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Olivier Dard, ed., *Le corporatisme dans l'aire francophone au XXème siècle*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. viii + 249 pp. Notes, abstracts, and index. 52.80€. (pb). ISBN 978-3-0343-1066-6.

Review by Steve Jefferys, London Metropolitan University.

This review begins with an apology. It is not written by an expert in twentieth-century French right-wing political history or in French Catholicism. Nor is it written by someone who has a more than general knowledge of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese or Austrian fascisms. Rather it is written by a British scholar of French industrial relations who has written about the evolution of French management and its slow and often reluctant and pressured adoption of what has become known as the “French social model” during the twentieth century.[1]

Why then, it is fair to ask, should this reviewer have agreed to review this collection of nine essays and an introduction? The answer is embarrassing: in agreeing with real interest to review the book what had come immediately to mind was the common Anglo-American meaning of corporatism as “political or social organization that involves association of the people of society into corporate groups, such as agricultural, business, ethnic, labour, military, patronage or scientific affiliations, on the basis of common interests.”[2] What had been overlooked by the reviewer was the narrower French meaning of *corporatisme* as a doctrine “qui, répudiant à la fois l'individualisme et le collectivisme, est fondée sur l'organisation des professions en organismes permanents et institutionnels qui élaborent des décisions sanctionnées par les pouvoirs publics et qui sont représentés auprès du gouvernement.”[3] Yet it is the tensions between a definition of *corporatisme* as an anti-capitalist ideology and as an ideology of the extreme right that is at the heart of this book.

Thus it is perhaps the reviewer's problem rather than that of this collection that it often reads as a list of names and writings of long forgotten, right-wing and largely Catholic intellectuals, many of whom openly supported fascism and/or Nazism, and longed for a “new order” where a monarch or strong leader would impel social justice while emasculating independent working class action. It is extremely difficult for political doctrines to be presented outside of the social and economic context in which they emerge, and in drawing together papers from a conference, especially when they cover four different countries—France, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec-Canada—this task is almost impossible. The assumptions are often made that someone else will cover the general background, and if this is not done, then for a reader coming in from the cold, as this reviewer has, major questions remain unanswered.

A key question that is not fully answered concerns the intrinsic interest in juxtaposing these particular chapters. What does unite the five papers on France, the one on Switzerland, the two on Belgium and the one on French Canada, other than that they were presented at the same conference? Dard's overly brief introduction recognises that, unlike the substantial state-led experimentation with diverse forms of *corporatisme* in Brazil and Argentina, and in Italy, Spain and Portugal, other than the brief tenure of Vichy, there is no real comparability of experience between French-speaking countries in the 1930s—differences in size are huge, as are governance arrangements and economic fortunes. The collection's declared aim in focusing on the French-language debates was thus modestly to trace the international exchanges and circulation of the doctrines of *corporatisme* (p. 7), although the material is not wholly

convincing on this. Perhaps Dard's reference to "exhuming" the works of the doctrine's less well-known right wing intellectuals and publicists (p. 7) is the real primary objective, and one which is more nearly attained?

François René La Tour du Pin (1834-1924) was a leading social catholic and monarchist and the first of several corporatist French-language writers who Dard suggests had a "transnational influence" (p. 7). La Tour du Pin wrote for the *Action Française* review founded by his friend, the leading French nationalist and anti-Semite, Charles Maurras (1868-1952). The latter, we are told, often visited Lausanne in Switzerland where the Vaud Canton's Liberal-Conservative Party adopted *corporatisme* in 1934. La Tour du Pin was clearly read widely in the 1930s--at a time when the Catholic Church was officially advocating *corporatisme*. But his monarchical brand did not appear to travel to Switzerland or Canada. In Confederal Switzerland, Jost's chapter informs us that not only did politics in the 1930s follow linguistic lines (with the French-, German- and Italian-speaking right very divided), but its intellectual support was highly fragmented. In contrast, earlier, the "Fribourg Union" (1884-1891) which brought La Tour du Pin and other Catholic corporatists together under the chairmanship of the local bishop to discuss the relationship of the state and of politics in the world of work, did suggest some early transnationalism.

After the First World War, the Catholic aristocrat Gonzague de Reynold (1880-1970), who had studied in Paris, worked with extreme right Swiss groups and established personal relations with Salazar and Mussolini and advocated Switzerland joining Hitler's New Europe. Other Swiss intellectuals were strongly attracted by fascism and Lausanne University awarded Mussolini an honorary doctorate in 1937 in recognition of his having "given back to the Italian people its vital sense of spiritual, economic and social cohesion" (p. 125). In Canada, Meunier and Bock suggest a successful fusion of Quebec nationalism and social Catholicism led to a relatively unified corporatist movement. Its key ideologue in the first half of the twentieth century was the Abbé Lionel Groulx who saw the Catholic Church and French Canada as coterminous. He edited *L'Action française* from Montreal between 1917 and 1928--and in 1933 changed its name to *L'Action nationale*. Before the 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, La Tour du Pin was only cited in relation to his criticism of liberalism, rather than as someone who had developed a concept of a corporatist society. Even after 1931, *corporatisme's* Canadian advocates appeared to have to devote much time to inventing a phantom Canadian Communist or Socialist threat to try to persuade Catholics to embrace such significant constitutional change away from democracy.

Corporatist ideas were strongly embedded among right-wing Belgian Catholics in the interwar years, as Luyten argues. But in Belgium, there was a vigorous debate between "professional corporatists," building on existing structures organising workers, employers and farmers separately, and "authoritarian corporatists," who insisted on a strong central authority to end economic and social chaos and the threat of Communism. Charles Anciaux is the subject of Balace's chapter. He founded the "Réaction" circle in 1932, closely linked with the daily newspaper *La Nation Belge*, which criticised the Belgian king for having precipitately agreed to universal suffrage in 1918. Their aim was to establish an authoritarian, decentralised monarchy whose parliament would be based on socio-professional interest groups, and the Walloon Belgian right were clearly strongly influenced by Maurras and *Action Française*.

Among the largely unanswered questions are whether the various versions of the *corporatisme* discussed had any real influence on employer behaviours? Balace quotes an article in the January 1935 Belgian *La revue réactionnaire* that claims industrialists from Verviers and businessmen from Anvers were present at the founding circle meeting, but doesn't pursue this.

Boulat's chapter on the industrialist Jacques Warner, in contrast, does address actual influence rather than merely the exchange of ideas. He covers Warnier's progress from 1926 when, at the age of twenty-five, he became the fourth generation to run the Reims family woollen textiles firm. A broader

perspective here might have included reference to work showing the higher degree of family-firm longevity in eastern France thus framing more convincingly the context of Warnier's 1932 "discovery" of *corporatisme* through reading the Catholic journal, *La Vie intellectuelle* (1928-1956), to which his wife subscribed (p. 96).<sup>[4]</sup>

*La Vie intellectuelle* carried several articles by George Viance, who is identified in Bonafoux's chapter as the most well-known herald of inter-war Catholic advocates of *corporatisme*. She highlights its "extraordinary success" in France in the 1930s, claiming that nearly the whole of the "Catholic domain" had bought into the search for "a third way between liberalism and statism, between capitalism and collectivism" (p. 12). A continuation of the legacy of *ancien régime* social relations into contemporary management behaviours is argued strongly by d'Iribarne, and Bonafoux argues that Catholic *corporatisme* at the time rested on three pillars: the medieval guilds, nineteenth-century social Catholicism and the papal encyclicals (especially Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and Pope Pius XI's encyclical on the "Reconstruction of the Social Order," *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931).<sup>[5]</sup> Viance, in charge of publications at the National French Catholic Federation (an essentially male grouping with one million members in the 1930s), was also a key figure in the Social Insurance Fund for low-paid workers established in 1930, and in the Family Social Insurance Fund set up from 1932. However, Bonafoux suggests his advocacy of a non-totalitarian form of corporative society was largely free of the positive references to medieval guilds of his theoretical mentor, the Marquis François-René de La Tour du Pin.

Warnier, the Reims textile employer, was probably spurred into activity by the events of February 6 1934, when much of France's nationalist political right was shaken up by the deaths at a huge Paris anti-government demonstration. That year he joined the Catholic family Saint Louis Society, and two years later, formed a monarchist, corporatist Regional Trades Centre in Champagne. Then, feeling the need to prepare "social and economic institutions that a strong political power can use" (p. 99), after the election of the Popular Front and the Matignon Agreements he formed a Corporatist Industrial and Commercial Reims Textile Alliance, supposedly led by a council of equal numbers of employers and workers. Interestingly, this corporatist body was spurned both by the Catholic CFTC, who saw it as direct competition, and by the unified CGT, which simply ignored it. Soon afterwards Warnier helped found the Centre des jeunes patrons (CJP) and joined the Comité central de l'organisation professionnelle.

In 1940 and 1941, Warnier saw the Vichy regime and the "National Revolution" as crowning the four years of pre-war struggle he had put in to establish *corporatisme*. For Petain, as for Warnier, "the class struggle is fatal for the country" and in June 1941 he set up a Social Committee made up of himself, a representative of the management, and four worker representatives from his own Warnier-David factory (pp. 106-107). He became Director of the Office of Social Committees, which expanded rapidly from 372 in January 1942 to 9,000 by May 1944.

The Vichy period also represented the apogee of French farmers' direct involvement in control over agricultural organisation. Chatriot demonstrates the continuity of farmer organisation in the face of falling prices in the 1930s to the food shortages and central organisation of the wartime *Corporation paysanne*. Gros traces the evolution of Louis Salleron, one of the key Catholic agricultural advocates of *corporatisme* of the Vichy period, a supporter of medieval guild organisation and of a society without conflict, and a consistent critic of democracy who went on in 1983 to publish his last book, called *Cancer socialiste*.

The absence of a general "what happened next" question after detailing some of the outpourings of French-speaking writers in the 1930s who either called themselves reactionary or were called that by others is to be regretted. None of the contributions discussing figures who lived through the Second World War touch upon any self-criticism or reappraisal by the intellectuals they describe. Only the Boulat chapter traces Warnier's being part of a French delegation to the US to promote productivity in

1951 after which he returns determined to support productivity growth as a means of overcoming the class struggle. Under the auspices of the CNPF (the national employers' organisation) and with the support of the CJP he then helps found the Centre de recherche des chefs d'entreprises in 1953. But there is no reflection in this (or any other chapter) on the significance or relationship of the shift from Catholic *corporatisme* towards an American managerialism preaching human relations and productivity.

Indeed, only Dard's own chapter attempts a more general assessment of the fate of the doctrine of *corporatisme* after the war. He argues that despite its discrediting at the Liberation, there were several attempts to revive it, and among those trying to maintain extreme right nationalism it reappeared within the Poujade movement. It was also present in the writings of some traditional Catholics, and among many admirers of Salazar's Portugal, some of whom attempted to resolve the Algerian conflict through the notion of "l'empire corporative" (p. 81). With only a handful of extreme right groups still referring to *corporatisme* after the democratic revolutions in Portugal and Spain, the definitive consecration of *corporatisme* to history is undertaken by Le Pen's National Front in 1984.

The book is thus disappointing from this reviewer's perspective. Its focus is on exhuming corporatist ideas and linkages between French-speaking reactionaries rather than in the much more interesting and challenging task of critically trying to locate them in their period. It exposes the presence of such writers, without critically discussing either the religious or the anti-semitic components of their different forms of "revolutionary nationalisms." It is not a book I can recommend anyone should read.

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## NOTES

[1] Steve Jefferys, *Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité at Work: Changing French Employment Relations and Management*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

[2] Wikipedia definition at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporatism> (6 April 2013).

[3] Larousse definition at <http://www.larousse.com/en/dictionnaires/francais/corporatisme/19397> (6 April 2013).

[4] Maurice Lévy-Leboyer, “Le patronat français a-t-il échappé à la loi des trois générations?” in Patrick Friedenson, ed., *Industrialisation et Sociétés d’Europe Occidentales* (Paris: Editions de l’Atelier, 1997).

[5] Philippe d’Iribarne, *La logique d’honneur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989).

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