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Valerie Deacon, *The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: members of the Cagoule and Corvignolles in the Second World War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 230 pp. Bibliography and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hc). ISBN 978-0-8071-6362-7.

Review by Richard J. Golsan, Texas A&M University.

Valerie Deacon's *The Extreme Right and the French Resistance* offers an excellent, thorough, and very readable account of the role played by extreme right groups and especially key individuals in resisting the Nazi occupant during World War II. Specifically, Deacon focuses on two pre-war right wing organizations, the Cagoule and Corvignolles, the first under the leadership of Eugène Deloncle, who became a pro-Nazi leader during the war, and the second under the leadership of Georges Loustaunau-Lacau, an army officer through most of the pre-war years who become a right wing deputy after the war in the early 1950s.

Of the two groups, the Cagoule is better known, in part because some of its leaders had links to the young François Mitterrand and also because in June 1937 some of its members carried out the murder of two Italian anti-fascist leaders, Carlo and Nello Rosello, a crime which produced a national scandal as well as a trial at the time. Cagoule leaders and their members, as Deacon points out, were anti-Communist, anti-Republican, and in many cases deeply anti-Semitic. For example, Aristide Corre, whom Deacon describes as the "unofficial archivist of the group" was an admirer of Céline's *Bagatelles pour un massacre* and believed that the Jews needed to be entirely rooted out of French society and destroyed. Deacon adds that Corre "certainly did not protest when "the Nazis began to burn synagogues in Berlin" (p. 53). Many members of the Cagoule, like Deloncle himself, were engineers and well-to-do. As Deacon points out, many lived in the 16th Arrondissement.

The Corvignolles, created in December 1936, was a secret army organization established by Loustaunau-Lacau primarily to counter a perceived threat of Communist infiltration in the Army. Deacon notes that the French army was indeed a target of Communist propaganda at the time, and also that the Corvignolles itself was symptomatic of an increasing politicization of the army in the 1930s. It simply ended up on the wrong side of political power after the ascent of the Popular Front that same year. Under any circumstances, both the Corvignolles and the Cagoule benefitted from the government's outlawing of the right-wing and fascist Leagues following the failed coup d'état of 6 February 1934.

Before discussing the resistance activities of these groups, or more accurately, some of their leading figures like Loustaunau-Lacau, Deacon raises the difficult question as to why these right-wing anti-Republican figures would join the resistance in the first place, given that the Vichy regime seemed tailor-made for many of their political ends. In answering this question Deacon notes that at least at the outset of the Occupation, some officials in the Vichy regime itself tolerated and to a degree encouraged these groups. As the war progressed and the regime hardened, however, such tolerance waned. A second

question that arises is why, given their anti-Communism and anti-Semitism, these groups and individuals did not support the Nazis themselves. In fact, some did, including *cagouleurs* Deloncle and Jacques Darnand, who of course would eventually become the head of Vichy's paramilitary *Milice*. In most instances, for those who did join the Resistance, the presence of the hereditary German enemy on French soil trumped all other considerations. This was certainly true for many veterans of the Great War like Loutaunau-Lacau.

At the outset of the war Loutaunau-Lacau reintegrated into the army for the battle of France in May-June 1940. He was wounded, hospitalized in a German-controlled hospital, and then escaped. Eventually he made his way to Vichy where, with Pétain's knowledge, he formed the resistance group "Alliance." Deacon notes that the Alliance network "which has often been overlooked by historians of the resistance, was numerically superior to most other networks" (p. 87). Its agents were primarily involved with military intelligence, and spread out all over France to spy on German forces. The information gathered was then funneled to the British, who provided Alliance with support including money, agents, and radio transmitters.

Eventually Loutaunau-Lacau was captured and imprisoned for his resistance activities, and leadership of the Alliance group fell to Marie-Madeleine Méric and Léon Faye. From Loutaunau-Lacau's perspective, Méric was an excellent choice, as the Germans would never suspect a woman of resistance. Under any circumstances, in 1942 Alliance was given a difficult and politically vexed assignment by the British intelligence. Alliance was asked to encourage General Henri Giraud, who had escaped from prison in Germany, to work with British intelligence. Alliance was also eventually asked to work with the British to help Giraud escape to Gibraltar, where he met with Eisenhower. Later, of course, he would become a rival and detriment to de Gaulle and his ambitions. As for Alliance, their role in the operation alienated them from other pro-Gaullist resistance groups, before and after the war.

As for Loutaunau-Lacau himself, he had been deported by the Germans to Mauthausen. He survived, and eventually returned to France, where he launched a career in parliamentary politics in 1951. Regarded with suspicion and hatred by the left, as well as others, for his political actions and adventurism, Loutaunau-Lacau remained a fervent defender of the army, a fanatical anti-Communist, and a germanophobe in his personal as well as his political life. Given his pre-war past, he remained associated in the public eye with extreme right-wing groups and conspiracies. He was caught up in legal tangles when the trial of the Cagoule, which had been halted by Vichy resumed. He was also linked to the *plan bleu* conspiracy, whose aims included the overthrow of the government to prevent a communist take-over. As Deacon notes, however, evidence linking him to that plot is inconclusive, at best. Loutaunau-Lacau also, perhaps predictably given his support of national defense, championed the need for France to become and remain an atomic power, and also the necessity for the nation to preserve its empire. Weakened by his experience in the Nazi camp, he died prematurely in 1955, after the army recognized him by promoting him to the rank of general.

In discussing former *cagouleurs* who at least arguably became leaders of the resistance or founders of resistance groups, Deacon cites the case of Georges Groussard, a friend of Loutaunau-Lacau and a fellow army officer who became a police and intelligence official at Vichy. Part of the reason Groussard assumed this role was, as Deacon explains, because of his distaste for French camaraderie with the Germans, which he had witnessed after the fall of Paris and elsewhere in 1940. While a police official at Vichy, Groussard created the *Centre d'Information et d'études*, or CIE, which by most accounts was intended as an organ both to serve the interests of Pétain in his struggles with Laval and to resist the Nazis and prepare the ground for an eventual struggle with them. But the CIE also sought to root out Communists in the Resistance, obviously a shared cause with the Nazis. At one stage, when seeking to extend the operations of the CIE into the Occupied Zone, a CIE official François Méténier wrote the Nazi leader Helmut Knochen in Paris to explain their shared goals. Indeed, given the observed repressive tactics of the CIE, the Nazis referred to them ironically as the "French Gestapo" (p.126). But

Nazi sentiments towards the CIE changed when Groussard and his organization played an important role in ousting Pierre Laval in 1941. At that point, the Nazis demanded that the CIE be shut down. After the CIE was dissolved, Groussard went on to seek British support for his new resistance network, the Gilbert network. He went to London, where he met with Churchill among others. Back in France, his situation became increasingly dangerous, and in 1942 he fled to Switzerland, where he continued his effective Resistance work.

According to Deacon, Groussard's decision not to link his Resistance movement to the Gaullists remains a mystery as, unlike Loustaunau-Lacau, he had no problem with De Gaulle. This would remain the case until after the war, when Groussard like many other far-right resisters, became enraged with De Gaulle over his Algerian decisions. He subsequently became a staunch defender of the Algerian generals, but what succeeded in sinking his reputation for good was his indirect involvement with the capture of Jean Moulin by Klaus Barbie at Caluire (an involvement too complicated to explain here).

In addition to Loustaunau-Lacau and Groussard, Deacon includes in her study fascinating accounts of other *résistants*, most of whom were involved with the Cagoule and eventually embraced Gaullism, at least into the early postwar years. These include Pierre de Bénouville who, among his more notorious actions, fatefully ordered René Hardy to attend the meeting of Resistance leaders with Jean Moulin at Caluire, and Georges Duclos, whose exploits in the Resistance were truly heroic, but who chose nevertheless to move permanently to Argentina after the war. As a rule, these men maintained close ties with each other, and also remained strong supporters of French Algeria. It was in fact their strong political and ideological links to each other, and especially their pre-war familiarity with clandestine activities and lives, that in many cases made them such effective members of the Resistance.

In the end, Valerie Deacon has tackled a difficult subject, for several reasons. First, the notion of extreme right resisters goes against the commonly held view that the Resistance was filled with individuals of the left and center, and certainly individuals devoted to the French Republic. This is certainly not the profile of the pre-war *cagouleurs* who became Resistance fighters and who also refused to renounce their right-wing politics. Second, as Deacon points out, some of these individuals remained staunch Pétainists while serving the cause of resistance to Nazism. Viewed from the present, this seems difficult to comprehend, given what we know now about Vichy's politics. But perceptions at the time were of course quite different. Finally, an issue which Deacon chooses to face head on is how we view these men, given that, despite their Resistance records, all still embraced unsavory political opinions before the war, and some committed crimes in the name of those opinions. To her credit, Deacon refuses either to condemn these men completely or champion them on the basis of their Resistance actions. She calls instead for a nuanced understanding of both their views and actions over their lifetimes. This approach alone, she argues, will allow us to understand the historical complexities both of the Resistance and of the Dark Years themselves. In this Deacon is absolutely right, and it is her nuanced approach that makes *The Extreme Right and the French Resistance* an excellent read as well as an important and indeed essential contribution to the scholarship of French Resistance to Nazism during World War II.

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