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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.

Response Essay by Philip Nord, Princeton University

I have been fortunate in my readers. Let me begin by extending to them a warm thanks for their comments and criticism, by turns generous and acute but always lucid and to the point. Laura Lee Downs notes that there is an implicit comparative dimension to my book, and she invites me to reflect in a more explicit way about the matter. This is a good way to start as it will help make plain the biases built into the project and lay the groundwork for my reply to the various queries and second thoughts which my four readers have expressed with characteristic cogency.

It has become a commonplace in American public rhetoric that Europe is the land of socialism. The dictum is most often pronounced with satisfaction by Americans pleased with their own free-marketizing ways which have brought a freedom and abundance that Europe is imagined to be lacking. Many Europeans, of course, are prepared to go along with such stereotyping, provided the valances are reversed. From this angle, socialist Europe is the exemplar of a public-service minded egalitarianism that makes a perfect and comforting contrast to the money-grubbing savagery of the American way. It is not hard to see how a case for the contrast can be made. It would begin with 1930s Sweden and then move on to postwar Great Britain, pointing out the ways in which labor-based parties built up welfare institutions and used the state to make available to an ever-widening public the goods of this world, both material and spiritual. To my mind, however, there is a problem with this way of looking at things, for it shifts the angle of vision from the continental core of Western Europe to its periphery. The states which led in the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War and in the construction of the European Union too for that matter were Germany, Italy, and France, and their political trajectories differed from those of Sweden and Britain in two critical respects.

First, the states of the continental core all knew more or less extended periods of authoritarian government, whether fascist, Nazi, or Vichyite. Vichy, to be sure, was born of a cataclysmic military defeat and was distinctive in this respect, but like the other dictatorships, it enjoyed, at least for a while, a measure of support from segments of opinion, and it enacted policies—and not just repressive ones—that left an imprint on public life into the postwar era. Along the way, Vichy explored forms of state intervention—sometimes building on republican precedents, sometimes not—which would exercise an attraction on postwar policy-makers.

Second, the war years had a transformative impact on the party politics of all three states, above all on the party politics of the Right. The Catholic Zentrum had been a key player in the Weimar years, but after the war, refashioned as the Christian Democratic Union, it was more than one party among many, effectively dominating public life until the very end of the 1960s. The same metamorphosis occurred in Italy, although here, Christian-Democratic hegemony exhibited yet more dogged staying power and did not unravel until the 1990s. French experience was comparable, though not quite so dramatic. Confessional politics were a minor feature of the interwar scene, but that changed with the formation of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire in 1944. Important as the MRP was for a period, it never exercised the same dominion as its German and Italian counterparts, but it was a phenomenon to be reckoned with nonetheless, an essential component of all governing coalitions until muscled aside in the sixties by a resurgent Gaullism.

If the French case is looked at in this comparative context, then it is Vichy and Christian Democracy, rather than, say, the Popular Front or socialism, that move to interpretive center-stage. Such a perspective may distort, but it also reveals. The Liberation is often treated as a new beginning, a moment when a line was drawn and an outworn past shucked off, but I am inclined to see the boundary as more porous, Vichyite policies, institutions, and people finding ways to adapt to an altered postwar political landscape and make a place for themselves in a France refashioned. As for Christian Democracy, it turns out to have been a major player on the postwar scene across a wide spectrum of policy areas: from family policy to agricultural affairs to youth organizing. Downs, who knows more than a little about youth organizing herself, remarks on this.[1]

This perspective also has something to say about the changing character of French democracy. The MRP made sure that the interests of the Catholic Church in matters of education and public morals got attended to; senior civil servants, who had grumbled in the interwar decades about parliamentary fecklessness, felt empowered in the more technocratic world of the Fourth Republic; and women were enfranchised. In important respects, the postwar order was more capacious than the regimes that had preceded it, but there is another side to the story. The Fourth Republic, though still a parliamentary regime, conducted more and more business behind closed doors, with technocrats and representatives of organized interests hammering out policy together through concertation. Such corporatist schemes siphoned decision-making power out of the public domain, a trend that would be accelerated with European construction and the so-called “democratic deficit” that attended upon it.[2] The postwar order was at once more inclusive and less participatory; it furnished goods and services on an unprecedented scale, even as the process of decision-making itself grew more remote and opaque.

Now, my readers have noted numerous lacunae and *partis pris* in my argument. I have not given public opinion its due; the Left gets slighted; and the same goes for the United States and General de Gaulle. On the matter of public opinion, Olivier Wieviorka makes the pertinent observation that it very much favored a new start at the Liberation. Politicians were able to accomplish so much, in part, because there was consensus out-of-doors that change was necessary. True, but I would make three additional points. First, in the immediate aftermath of the war, de Gaulle’s provisional government had exceptional executive leeway. An *Assemblée générale provisoire* kept an eye on the General’s doings, but it was, as its name indicates, a provisional, not to mention an unelected, body. Second of all, the executive apparatus now had instruments at its disposal to monitor and manage opinion thanks to partnerships with polling organizations such as Jean Stoetzel’s *Institut Français d’Opinion Publique*. I am not suggesting anything Orwellian here, just that the vectors of influence between government and people moved in both directions with government in fact now in a position to exercise a more guiding hand. And last of all, as the state, in response to popular expectations, built itself up in the postwar era, it at the same time arrogated to itself regulatory authority and engaged in corporatist bargains that insulated it against future interference from the out-of-doors.

There is another way to frame this criticism, though, which, I fear, is harder to respond to. It’s not the public I have overlooked as much as the role of interest groups. Richard Kuisel makes this point, and it is a well-taken one. I would point out in my defense that I haven’t ignored the subject altogether. It is part of my discussion of the reconstitution of the film industry and of how Jean Monnet’s planning machinery functioned. In the movie business, public authorities set up an executive-dominated administrative apparatus that worked in consultation with an industry parity board composed in equal parts of business and trade-union interests. The whole aim of such a design, in my view, was to hem in Communists who were far and away the dominant force in industry unions. The modernization commissions which Monnet established to consult on planning matters were composed of experts, businessmen, and labor representatives, but the selection of who got to serve was made by Monnet and his advisors, and the balance of representation tended to favor industry over the unions. In both examples, the state acknowledged interests but made sure they were involved in a way that served the state’s purposes.

In the domain of welfare reform, though, it’s not so easy to slip the grip of Kuisel’s criticism. Pierre Laroque, the founder of France’s social security system, wanted local social security funds to be

administered by the interested parties themselves, by employers and labor. In the event, representation was not divided fifty-fifty between the two but weighted in favor of labor, an arrangement, I argue, that helps explain why workers bought into the system over time and wound up among its staunchest defenders. In Great Britain by contrast, civil servants took charge of managing the postwar welfare system, making minimal effort to involve organized interests.[3] The result, as Downs observes, was a welfare regime more vulnerable to later neo-liberal attack than the French system which was anchored in associational networks beyond the state's grasp. This line of analysis has purchase in other policy-making areas. In agriculture and small business too, the postwar state entered into collaborations with organized interests that complicated (without making impossible) any future renegotiation of the terms of partnership. I would just add that in all these cases, it was the state that set up the framework of cooperation and that the organized interests involved gained power and stature in part thanks to their proximity to the state. Still, the point remains, and I believe it a fair one: the postwar order in France was more corporatist in constitution than my account, centered on executive initiatives, allows for.

But was it, for all that, more left-wing in inspiration and design? In one way or another, Herrick Chapman, Kuisel, and Wieviorka all pose the question of the Left, and on this issue, I think I would like to stand my ground. Chapman remarks on how divided the Left was. Socialists and Communists competed with each other at every turn in an era of deepening Cold War tensions, which meant, in starkest terms, that neither party could get its way without non-left allies. I am in full agreement, but note the implication of this observation. Wieviorka is no doubt right to insist on the SFIO's role, but the Socialists were just one piece of a larger political puzzle that was composed of Gaullists, Christian Democrats, and sundry others. When it came to institutional infighting, moreover, paladins of the Left like André Philip and Pierre Mendès France just plain got outmaneuvered. Some of this may have been the result of a tilted playing field. It is to be expected that the likes of a Philip or Mendès France would be less adept at navigating the corridors of bureaucratic power than technocrats and civil-service insiders. But some of it also had to do with the policies at stake. The kind of dirigisme and austerity-mindedness that the Left had in mind generated opposition in a way that the more flexible (or less demanding) schemes of Monnet and René Pleven did not.

It would be a mistake, of course, to understand the Left just in terms of Communists and Socialists. France boasted a formidable trade-union movement, and, as already noted, organized labor was assigned a key part in the constitution of the postwar welfare state. It played a role no less central in the nationalized sector. Shouldn't I have made more of this? I would say three things in reply. The criticism is well-founded but just up to a point. In the nationalized sector, management found ways to reassert the prerogatives of expertise over time, and it's not as though labor ran the social security system all by itself. Nor was the *Sécurité sociale* all there was to the French welfare state. Welfare reformers worried about the vitality of the French family and a flagging birth-rate, and in these domains Christian Democrats and pronatalists, not the labor Left, took the lead. Second, as indicated above, labor was not the sole organized interest that the state turned to in search of partners. It looked as well to business and agricultural interests: to the Conseil National du Patronat Français, the Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises, the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles, and these were not left-wing organizations, far from it. Last of all, while it is true that I don't say much about the nationalized sector, I also don't say much about military or colonial affairs or about housing and town planning policy either. A closer engagement with the issue of nationalizations would no doubt have given the analysis a more leftward tilt, but by the same token, a closer examination of these other areas would have tipped it in the opposite direction. Overall, I think I have got the political valence of the postwar story about right.

Postwar reconstruction was sold to the French public as a modernizing endeavor, and in my book, I try to unpack the not-so-left political agenda that underpinned the modernization project. Chapman makes a pertinent observation in this connection, proposing a closer study of how postwar reform worked out in practice, of the uses to which the new machinery of state was put. I am well-disposed to the idea that there was a Left buying in, even Left appropriation of the new postwar order. This process, though, was a long one, unfolding across the 1960s into the Mitterrand years. Then,

looking backward, it became possible to think of the postwar moment as one of left-wing conquest, and this retrospective view was reinforced by the French Right's own flirtations with neo-liberalism. If the Right opposed the welfare state, then the welfare state must have been from the very beginning a "*conquête ouvrière*." I see how people have come to look on postwar Europe the way they do, as the happy days of a social-democratic consensus now bygone, but I don't believe that social democracy tells the whole story of France's postwar modernization drive.

I don't believe either that this is a story of Americanization. Kuisel raises the issue of Washington's role in France's postwar makeover, and it is important to acknowledge the degree to which France was in no position to determine its own destiny alone. The United States wanted to rearm Germany, and unwilling French diplomats had to accommodate themselves; the United States opposed the Suez adventure, and the French (not to mention the English and Israelis) had to back off. Then there is the story of France's consumer revolution. The American model of a high-consumption society haunted the imagination of French policy-makers, generating angst but also inciting imitation. But three additional points need to be made. First, there was often a congruence of views between French and American decision-makers, such that it would not always be a simple matter to distinguish who was taking the lead. In foreign affairs, French Socialists and Christian Democrats did not need prompting from Washington to take up the fight against Communism. Second, consciousness of American models did not mean slavish imitation. Kuisel's own work on French consumer habits and management practices demonstrates just this point. Borrowing went hand in hand with adaptation and refitting. Last of all, in crucial domains the French did not bother with the U.S. example at all but just proceeded as suited them. Welfare-state construction is a case in point, and so too the culture state erected at the Liberation. Just think how difficult it has been for the United States to pass health-care reform; just think how anemic and endangered the budget of the National Endowment of the Arts. France dealt with these problems over a half century ago, setting an example of its own which U.S. policy-makers might do well to consider imitating.

Last of all, I turn to the role of de Gaulle. He is an *éminence* in my book more than an on-stage presence, and Kuisel is not persuaded that I've got the casting quite right. I see de Gaulle in generational terms, as a non-conformist out of tune with the "established disorder" of the 1930s but very much in sympathy with kindred spirits—whether technocrats or Catholic Action militants—who dreamed of using state power to set the nation's house in order. De Gaulle at the Liberation was surrounded by a cadre of institutional entrepreneurs, and he empowered them to fill in with concrete policy the vision of a restored French grandeur that was his own motivating principle. The General departed from the political scene in January 1946, but those entrepreneurs did not, going on to serve the French state in a variety of capacities, often without interruption, on into the 1960s. I have chosen to highlight the activities of the men and women who stayed on, not of de Gaulle who gave them their chance but then retired.

De Gaulle's retirement, of course, was not permanent, an observation that prompts some reflection on Kuisel's parting invitation to the reader (and to myself) to think about how the story recounted in *France's New Deal* fits into the general flow of French history. There are a couple of ways to address this question.

It might, first of all, be put to me in the form of a criticism. Why conclude the story, as I do, in the 1950s? De Gaulle returned to office in 1958 after all, and it is possible to view the making of the Fifth Republic as the terminus ad quem of the process I have studied and not as an episode that lies beyond its scope. There is a measure of truth to this critique, but to my mind, it glosses over the centrality of the Algerian War and of decolonization in general in the transformations of French politics in the 1960s. First, and most obviously, de Gaulle might never have gotten a second chance had it not been for the Fourth Republic's failures in dealing with the Algerian crisis. The Gaullist project itself was in part about finishing up what was begun at the Liberation, but it was also about finding a place for France in a post-colonial world. And not least of all, the Algerian war fractured the cadre of institution-builders whose postwar crystallization was such a central theme of my book, bringing to an end a moment of dynamic unity. This fracturing was freighted with long-term consequences. A number of senior public servants, unhappy with France's Algerian policy, rallied to

citizens' groups like the Club Jean Moulin, making their way from there into the ranks of a reconstituted Socialist Party. From this angle, the Fifth Republican moment appears not just as a culmination but as a point of departure which prompted new efforts to craft a left-wing alternative to Gaullism. Thanks to the economic dislocations of the 1970s, the Left would get its turn to show what it had learned (or not) from decades in the political wilderness. With François Mitterrand's election to the presidency in 1981, Socialism laid claim to the legacies of the postwar era, adjusting them, making them its own. It did so well at the task it now appears that Socialism alone was responsible for what had been achieved, a move that French neo-liberals were happy to abet, blaming the Left for the rigidities of a statist order they so much detested. As I have tried to argue, however, the idea that the postwar order was a socialist construction hides more than it reveals, erasing as it does the contributions of multiple competing currents, Christian Democracy and Gaullism among them.

But the issue of how my story fits into the flow of French history can be posed in a second way, centered not so much on the figure of de Gaulle as on questions of continuity and discontinuity. My commentators have understood my book as a story about continuity, a work of latter-day Tocquevillianism. It's a reading that makes a lot of sense, but I would make three further remarks. First, there is a sense in which I fail to insist enough on continuity. I do not discuss the persistence of the regalian state. The administrative apparatus Napoleon Bonaparte did so much to perfect has lasted more or less intact down to the present day, and it is true that I have not made much of the fact, a shortcoming for which I have been criticized elsewhere.

Second, as this very reply demonstrates, I do indeed have an interest in the genealogy of state reform. I have suggested here how the story might be carried forward into the 1980s. It might just as well be pushed backward into the 1920s, the Great War, or even the fin de siècle when state-centered welfare reform first found its way onto the national agenda. That said, I do not see the process of state-remaking as the expression of an abiding French Jacobinism, nor as the progressive working out of a modernizing logic. Yes, Edouard Daladier, Pétain, and de Gaulle all wanted a stronger, more effective State and took measures to achieve that end, but they worked in different political settings, operating under different political constraints, in pursuit of different, even incompatible political objectives. Daladier's center-right republicanism is not to be confused with Pétainism, nor with the Catholic Action-inflected technocracy of the postwar years. Politics is everywhere in the story, but not Jacobin politics. As for modernization, I am at pains to unpack in the book the political projects that the term, so shiny and neutral sounding, covers over.

One final comment on this question, and then I will conclude: *France's New Deal* does treat 1940 and 1944 as porous borders. Vichy was not born ex nihilo but plunged its roots deep into French soil. Nor did the passing of the regime in 1944 mean that it departed the scene without leaving a trace, and I try in my book to identify what some of those traces were. Nevertheless, at the same time, I understand Vichy as an interruption in twentieth-century French history, as an authoritarian and racist moment wedged between two Republics. I have tried to strike a balance on the matter of continuity and discontinuity, although I cannot say with confidence that I have got it just right.

I am aware, though, that there is an ethical risk in stressing continuity as much as I do. Granted that the reform of the state was a political phenomenon that played itself out in episodic spasms; granted that it was not the expression of some bred-in-the-bone national character trait or the consequence of a value-neutral rationalizing impulse. Yet what does it mean to place Vichy at the center of the story? Doesn't such a move normalize the war years, treating them as a stepping stone in an ongoing process rather than as a *sui generis* exception born of extraordinary circumstances? That is not my purpose. Americans are susceptible to looking at the postwar decades as happy days. I don't believe it was in fact so easy to erase what had come before: the traumas of depression and war. I believe it even less so when it comes to continental Europe. The legacies of Vichyism, not to mention fascism and Nazism, were not effaced once the war was concluded but still a living presence. It was not just that tens of millions who had lived through the recent past were still alive, but that the regimes they had lived under and supported bequeathed policies, institutions, and personnel that continued to shape the continent's public life. I treat 1944 as an open frontier but

just up to a point, and in doing so, it is not my intention to make *les années noires* of the war and the Occupation any the less so but rather to cast a shadow over the bright and shining face of the 1950s.

It remains only for me to thank my critics once more for their generous and thoughtful readings and to thank H-France for giving me this opportunity to think through further the direction my work has taken me.

NOTES

[1] Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880-1960* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002). See also Susan Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).

[2] Martin Conway, "Democracy in Postwar Western Europe: The Triumph of a Political Model," *European History Quarterly* 32 (2002): 59-84; and idem., "The Rise and Fall of Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945-1973," *Contemporary European History* 13 (2004): 67-88.

[3] See on this point Douglas E. Ashford, *The Emergence of the Welfare States* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), ch. 5. Better late than never.

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