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Philip Nord, *France's New Deal from the Thirties to the Postwar Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. xi + 474 pp. Notes and index. \$39.50 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 978-0691-14297-5.

Review Essay by Richard Kuisel, Georgetown University

Philip Nord's *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* is an important and challenging historical study even if its thesis is not entirely new. It builds on earlier studies like the seminal essays of Stanley Hoffmann, yet it offers a fresh and, in many ways, original synthesis. [1]

Philip Nord addresses the midcentury transformation of the French state from the role of "institution builders" explaining the agendas, actions, itineraries, and interaction of elites. He argues the State was rebuilt through the efforts of administrative "insiders," the consensus builders like Pierre Laroque, Michel Debré, François Bloch-Lainé, Alfred Sauvy, and Jean Monnet. Notably Nord expands the range of institutional creativity usually attributed to these institutional architects. In addition to the familiar reform agenda of economic planning and social security, he adds demography, family planning, statistical agencies, survey research, and elite education, e.g. the transformation of Sciences Po to the Institut d'études politiques and the establishment of the Ecole nationale d'administration. He then goes further to incorporate the creation of a new cultural state, referring to the reordering of the theater, radio, and cinema.

The author argues, rather provocatively, that the Liberation was neither a social democratic triumph nor a rupture. It was more of a conservative, statist modernization constructed around projects designed during the 1930s and partially implemented before the war, developed under Vichy, and revised and extended by the Resistance. For example, the program of the Daladier/Reynaud government of 1938-39 foreshadowed what was to come. The order that emerged during the Liberation was not entirely new: it was the outcome of numerous earlier attempts at overhauling the French state as constituted by the Third Republic. The thrust of his thesis is for continuity. In the end, the postwar state was an amalgam or mixture of the various reformist movements. And this amalgam, Nord believes, has survived more or less intact, to the present.

What necessarily follows from this approach is a refutation of any grand linear thesis about how postwar France was rebuilt: it could not be described as the arrival of Americanization or technocracy or Christian democracy or social democracy. Rather it was a bit of all of the preceding as well as other forces like the familist movement. The author focuses in particular on explaining why the Left's hope for social democracy faltered. He asks why the outcome was less egalitarian, less *dirigiste*, less working class than the Socialists, Communists and assorted leftists sought? Or why by 1950 was France closer to "new elite managed statism" than it was to social democracy? His answer is that postwar renovation resulted from the conflict and mixing of rival interests, currents, and forces.

If Nord's narrative diminishes the role of the Left, it elevates the agency of others in particular, the "non-conformists" of the 1930s (many of whom were on the Right), the apolitical or centrist experts like engineers and educators, but especially Catholics. Catholic reformers appear at the center of the historical stage: they were appalled by the materialism, individualism, and political inertia of the Third Republic and sought a spiritual reawakening and a new commitment to probity, community, a culture of "quality," and nation. [2] He calls attention not just to Catholic political elites, but also to Catholic action groups like the *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (JOC) as well as to individual clerics and

writers who inspired some of the technocrats. This may be Nord's boldest addition to the conventional narrative since the confessional and spiritual contribution of these Catholics has been neglected by other historians.

Along with Catholics, Nord stresses the contribution of those he describes as "the not-so-Left," or those former Pétainistes who switched to the Resistance including unfamiliar figures like Pierre Schaeffer, the Catholic scout, engineer, founder of Jeune France, and director of experimental radio broadcasting, as well as more familiar names like Maurice Couve de Murville, Aimé Lepercq, and Pierre Laroque. Nord assigns some credit to certain Vichy officials censured by other historians. For example, he holds his nose in describing Dr. Alexis Carrel eugenicist ideas, yet acknowledges the doctor launched postwar demographic studies. These are treacherous waters that the author deftly navigates. What joined the "not-so-Left" with the true social democratic Left at the Liberation was a common rejection of the parliamentary politics of the Third Republic, a shared perception of national decline and cultural decadence, a commitment to nation, family, and discipline, and a need for new elites of high moral standing.

Featuring the "not-so-Left" speaks to one of the most valuable achievements of *France's New Deal*: it overcomes or bypasses the conventional politicized narrative of what Nord labels the "transwar" transition (pp. 12-13). He exposes the shortcomings of the polarized interpretation that pits Left against Right, Popular Front against Vichy, Vichy against the Resistance, and the Third Republic against the Fourth Republic. His story focuses on the "in-betweens," the apolitical, the centrists, and the ex-Pétainistes—a group of men committed to values that transcended Right and Left. They were *ni droite ni gauche* (if a bit more Right in the early years and more Left at the Liberation). [3] Yet Nord does not fall into the trap of eradicating differences between Vichy and the Resistance. What institutions emerged in 1944 to 1946 owed much to Vichy, but they were not mere clones. Thus in cultural matters the Pétain regime had "poisoned" reorganizing the theater and cinema with anti-Semitism and authoritarianism, but the Resistance cleansed and democratized these reforms.

France's New Deal is a formidable achievement. It builds on existing scholarship about the transwar years, uses new sources, among which are the archives of Sciences Po, and refines, expands, and deepens the standard interpretation.

One might ask, despite this accomplishment, does *France's New Deal* get the mix of actors, projects, and influences right? It certainly alters the standard narrative, but are a few, if minor, adjustments still needed?

Nord's selection of institutions colors his interpretation. By choosing theater, radio, and cinema, for example, he tilts his explanation toward Catholics and their project of spiritual and cultural uplift. And his focus on planning, statistical agencies, and social security inflects his thesis toward technocrats. One wonders how different his argument would be if he had included the nationalizations of industry and political overhaul, e.g. constitution-making, ministerial reorganization, and interest group representation, in his sample? Would the Left and the trade unions edge back toward center stage? Historians could extend the institutional sampling even further than *France's New Deal* already does to test and authenticate the Nord thesis.

There is also the question of Gaullism. Nord correctly places De Gaulle at the center of his story: as the head of the Provisional Government he chose among projects, ratified what pleased him and blocked what he opposed, namely a Communist role in governing the cinema. But Nord sets the larger Gaullist project to the side. De Gaulle, nevertheless, embodied an impulse, which was widely shared by the "not-so-Left" and even the true Left that inspired much of the postwar effort. There was the drive to recover international status; to restore self-esteem and overcome the humiliation of defeat and occupation; and to use the State as the principal means. Economic modernization, at least for some, had a nationalist goal. Somehow the Gaullist statist cum *grandeur* agenda gets lost because Nord omits topics like the making of the Fourth Republic, the military, and public finances. De Gaulle's departure in 1946 did not end either his influence or that of his disciples. The Gaullists and their agenda shaped the debates about reconstruction through 1950. I would reintroduce

Gaullism as a project that informed, or at least complemented, the programs of other reformers such as the technocrats and Catholics.

Some fine tuning may also be appropriate in discussing the place of the United States. Nord wisely emphasizes the internal, rather than the external, dynamics of institution-building, and he disputes the notion that the Liberation was about Americanization. Yet I am unwilling to go quite as far as he is in marginalizing the role of the Americans in this story because the United States was present both in the form of a model, which carried positive and negative valences, and as a state actor. Many, if not most, of Nord's builders attributed the decadent trends of the time to the American model: they rejected America because it represented commercialism and junk culture, and a few even conflated anti-Americanism with anti-Semitism. Strident anti-Americanism could be found among non-conformists like Robert Aron and Emmanuel Mounier and among Vichy administrators (who had banned Jazz). Marxists, Catholics, Gaullists, and assorted members of the Right could agree on keeping America at bay. The Resistance, both Left and Right, feared postwar domination by the U.S. and prominent critics of America held influential positions after the war. For example, among those involved in creating the Institut d'études politiques during the Liberation, André Siegfried, had, at best, a mixed appreciation of America while Georges Duhamel had authored the most celebrated anti-American polemic of the interwar years.[4] If "America the menace" figured in the imaginations of these institution builders, so did "America the beautiful." The American model inspired others, most notably Monnet's team and the thousands of businessmen, trade unionists, agronomists, and other experts who visited the United States after 1948 to learn the secrets of Yankee prosperity. Moreover, Washington as an actor interfered with how France was reconstructed: it supervised the use of Marshall Plan aid, exhorted Paris to stem inflation, discouraged nationalization, resisted screening limits on Hollywood movies, and warned against controls over foreign trade. It should be noted that the bulk of funding for the targeted sectors of the Monnet Plan came from Marshall Plan grants. As is well known, Washington also fought the Cold War in France, encouraging the Fourth Republic to oust Communist ministers and split the trade union movement. Nord mentions most of what I have sketched here, but he sees it as external to the main act. I would keep America as a lead in the drama.

France's New Deal, as any important research, encourages scholars to continue investigating the transwar years. So what's next?

Nord's study invites historians, at least as I reflect on his findings, to rewrite the history of the 1930s. We should see this interwar decade less as a prelude to military defeat, anti-Semitism, authoritarianism, and collaboration and more as a decade of reformist ferment. *Ni droite, ni gauche* thus appear less as a pre-fascist posture and more as a search for alternatives to the Third Republic, to Marxism, to fascism, and to Americanization. The non-conformists' dissent led in three directions: to the proto-fascist, exclusionary policies of Pétain's regime; to Vichy's institutional creativity, and to the public-spirited reforms of the Resistance and Liberation. I would argue that in its thirst for social experimentation, e.g. human engineering, France of the 1930s resembled Weimar Germany in the 1920s.[5] The French thirties were a decade of dissent and self-criticism, of a search for physical and spiritual renewal and for ways out of a dysfunctional parliamentary system. Nord points to such ferment in the projects of neo-liberal engineers and businessmen led by Auguste Detouef who contributed to the review *Nouveaux Cahiers*, the design of numerous economic plans, the arrival of Keynesian economics, the beginning of survey research (Institut français d'opinion publique: IFOP), the human engineering associated with the pronatalists and demographers, and modernist creations like the architectural novelties of Le Corbusier. In this light, the 1930s become a lively and progressive decade rather than simply the foyer for decadence, defeat and collaboration. And I might add the search for the origins of mid-century modernization should include the 1920s when Marshal Lyautey, as Nord observes, sponsored new organizations such as the Catholic Scouts de France; Ernest Mercier and the Redressement français promoted technocratic overhaul; and André Tardieu proposed remodeling the Third Republic. From this perspective, the entire interwar period takes on a more enlightened and modernizing cast.

Nord also invites historians to assess the durability of the new postwar order. He argues the 1930s and 1940s created the institutional forms of the contemporary French State—an assessment I endorse. Yet the innovations of this period have not been static; they have evolved over the last half-century. *Dirigisme* has been relaxed. Postwar institutions like the social security system and public assistance for the cinema industry have been overhauled. Most of the nationalized sector has been privatized—though some of the stars of the postwar years like Electricité de France remain as public services. And a few standouts of the postwar period like economic planning have not survived. There is an interesting question here for historians to consider: how and why did mid-century renovation evolve, how did it perform, and what remains?

Finally, a grand thesis like the one advanced by Philip Nord should make historians think about international comparisons. The title itself, *France's New Deal*, invokes transatlantic parallels. One might ask, did the reforms of mid-century France resemble what occurred in postwar Italy, the UK, or the Low Countries? Surely they seem similar to the conservative institutional overhaul of what became West Germany—though the U.S. played an even more central role there.

Philip Nord has provided us with a sparkling new synthesis of France at mid-century, and he invites other historians to refine and expand his conclusions.

NOTES

[1] Stanley Hoffmann, “The Effects of World War II on French Society and Politics,” *French Historical Studies*, 2 (Spring 1961): 28-63. I contributed to this argument in *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and “Vichy et les origines de la planification économique,” reprinted in *Guerres, paix et sociétés, 1911-1946*, ed. Antoine Prost (Paris: Editions de l’Atelier, 2003), pp. 158-182.

[2] Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les Non-conformistes des années trente* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969). Also see Seth Armus, *French Anti-Americanism, 1930-1948* (Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2007).

[3] See Zeev Sternhell’s *Ni Droite, ni gauche*, which has been translated as *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[4] André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*, trans. H. H. Hemming and Doris Hemming (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927); and Georges Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future* translated as: *America the Menace*, trans. Charles Miner Thompson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931).

[5] See: Peter Fritzsche, “Did Weimar Fail?” *Journal of Modern History* 68 (Sept. 1996): 629-656.

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