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H-France Review Vol. 17 (February 2017), No. 43

Caroline Campbell, *Political Belief in France, 1927-1945: Gender, Empire, and Fascism in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. xiv + 286 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$48.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8071-6097-8.

Review by Joan Tumblety, University of Southampton.

In April 1938, a joyful Marivic Duval sailed into Algiers singing the "Song of the Croix de Feu" alongside her fellow travelers, all of them, like herself, young female members of the Parti Social Français women's university centre in Paris. Collectively they were known as the "Soufflotines" and, by May 1937, there were almost 500 of them. A select group made this trip to Algeria to help build the PSF movement there, specifically to advise on the foundation of a new Algiers branch of the *foyer universitaire*. While there, the women were billeted with local PSF supporters, they made trips to souks and Arab cemeteries, and they prayed to the Virgin Mary in the Grand Basilica, which had been built as an assertion of the Catholicism and cultural superiority of "Greater France."

This episode illuminates the wider political beliefs, practices and strategies of the Croix de Feu/PSF in a number of ways. First, it alerts us to the presence and mobility of women in a political enterprise that has been more readily characterized as masculinist, not least for its proclivity (especially before 1938) for street fighting and paramilitary violence. Secondly, it points to the importance of French North Africa for Croix de Feu/PSF designs on expanded membership and influence. Thirdly, it hints at the very broad scope of the movement's activities, which encompassed various forms of social action (including poor relief, holiday camps, and exhibitions) in addition to more overtly politicized rallies and closed meetings.

Furthermore, the trip to Algiers underscores how women's engagement in the Croix de Feu/PSF could serve to strengthen the movement's racist politics while being at a remove from its often violent political fights in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In underlining the backwardness and squalor of Arab Muslim men and women in their published reflections on the trip, the Soufflotines implicitly endorsed the hyper-racialized, exclusionary "civilizing mission" that was the hallmark of Croix de Feu/PSF politics in French North Africa, while notionally operating in a framework of social and cultural (rather than an avowedly political) action.

Scholars have been aware for some time of the relative success with which the Croix de Feu/PSF mobilized women, and have recently turned their attention to the efforts of French radical rightists in the Maghreb [1]. But in this impressive and readable book, Caroline Campbell has produced the first systematic study of women's involvement and, in doing so, she clarifies how the gender dimension of the movement's political action intersects with the imperial dimension. Most significantly, Campbell makes a powerful case that the successful transformation of the paramilitary Croix de Feu into the largest political party in France by 1937, under its new guise of the Parti Social Français, was wholly dependent on its ability to recruit women and that its comparatively limited success in North Africa is at least partly explained by its failure to mobilize women on as large a scale there.

It is not only that women took charge of the leadership and delivery of the Croix de Feu/PSF's vast program of social action in France after 1934, which extended far beyond the comparatively tiny Soufflotines mentioned above, or that women made up almost a third of the movement's considerable membership. It is that their welfare work also helped to humanize and make respectable the public image of the Croix de Feu. Indeed women's presence made it easier for the movement's leader, Colonel François de la Rocque, to present its authoritarian and racialist politics as an apolitical commitment to a stronger, properly Christian France. That the Croix de Feu/PSF failed to transform itself into a mass social reform movement along these lines in French North Africa was both cause and effect of the difficulties (despite the female emissary work of the Soufflotines and others) of mobilizing women (and also, crucially, Catholicism) in the hyper-masculine, violent political cultures there.

In exploring these dynamics, Campbell consults a wide range of printed and archival materials located in several repositories (in Paris, Nantes, and Aix-en-Provence) including the private papers of François de la Rocque held in the French national archives and at the Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po, the latter especially illuminating on how Liberation-era authorities assessed the movement's Vichy-era political ambiguity. A considered reading of the private correspondence of the movement's leaders (both male and female) against its own press, allows the author to distinguish between ideological gloss and felt commitment. It also reveals the movement's political failures, as well as its successes.

Chapter one delineates the "masculine world" of the early Croix de Feu (1927-1934), whose "veteran's mystique" served to justify the exclusion of both women and the idea of the feminine from the movement's project of recasting France along hierarchical lines (p. 29). In chapter two, Campbell sets out her key arguments in the defining and longest chapter in the book. By 1934, the Croix de Feu had already extended its reach, creating ancillary groups open to the sons and daughters of its veteran members, non-combatant men and women, and men who had been too young to fight in the First World War. But it was in launching the "Social First!" strategy in late 1934 that the movement opened not only its membership, but its leadership positions to women. This was an attempt, in the wake of the divisive Stavisky riots of February of that year, to promote the Croix de Feu as an instrument of national reconciliation rather than a force for street-fighting, and thus to posit the movement as a solution to the decade's alleged civilizational crisis without seeming to pose a direct threat to the republic.

In this respect, the key figure was Antoinette de Préal (b. 1892), the daughter of a general who had volunteered as a nurse in the Great War and a devout Catholic who worked closely with la Rocque after 1934 in a bid to "re-Christianize" France. In addition to being head of the movement's Women's Section, she sat on the Croix de Feu's central leadership council, which meant that she also wielded considerable power over the movement's male leaders. The social program pioneered by de Préal and her closest female associates was vast and, as Campbell shows, its continuities with the welfare initiatives pioneered by social Catholics earlier in the century sat well with the la Rocque's disdain for the republican state and its penchant for centralization.

The women's section recruited most heavily in the bourgeois districts of large cities, and its work was most concentrated in those areas where political conflict between right and left was high. By mid-1936, in Paris and the provinces, it had distributed a total of 87,000 pieces of clothing, served around 200,000 meals in soup kitchens, and conducted over 4,000 medical visits. In a mark of how far the Croix de Feu had come since its early days, at the annual Joan of Arc parade in 1936 the "social action" women no longer marched behind the veterans, but alongside them. It is one of Campbell's central arguments in this chapter that the reason why the dissolved paramilitary Croix de Feu was able to reinvent itself so quickly and so powerfully as the Parti Social Français was because of the organizational depth and breadth of this social program, largely run by women--something that the new government of 1936 had failed to grasp.

The next three chapters flesh out the nature and scope of Croix de Feu/PSF social work, treating respectively the themes of health, physical culture and entertainment. Campbell stresses the importance

of women's involvement as nurses and administrators in the movement's medical association (named after Joan of Arc) and, in a particularly illuminating sub-section, traces the daily challenges of managing staff and patients at the rest home for poorly women and their children that the movement set up in Pau. She also points out that the extensive organization established to deliver physical education to the masses (SPES) made a rare commitment, in the interwar context, to encouraging girls' team sports such as football and basketball. And as part of the 1937 Paris international exhibition, Antoinette de Préval organised children's entertainment spectacles on the themes of youth, the family and the colonies. The latter, communicated with a surprising degree of violence given the young age of the audience, was an attempt "to convince children that Africa was a dangerous, brutal, and superstitious place" (p. 132). Campbell thus locates women's role in promoting the PSF's racialized sense of civilizational hierarchies in sites that were apparently "apolitical."

Chapter six treats the situation in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, where La Rocque enlisted the converted Berber Catholic, Augustin Iba-Zizen, in the PSF Commission for Indigenous Affairs. The party strategy was to build "a bridge between the settler and indigenous communities," but in a way that simultaneously required the exclusion of Muslims from what La Rocque called "integral citizenship"—his deliberate counter to the plans envisaged in the Blum-Violette Bill of 1936 (p. 169). The strategy was poised not only to play Berber against Arab, but to mobilize considerable currents of indigenous anti-Semitism. As it turned out, however, the PSF could not manage these locally inflected hatreds, whose manifestations extended from boycotts of Jewish businesses to murderous riots. On one occasion, La Rocque tried and failed to sanction members of one Algerian section for its attacks on Jews. Campbell stresses that such political violence was most concentrated in Tunisia, and suggests that it is no coincidence that it was in Tunisia where the Croix de Feu/PSF failed most notably in its attempt to mobilize both (European settler) women and indigenous men. The "Social First!" strategy that was so successful in metropolitan France in pitching a politically positioned ethno-nationalism as apolitical could not work in the explosive (and more gender-segregated) environment of the Maghreb.

In chapter seven, Campbell takes the study through the war years, and into Liberation-era attacks on the PSF: the party was renamed the Progrès Social Français after the 1940 defeat and, until 1942, openly supported the Vichy state. In spring 1939, Antoinette de Préval had moved to the forefront of welfare efforts for the anticipated evacuation of civilians, leading a specially created PSF organization of passive defence auxiliaries (ADP). In working closely with the officially sanctioned Secours National and Red Cross, the ADP thus became an important force in what Laura Downs has called the "para-political terrain of social protection."<sup>[2]</sup> Existing PSF social centres and summer camps were turned into refugee welcome centres, although this work temporarily fell apart once the German invasion of May 1940 brought millions of civilians onto the roads of France, fleeing south. Given formal recognition and funding by the new Vichy government (as the renamed Artisans du Devoir Patriotique), the ADP operated 250 social centres and 4,000 sewing rooms across both occupied and Vichy France, and was heavily involved in sending parcels of food and other commodities to French POWs in German camps. Campbell's in-depth treatment of the ADP thus helpfully extends recent work on the evacuation and *exode* of 1939-1940.<sup>[3]</sup>

Against a background in which so many men, including PSF personnel, were either mobilized or prisoners of war, and in which the Vichy state itself prioritized social welfare, including women's aid to prisoners, as part of a strategy to justify its own existence, it is easy to agree with Campbell's claim that, between 1940 and 1944, the ADP had effectively *become* the PSF. In any case, as the author shows, what killed off the party in the end (it was defunct by 1947), was not so much its purge-era tagging by the Liberation authorities as Vichyite and therefore collaborationist, but the decision of Adrien Tixier, as the interior minister of the provisional government, to cut the ADP's state subsidies, which rendered the movement incapable of delivering the social program that had ensured PSF success for so long.

Campbell's book is a fine exposition of the recent trend to explore the interwar and Occupation-era radical right in a way that moves beyond the problem of its ideological classification. Campbell is interested in

questions other than those that straitjacketed historians of the far right in France for so long: the degree to which the Croix de Feu/PSF was fascist, and the extent to which it came close to achieving formal power. She offers instead an account of the everyday texture of the movement's politics, and of the political, social and cultural environments in which its policies and strategies were developed. Most of all, she provides a nuanced and carefully weighed set of arguments about just how far women exerted genuine agency within the movement between 1934 and 1946 despite, or because, of the deep-rooted Catholic conservatism of the male leadership. She has convinced me that to understand the Croix de Feu/PSF without taking female agency into account is to not understand it at all.

#### NOTES

[1] Kevin Passmore's "'Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism': Women's Social Action in the Croix de feu and Parti social français," *Journal of Modern History* 71/4(December 1999): 814-851, proved to be a crucial intervention in the field. See also the scholarship of Laura Lee Downs, most recently "'And some transform a people': Women's Social Action and the Reconfiguration of Politics on the Right in France, 1934-1947," *Past and Present* 225(November 2014): 187-225. On the activities of the radical right in French North Africa, see Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism: the Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[2] Downs, "'And some transform a people'," p. 189.

[3] Nicole Dombrowski Risser, *France under Fire: German Invasion, Civilian Flight, and Family Survival during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Julia S. Torrie, *"For their own good": Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

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ISSN 1553-9172