Beyond Left and Right: New Perspectives on the Politics of the Third Republic

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The articles in this issue all reflect on the various ways in which political trends during the period of the Third Republic have been categorized by both historians of the period and the political actors themselves. Ranging in topic from political trends in the French military in the years after the Dreyfus Affair to the participation of women in the politics of the extreme Right, these pieces focus especially on the need to transcend categories of Left and Right in order to discuss more accurately the ways in which the political party system developed, in particular during the years between the world wars.

Certain commonalities seem to have been shared regardless of political affiliation: Anti-Semitism was at times rampant on both the traditional and radical "Right" and among elements of the radical Left. Fascism and authoritarianism could be seen as deriving from both leftist and rightist groups. The debates among non-traditional political parties seem to have challenged the basic political categories that had been in use up to World War I. Definitions of masculinity and femininity—and the potential role that women's suffrage might play in changing the political discourse—were subjects of concern across the political spectrum. Individuals were also transient in their alliances, with political leaders forming connections between seemingly disparate communities through their own participation in various official and unofficial activist groups. Thus, the authors of these articles all agree that the traditional categories, and historical attempts to slot radical groups into them, must be reevaluated, transcended, and transformed into a model that recognizes these groups as a multivalent, multidimensional series of interlocking relationships, ones in which all the political and socio-political communities engaged.

John Cerullo's article, "The Aernoult-Rousset Affair: Military Justice on Trial in *Belle Époque* France," discusses the post-Dreyfusian military judiciary and how the fallout from that trial affected later judicial procedures for insubordination, especially in the colonial army. In particular, Cerullo focuses

on the role of the press and the appropriation of the stories of soldiers, such as those involved in the Aernoult-Rousset affair, by political groups in France who wished to undermine the independence of the military judicial process.

Sean Kennedy, in "The End of Immunity? Recent Work on the Far Right in Interwar France," provides an historiographic overview of the problems historians have faced when attempting to categorize diverse political groups, whose ideologies ranged from traditional conservatism to radical fascism, under the rubric "Right." His piece provides a roadmap into the historical work analyzed by the authors who follow.

Samuel Kalman's article, "*Parasite from all Civilizations: The Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français Confronts French Jewry*," takes on the issue of anti-Semitism in the newly formed parties of the post-World War I political community. The Croix de Feu was "the largest extreme right-wing movement in 1930s France" yet has been largely exempted from charges of anti-Semitism by most historical perspectives. Kalman presents an alternative analysis to the standard one: that the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français, despite public statements decrying xenophobia and public claims to be welcoming to Jewish members, was nevertheless profoundly anti-Semitic in outlook and in membership. In formulating this conclusion, Kalman thus challenges more traditional notions of the Croix de Feu as a party that was able to transcend the xenophobic and racist agglomerations that usually accompanied extreme-Right political movements.

In "*La Dérive Bergery/The Bergery Drift*": Gaston Bergery and the Politics of Late Third-Republic France and the Early Vichy State," Diane Labrosse discusses the political journey of one of the architects of Vichy, Gaston Bergery, author of the Bergery Declaration and "founding member of the Front Commun contre le Fascisme" from pacifist and leftist to proponent of collaboration with the Nazi regime. Labrosse reveals, through careful evaluation of Bergery's writings, the ways in which his earlier political stances led him to support Marshall Pétain and to embrace the idea of a united Europe led by a resurgent Germany.

Both Geoff Read, in "*Des hommes et des citoyens: Paternalism and Masculinity on the Republican Right in Interwar France, 1919–1939*," and Daniella Sarnoff, in "Interwar Fascism and the Franchise: Women's Suffrage and the *Ligues*," discuss the relationship between gendered discourse and the promotion of rightist perspectives in the Third Republic. Read's principal focus is on definitions of masculinity as found in the rhetoric of three political groups, the Alliance Démocratique, the Fédération Républicaine, and the Parti Démocrate Populaire. These groups tended to connect masculinity with paternalism, promoting a kind of new *paterfamilias* as the model of the ideal French male. Sarnoff looks at the participation of women in political parties on the extreme Right and discusses the ways in which anxiety about the possibility of female suffrage and its impact on the electorate was addressed within far-Right "leagues" such as the Croix de Feu and the Jeunesses Patriotes.

Both Read and Sarnoff discuss the ways in which the Right positioned maleness as a category of political enfranchisement, and the (male) head of the household as holding political authority that transcended the personal and individual obligations of the citizen. They also discuss the issue of female suffrage as one that galvanized the Right: anxious that suffrage would result in the dominance of communist parties, the rightists appropriated the rhetoric of suffrage for women while at the same time working to promote changes in the political franchise that would limit the effects of female voting rights.

Guest editor William Irvine, in “Beyond Left and Right, and the Politics of the Third Republic: A Conversation,” rounds out this issue by connecting the multiple threads of the previous articles into a comprehensive and thought-provoking whole. Drawing from elements of all the other pieces, Irvine adds his own perspective, challenging the very idea of Left and Right when discussing the politics of the Third Republic. For Irvine, there are indeed “two Frances: one seeking to preserve, or restore, the established social and economic order; the other seeking to reform, or overthrow, it.” Defining these dichotomies, however, as merely Right and Left fails to address the tremendous subtleties of the categories in use by the very actors in the political discourse. It is therefore time to move *Beyond Left and Right*.

The editors of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* are delighted to present this special issue. Enjoy!