

■ **Women and children too
Or the right to be represented by the family vote
Virginie by Luca Barrusse**

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ARTICLE

“The ballot paper is our only weapon, but an all-powerful weapon in a democracy. »

— Captain Mayor, president of the People's League of Fathers and Mothers of Large Families, 1910.

“There are 39 million inhabitants in France and 12 million voters. On the one hand, single people and fathers with no more than two children number 8.5 million. They represent 16 million French people. When they vote, they each represent two people. On the other hand, fathers with three or more children number 3.5 million. They represent 23 million French people. When they vote, they each represent six people [...]. FATHERS MUST HAVE A NUMBER OF VOTES IN THE ELECTIONS IN RELATION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR SOCIAL ROLE” ^[1]. Published by the central committee of the leagues of large families in November 1917, this leaflet puts into perspective a mode of use of demographic indicators – the composition of families – in the political argument which aims to legitimize the family vote. This mode of suffrage consists in giving one or more additional votes to the heads of families so that the families, “basic cells of society”, weigh more in the electoral balance.

Here, we examine the question at the time when the debate was most heated, that is to say from the 1910s to the end of the 1920s. the desire to push the law of numbers to the extreme ^[2]. At its origin, in fact, the family vote was demanded by the opponents of the new electoral practice. On July 31, 1871, Baron de Jouvenel tabled a bill in favor of family

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voting, which he opposed to universal suffrage. Supported by legitimist conservative circles, the project was clarified by the Marquis de Douhet: the legitimately married father would deposit in the ballot box a number of ballots equal to the number of his children, to which would be added that of his wife and his own. Discredited by the conservatism that emanated from it, the project was rejected by the Assembly. It is especially from the end of the XIXth century, especially after 1892, when Belgium set up a so-called "plural" mode of suffrage - a man has a plurality of votes - that the defenders of the family seized on the question and multiplied the proposals in the House parliamentarian, testifying to the priority they give to the family vote. They present family suffrage as full universal suffrage, taking into account women and children. The various proposed methods of exercising this vote show the coexistence of two strong hypotheses. Roughly speaking, on the one hand are the social Catholics, close to the Leplaysian theses, for whom the plural vote is essentially the tool for restoring the moral order through the representation of the family in the vote; on another side, for familyists and pronatalists gathered in associations for the defense of large families and the birth rate, the family vote is above all a vector of national greatness and renewed vitality. This last current is marked by the use of specific instruments of demography, which is constituted in filiation with the political^[3]. Indeed, the demographic discipline is carried by a few men, several of whom are members of the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population and support the family vote, playing a significant role in the dissemination of the idea. Above all, for this group of men who are involved in the public sphere, their productions which justify the family vote constitute keys for public action and are used as such.

It is not a question here of making an inventory of the many proposals in favor of family voting^[4], but to examine the types of argument implemented to defend this idea and to show that the networks which support it oppose on the conception of the vote as a function or a right. Also they oppose on the concrete modalities of the electoral system to be defended. It is especially the question of the vote of the mothers and the representation of the individualized children which is at the heart of the dissensions. If the representation of women and children in the ballot is presented by the promoters of the idea of family voting as equivalent from the point of view of the individual right to "count" and "to be counted", there is nevertheless a political and social issue different, in particular because at the same time the issue of women's representation interferes with that of women's suffrage, supported by an increasing number of militant movements^[5]. The choices made by the authors of the various legislative proposals upset the electoral arithmetic by favoring a given category of family, even by giving the majority of the ballot papers to women. The arguments and evaluations of the various propositions are carried by those who make the question of the number of men their business.

[5] On this question, see C. Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne*,...

The concept of family voting arises from the desire to organize the family into political power. At the end of the 19TH century, circles that supported the family vote believed that by giving the family legitimate political power, the government would be forced to organize the nation by establishing laws that supported it, under pain of being reversed. The foundation of the family vote therefore lies in its ability to combine defense of the family and support of the birth rate. The anxiety of depopulation creates a favorable context for the refocusing of political questions on family matters ^[6]. In 1923, Jean-Louis Breton, former Minister of Hygiene, Welfare and Social Assistance, justified the requested reform as follows: "The country is only too threatened. Depopulation eats away at it. Do we finally want to adopt the remedies that will save it? Let us then institute the family vote, this great reform which is the key to all the others" ^[7]. Moreover, beyond the demographic question, the family vote defends a certain idea of justice. Establishing a strict equality of votes between the selfish bachelor and the deserving father of a family is contrary to the consideration of the individual values that the ballot must represent. Equality proportional to individual values therefore finds the springs of its legitimacy in this anguished context of declining birth rates. In 1910, in a doctoral thesis in law, Paul Labouré took an interest in the question of the strict mathematical equality established between individuals: "In human society, in the electoral college, which is a fraction of this society, which is worth more, which is worth less, but no one is quite worth the other" ^[8]. The plural vote that he supports is based on two principles: "Equality, gender or species identity between men, therefore one vote for each citizen, but inequality of value between men, therefore several votes for some of them [...] . We are thus moving away from mathematical equality to achieve proportional equality" ^[9]. To this must be added a forward-looking vision of the nation in the making, which demands that the citizens who will compose it be taken into account. The child cannot be excluded from the votes of decision which will make the society of tomorrow. On the occasion of the first national birth congress in 1919, Paul Bureau, president of *Pour la vie*, asked "that little children who are interested in good legislation be represented by their parents during the period when they cannot express themselves -even their opinions on the collective interests. The child of eight, ten or fourteen is much more interested in good legislation than the old man of seventy or seventy-five . What appears to be an awareness of the political rights of the child is partly linked to the demographic crisis which raises questions about the future ^[11] . The general interest, that of the nation, coincides with the particular interests of citizens of

[11]On this question, see C. Rollet, *Les Enfants au xixe siècle, ...all ages*.

Beyond the general context provided by demography and the reading made of it by those who are interested in it, arguments of a legal nature justify the family vote. For some, the electorate is a personal right – whatever their age or sex, every citizen has the right to have their interests represented; for others, the electorate is a function, subject like others to regulation, and it is the superior political capacity of the heads of families that presides over the right to additional votes. The arguments, singularly different in their conception, nevertheless go in the direction of family suffrage. As early as 1873, Henri Lasserre had expressed the desire for a plural vote as a means of ensuring women and children the representation to which they are entitled:^[12]. The author bases his argument on the distinction between law and the exercise of law and the assimilation of political rights to civil rights: the heads of families must have as many votes as they represent distinct individual interests, wife, children, but also assisted, alienated children, whose guardians they could be. His proposal is based on the conception according to which the electorate is a right attached to the person. In spite of a solid argumentation, these remarks do not arouse debate, discredited by the reactionary conservatism of the circles which support the family vote. And the first years of the Third Republic, still fragile, are hardly favorable to a debate around an idea perceived as a threat against the principle of equality. However, when in 1906 the hero of Fashoda,^[13]. Their respective republican beliefs are sufficiently established for family suffrage and the fight against universal suffrage to be distinguished from now on, the first appearing as the natural and legitimate extension of the second ^[14]. In *The Echoes of Paris*, in [13] On J. Bertillon and his family, see J. Dupaquier, "La famille...August 1910, Jacques Bertillon declared: "Every human being, whatever his sex and his age, has rights and duties, it is logical that he should be represented in the councils of the nation. Civil rights and duties imply political rights. The father should vote for each of his children and for his wife "if we persisted in regarding her as an eternal minor." Otherwise, the mother would vote for herself and for the minors of whom she could be guardian in the event of widowhood for example. "The great voter in this system would be the father of the family... And it will be very democratic since it has been proven that it is among the people that the most numerous families are to be found" ^[15]. The main legal arguments, the distinction between the right or function vote and the assimilation of civic rights to political rights, were therefore put forward at the beginning of the 1910s and formed the basis on which the defenders of the family vote relied. Henri Roulleaux-Dugage, MP for Orne, behind several family voting projects tabled in the Chamber, supports before the Assembly the idea of voting as a right and points out the ambiguity of the electoral system which he denounces "One of two things, either you recognize the social value of the family and you must recognize a social and political right to it, or you only recognize the individual, but then recognize the rights of this individual without distinction of sex or age in the political sphere, as in the civil sphere. ^[16]. Such a conception of the

electorate is opposed to that of Abbé Lemire, the other defender of the idea of family voting in the Assembly ^[17]. For the deputy for Hazebrouck, the electorate is essentially a function conferred on the individual with a view to the collective good.

[16]H. Roulleaux-Dugage, quoted by R. Talmy, History of the movement...

The family vote is supported by influential networks which explain the debates it arouses, but also the proximity of the arenas in which it is debated with political power, and this, from the beginning of the 1910s. In 1911, the parliamentary group of the protection of large families, chaired by Ferdinand Buisson, MP for Paris, links the various associations of large families or support for the birth rate and the political environment; he defends the principle of family suffrage. Associations that bring together a large number of members also organize themselves into a central committee of leagues of large families and repopulation ^[18], which draws MEPs' attention to the proposed amendments in favor of family voting. In March 1919, a propaganda committee in favor of family voting was set up under the chairmanship of Baron d'Anthouard, minister plenipotentiary, who was responsible for organizing conferences, preparing and distributing leaflets on the question. Brochures, posters are multiplying and are widely distributed in the departments through local associations supporting large families and the birth rate, so that the issue is not only debated in Paris. The first meeting of this committee brings together some two thousand listeners who support the idea of family voting. Another example: the influential National Association for Economic Expansion, chaired by Adolphe Landry, of the parliamentary group for the protection of large families, also defends the principle of family voting. This method of voting is also supported by the Higher Birth Rate Council, created in 1920 at the instigation of the Minister of Hygiene, Social Assistance and Welfare, Jean-Louis Breton, who believes that "if the family vote is instituted, all questions relating to the birth rate and large families will thereby be resolved." ^[19]. Birth congresses, which have been held annually since 1919, inscribe the idea of family suffrage as true universal suffrage in the republican work, bringing together a large public, both Parisian and provincial.

[19]Quoted in The Biggest Family, April 1911.

THE FUNCTION JUSTIFIES THE RIGHT

But despite this apparent consensus of the natalist and familyist milieu, deep differences exist between the proponents of the family vote, which explain the impossible agreement on the concrete methods of its application. In July 1911, Father Lemire defended the following vote project: every married man would be entitled to two votes; if he is the father of at least three children, he will be entitled to a third ballot, an additional vote which he will keep as long as his sons are not themselves electors or his daughters are not married ^[20]. For the deputy of Hazebrouck, the function justifies the right: "A first vote for any adult citizen, it is the right of the individual, a second vote for

any married man or widower with one or two children, it is the right of the family, a third vote for the father of three non-voting children, it is the right of the nation or of the race” ^[21]. In 1914, the project submitted by Henri Roulleaux-Dugage was as follows: every Frenchman, whatever his age and sex, had the right to political suffrage which was the corollary of his civil personality. All electors of age twenty-one exercise their right to vote in person, except in the cases of incapacity or forfeiture provided for by law. The father of the family exercises the right of suffrage for himself and for all the persons placed under his authority, that is to say his legitimate wife and his minor children. In the event of the death, incapacity or absence of the father, the right of suffrage is exercised by the mother for herself and for her minor children, so that the numerous households in which the head of the family has fallen in battle do not are more deprived of political representation ^[22]. This project was presented as a compromise between the supporters of plural voting and those of women's suffrage, even if, in this project, the married woman is placed in a situation of inferiority compared to the single woman who personally exercises her right to vote ^[23]. This proposal was rejected by the Universal Suffrage Commission. Supported by deputies known for their attachment to the family, in particular Jean-Louis Breton, Adolphe Landry or André Honnorat ^[24], [23]On female suffrage, see C. Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne*,...Henri Roulleaux-Dugage will table from April 1919 successive projects which tend to achieve full universal suffrage by the adoption of family suffrage. This time, the married woman voted for herself. But these projects suffered from the opposition of Father Lemire who voted against, despite an increasingly significant increase in parliamentary votes in favor of the projects presented by Roulleaux-Dugage. In December 1923, the Chamber adopted the bill of the deputy for Orne by four hundred and forty votes to one hundred and thirty-five. The success is certain, the idea is supported by the Poincaré government ^[25], but the discussion is constantly postponed and marks the decline of the idea of family voting in [25]In the Chamber of Deputies, Minister Maunoury declared: “We...the Assembly.

It is true that the apparent cohesion of the various associations which militate in favor of family suffrage had shown some cracks when it came to studying the concrete methods of application of the principle, more particularly the conditions of representation of women and children. The demographic context demanded the representation of motherhood in one way or another. In the spirit that animates and motivates those who are interested in the demographic question, the birth rate also implies the distinction between the families which participate in the renewal of the population, taking into account the number of children who compose it, and the others. Two categories of families who deserved to weigh a different weight in the electoral balance.

On the one hand, the social Catholics, who militate for the family vote behind Abbé Lemire, oppose the idea of women's right to vote even if, by their intransigence, they alienate an increasingly great public opinion ^[26]. Since the electorate is a function, they consent to the representation of mothers and wives. The leader of this movement, Father Lemire, refuses to base the family vote on individual rights. After the war, he modified his project and only granted a third vote to the fourth child, thus aligning himself with the law of assistance to large families of 1913, but above all standing out from those who were interested in the only demographic question and to the third child, which demographic statisticians affirm that it causes the renewal of the population. Father Lemire is opposed to the theory of the representation of rights as it appears in the projects of the deputy for Orne: "To proportion the vote to the number of children, that would be to fall back into the anarchic individualism to which the idea of the family is precisely opposed. The goal of our project and of any project on the family vote, is to recognize the place of the family in the State by giving it a political right corresponding to its elementary constitution and not to the number of people who render these services. » ^[27]. By opposing the counting of children per family, which would individualize each of them, the deputy for Hazebrouck spares himself a justification of the counting of girls in families. Counting the children means taking into account the daughters who make up the family to establish its representation; difficult under these conditions to oppose each of them being able to access the ballot box one day to cast their own ballot as a citizen, single, married or mother of a family.

[27] Father Lemire quoted by R. Talmy, History of the family movement...

Faced with social

Catholics, pronatalists and familyists are far from united. Jacques Bertillon is in favor of women's suffrage, but grants full representation of each of the children to the father of the family or, failing this, to the mother, paradoxically placing the mother in a situation of political inferiority compared to the single woman who vote for herself. To rally the feminists who saw men monopolizing the votes representing the children, Paul Bureau, president of Pour la vie, proposed the sharing of votes between the parents, the father having an additional vote in the event of an odd number of children. . Criticized by the representatives of other family associations, because this division compromised family unity, her proposal is supported by Mrs Witt-Schlumberger, ^[28]. Only La plus grande famille, through its president, Auguste Isaac, is more reluctant to grant women the right to vote, because "the experience of countries with feminist legislation is hardly favorable to the birth rate. Where women worry too much about their rights, it is generally noticed that they worry very little about the duties of motherhood [...]. Exceptionally, we would accept the vote of the widows, of the widow even without children; they speak in the name of the dead whose lives have been sacrificed for the

[28] The Largest Family, April 1919. fatherland" ^[29].

If the concrete methods of application of the new electoral system have been so much debated, it is because the electoral representation of women and children through the family vote induces a recomposition of the electoral power of households. In *The Echoes of Paris*, in August 1910, Jacques Bertillon initiated the debate on the field of arithmetic. Consequently, for pronatalists and familyists, the question of the family vote is that of an accounting whose springs are legitimized by individual rights to be represented, but also by the demographic and political usefulness of the electoral power granted to certain household categories. “Families with three or more children in France comprise a total of 23.5 million individuals. So they form the majority of the French nation (about 60%). But since they only have 3,783,000 adult men (approximately) and the total number of voters is 11 million [...], they only count in the electorate as a small minority”^[30]. The National Alliance, studying the project that Abbé Lemire submitted in 1911, relied on accounts to determine its interest. The commentator composes the following table.

TABLE 1: THE RECOMPOSITION OF THE ELECTORAL BODY WITH FATHER LEMIRE'S PROJECT ^[31]

	Composition of the electorate	%	Voices attributed by the Lemire Project	%
Singles	2,600,000	24	2,600,000	13
Married without three children	4,600,000	42	9,200,000	45
Married with three or more children	400,000	4	800 000	4
Married with three or younger children	2,200,000	20	6,400,000	32
widowed and divorced	1,100,000	10	1,200,000	6
Total	10,900,000	100	20,200,000	100

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Thus, “singles would lose half of their influence by adopting the Lemire project; men who are married but only have a small family gain very little influence. On the contrary, those who have three or more children gain significantly. However, they continue to form the minority of the electorate”^[32]. Progress is certain, but could be increased. On June 8, 1917, the spokesperson for a meeting of associations for the defense of large families considered that “the reform envisaged is something other than a question of electoral arithmetic; it is the consecration of the social dignity of the head of the family and the seed of a national revival”. However, he calculates that “the pure and simple

extension of the right to vote to the female sex would not be without inconvenience or without risk because it would give electoral preponderance to women. Mr. Roulleaux-Dugage's plan, on the contrary, by delegating to the head of the family the right to vote of all minors, would in effect leave two-thirds of the votes to men and only one-third to adult women;^[33]. Indeed, the numerical preponderance of women, especially at the end of the war, risked, if they obtained access to the polls, upsetting the representation of categories of citizens. In turn, in 1922, *La Plus Grande Famille* compared the various legislative proposals, in particular the relative electoral power of the various family [33]Quoted in *The Biggest Family*, July 1917.categories of voters.

TABLE 2 : THE RELATIVE ELECTORAL POWER OF THE VARIOUS FAMILY CATEGORIES ^[34]

Family categories	Current system (in %)	Roulleaux-Dugage system (in %)	Lemire system (in %)
Singles	30.0	12.5	16.4
Married men without children	15.3	6.4	16.6
Heads of small families (one or two children)	34.2	35.5	37.6
Average household heads (three children)	8.2	13.8	9.1
Heads of large families (four or more children)	12.2	31.7	20.2

The Roulleaux-Dugage system is preferred because it has the double advantage of harming single people and favoring large families. “It responds much better to the [35]Ibid.principle on which the family vote is based” ^[35].

Ultimately, family voting appears to be a privileged instrument for establishing a new political order – through the electorate – based on the respective utility, in the medium and long term, of households. The intervention of even the most basic tools of household quantification, which evaluate and justify this new political order, is authoritative in part because at the same time the proponents of the family vote invoke common values and of collective interest to legitimize a system that pushes the law of numbers to its extreme by designing the political representation of those excluded from so-called “universal” suffrage.

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- [1] Tract entitled “The family vote” reproduced in *La Plus Grande Famille* , November 1917.
- [2] It seemed to us that the question had received little attention, despite the numerous debates to which it had given rise. However, among the recent texts, let us cite the rather introductory one by A. Béjin, “The idea of family voting in France from 1850 to 1950”, *Population and the Future* , September-October 1990, p. 13-14, and that of A. Verjus, “Vote familialiste et vote familial”, *Genèses* , 31, June 1998, p. 29-47, which focuses above all on the emergence of the idea.
- [3] On the links forged between demography and politics around the family theme, we refer to the texts of R. Lenoir, “The State and the construction of the family”, *Acts of research in social sciences* , March 1992, p. 20-37, and “The invention of demography and the formation of the state”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* , June 1995, p. 36-61.
- [4] The book by R. Talmy details the various proposals: *History of the family movement in France* , Paris, CAF, 1962, 2 vols. The sources that we have examined are of several types: works are entirely devoted to the question, journals of associations debate proposed laws such as *La Plus Grande Famille*, chaired by Auguste Isaac, the Popular League of fathers and mothers of families numerous, of Captain Maire, and the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population, founded by Jacques Bertillon. The annual birth congresses reflect the balance of power in circles organized around the same themes.
- [5] On this question, see C. Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne, histoire des féminismes* , Paris, Fayard, 1995.
- [6] What V. Antomarchi shows, *Politics and family under the Third Republic* , 1870-1914, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2000.
- [7] J.-L. Breton in the preface to A. Enfière's book, *Le Vote familial. Electoral Reform* , 1923.
- [8] P. Labouré, *The plural vote and its applications* , Paris, 1910, p. 6.
- [9] *Ibid.* , p. 12.
- [10] National Birth Congress, Nancy, 1919.
- [11] On this question, see C. Rollet, *Les Enfants au XIX^e siècle* , Paris, Hachette, 2001, in particular p. 219-246.
- [12] H. Lasserre, *On the reform and normal organization of universal suffrage* , 1873.
- [13] On J. Bertillon and his family, see J. Dupaquier, "The Bertillon family and the birth of a new social science: demography", *Annales de démographie historique* , 1983, p. 293-311.
- [14] *Bulletin of the National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population* , July 15, 1906, p. 228.
- [15] J. Bertillon, “The father of the family must become the grand elector”, *Bulletin de l'Alliance...* , October 1910, first publication in *Les Échos de Paris* , August 1910.
- [16] H. Roulleaux-Dugage, quoted by R. Talmy, *History of the family movement in France* , *op. cit.* , t. II, p. 42.

- [17] On his personality see J.-M. Mayeur, *A democratic priest, Abbé Lemire (1853-1928)* , Paris, Casterman, 1968.
- [18] It is made up of Jacques Bertillon, representing the Alliance; of Léonce Fargeas, president of the League of the civil servants fathers of large families; Paul Bureau, president of Pour la vie and Auguste Isaac, of La plus grande famille.
- [19] Quoted in *The Biggest Family* , April 1911.
- [20] By granting an additional vote from the third child, Father Lemire relies on the work of J. Bertillon, whom he cites, moreover, and who postulates that the normal family, that is to say the one which makes possible the renewal of the population, is composed of at least three children.
- [21] Father Lemire quoted by R. Talmy, *History of the family movement in France* , *op. cit.* , p. 121.
- [22] H. Roulleaux-Dugage's proposal clashed with opponents of women's suffrage. Also, Senator L. Martin proposed the same year a family vote where only male children were represented.
- [23] On female suffrage, see C. Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne, histoire des féminismes* , *op. cit.* , and L. Klejman and F. Rochefort, *L'Égalité en Marche. Feminism under the Third Republic* , Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1989.
- [24] These deputies are members of the parliamentary group for the protection of large families.
- [25] At the Chamber of Deputies, Minister Maunoury declared: "We are in favor of family voting", *JO* , Chamber of Deputies, debates, 1923, p. 4026.
- [26] On opposition to women's suffrage, see C. Bard (ed.), *Un siècle d'antiféminisme* , Paris, Fayard, 1999.
- [27] Father Lemire quoted by R. Talmy, *History of the family movement in France*, *op. cit.* , p. 47.
- [28] *The Largest Family* , April 1919.
- [29] *Ibid* .
- [30] J. Bertillon, "The father of the family must become the grand elector", *Bulletin de l'Alliance* , October 1910, 1st publication in *Les Échos de Paris* , August 1910.
- [31] *Bulletin of the National Alliance ...*, April 1912, p. 317. The author of the painting is not mentioned.
- [32] *Ibid* .
- [33] Quoted in *The Biggest Family* , July 1917.
- [34] *Ibid.* , January 1922.
- [35] *Ibid* .

RÉSUMÉ

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