regular open-air school. School time tables were organized as to prevent the «psychologically» weak from mingling with the «physiologically» weak as it was wished to avoid unwanted aggression on the part of the former towards the latter.<sup>109</sup> With respect to the programme for the «open-air school classes» nothing much seems to have altered, other than that they too were provided a more intensified and specialized medical-pedagogical regime including corrective gymnastics for pupils with spinal problems and psycho-motor training for those with a poor sense of balance, orientation, etc. The main difference between the open-air school and other schools was situated precisely in this increased medical-pedagogical guidance.<sup>110</sup> As far as the «mentally retarded» are concerned, it was already considered 'quite something' that they were educated to at least «some level», so that they could later find a job «in accordance with their abilities».<sup>111</sup> For them no «therapy» was used but a «special education method, made of gentleness, patience, observation – and to be quite honest – devotion against all testing».<sup>112</sup>

#### 4.4. *Decline of unpopular education? (1978-1983)*

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<sup>107</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil municipal, séance du 1 Juni 1951*. (AMR, File IV M.a.f., n° 1, (1921-1961), Groupe Scolaire du Plein Air); and Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The centre fell under the competence of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry (and hence the Departmental Service) of Youth and Sport. Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1957*, Roubaix, Verschave, s.d., p. 411.

<sup>108</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1955*, Roubaix, Verschave, s.d., p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> «Nord Éclair», Thursday 28 December 1961, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

If, in 1948, the school of Pont-Rouge was still deemed «an absolute necessity», exactly thirty years later this was no longer the case.<sup>113</sup> Like the few new open-air schools set up in France after the Second World War, notably in Dijon and Strasbourg that ended up catering for «visually defective» pupils, «chronically ill» ones, children with «unstable forms of epilepsy», «hearing and language problems», «motor disabilities» and «adjustment problems», the open-air school(s) of Pont-Rouge no longer recruited just the «delicate» or «culturally deprived».<sup>114</sup> It seems that particularly by annexing classes for the «mentally retarded» it took in a Trojan horse.<sup>115</sup> Around the 1960s and 1970s, indeed, discourse favouring the «integration» of pupils in the «normal school environment» sounded the death-knell for the school. It was now suspected of representing just another «ghetto» in which pupils were restrained.<sup>116</sup> To this was added a decreasing number of pupils from the original target groups that attended the institute, as well as (perhaps in part self-)imposed restrictions in terms of child admission. Thus, the teacher-pupil ratio – in other words, the cost-benefit ratio – dropped below acceptable levels. It was probably also for this reason that the open-air school of Pont-Rouge gradually ceased to exist. As of the school year of 1978-1979 six of its (by then only twelve remaining) classes were abandoned, and in the first half of the 1980s the whole school was closed.

## 5. Discussion

Even if other schools like it, however «specially» conceived they may have been, had been recognized as regular schools (as confirmed by the Ministerial circulars of 29 May 1953 and 16 January 1957) and had not needed to be genuine «special education institutes» (falling under Special Education Acts), they inevitably became entangled with the special education system in their search for new target groups «needy» of specialized medical-pedagogical care. Evidence of this provides the 17 March 1975 circular of the then Minister of Education, René

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<sup>113</sup> Compare : Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1948*, cit., p. 1019 ; Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1978*, Roubaix, Verschave, s.d., pp. 171, 382-384.

<sup>114</sup> Even a son of Victor Provo, suffering from spinal problems, is said to have attended the school. Interviews with C.G.M., Roubaix, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>115</sup> D. Lerch, *Que sont les écoles de plein air devenues? Leur évolution en France après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale / What became of the open-air schools? Their development in France after [the] Second World War*, in A.-M. Châtelet, D. Lerch, J.-N. Luc (eds.), *Open-air schools. An educational and architectural venture in twentieth-century Europe*, cit., pp. 391-394, 398-399.

<sup>116</sup> Ville de Roubaix, *Bulletin communal. 1978*, cit., p. 384.

Haby.<sup>117</sup> Thus, it was perhaps, not in spite of, but at least partly because of the fact that open-air schools in France were recognized by the then Minister of National Education «not only as places for children with [latent] tuberculosis but for all “with a physical impairment”», just before the Second World War, and would later also recruit those with other impairments, that several open-air schools would come to be closed by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>118</sup> They seem to have developed from symbols of freedom (as proclaimed alternatives to the existing restrictive «barracks schools») to symbols of restriction and detention in their own. Instead of gateways to prosperity, they became areas of solitary confinement – or at least started to be perceived as such.

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<sup>117</sup> D. Lerch, *Que sont les écoles de plein air devenues? Leur évolution en France après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale / What became of the open-air schools? Their development in France after [the] Second World War*, pp. 391-394, 398-399. However, the circular of 1975, after all, clearly states at the end: «Il est à peine nécessaire de souligner que cette *forme d'éducation spéciale* se caractérise essentiellement par une accentuation de moyens et de précautions qui ne doivent pas être absents des écoles ordinaires. [...] [Il ne faut d'ailleurs pas] oublier le rôle toujours actuel de cette structure dans la prise en charge temporaire d'enfants qui, à défaut, devraient être maintenus en milieu hospitalier ou à leur domicile. C'est pourquoi il importait d'actualiser les directives données à leur sujet et de souligner par une unification des modes de recrutement, *l'étroite cohésion qui doit exister entre toutes les structures d'éducation spéciale.*» (Italics supplied by the author). See: [http://daniel.calin.free.fr/textoff/ecoles\\_plein\\_air\\_1975.html](http://daniel.calin.free.fr/textoff/ecoles_plein_air_1975.html) (accessed: May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

<sup>118</sup> The same happened to other schools like Pont-Rouge in the North Department. This is in contradiction with what Châtelet has suggested. See: A.-M. Châtelet, *Des idées aux bâtiments: l'essor des écoles de plein air en France (1907-1940) / From ideas to buildings: the rise of open-air schools in France (1907-1940)*, cit., pp. 182, 189.

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