
H-France Review Vol. 21 (September 2021), No. 169

Richard Griffiths, *France's Purveyors of Hatred: Aspects of the French Extreme Right and its Influence, 1918-1945*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021. xiii + 230 pp. Preface, acknowledgments, abbreviations and conventions, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$128.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-0367255848; \$35.96 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-0367255879; \$40.45 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-0429288494.

Review by Sarah Shurts, Bergen Community College.

In *France's Purveyors of Hatred: Aspects of the French Extreme Right and its Influence, 1918-1945*, Richard Griffiths does once more what he has so ably done in the past: make an array of individuals and groups with complex motivations and responses comprehensible to his audience. The author of *Marshal Pétain, Fascism*, and *Patriotism Perverted* returns in this book to the origins and ideas of interwar extreme-right movements outside Germany and Italy and the influence of these movements on wartime collaboration.^[1] Although much ink has been spilled on these questions already, Griffiths's approach provides a commendable blend of existing scholarship and unique insights that make the book both a worthy addition to the libraries of those already steeped in the field and an accessible introduction to newcomers.

The focus of *France's Purveyors of Hatred* is in some ways quite narrow since, after a quick introductory chapter tracing the ideas of the radical right back to the fin de siècle, its scope is limited to the years 1918-1945. However, the narrow time frame allows Griffiths to explore his theme more broadly in other ways: taking a transnational approach to the right-wing movements flooding Europe and tracing their connections to French influence. In his opening sentences, Griffiths makes clear both the trajectory of his argument about the French right and his position on the oft-debated question of a native variant of French fascism. "Fascism did not emerge in the 1920s unheralded," he begins, "It had been preceded, before the First World War in Italy and France, by a number of what have been called 'pre-fascist', or 'radical Right' movements..." (p. 1). His exploration of the French radical right movements of the pre-WWI period therefore gains increased significance since, as he acknowledges, his intent is to prove them to be the "origins" of European fascism (p. 3). The radical right that emerged from the traditional political divisions of the French Third Republic was one that was anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, and influenced by anti-rationalism. It celebrated a cult of violence and was increasingly populist in its appeal. To help define and delineate this new pre-WWI radical right for his readers, Griffiths structures the introduction around those he considers its four significant intellectual influences: Maurice Barrès, Édouard Drumont, Charles Maurras, and Georges Sorel.

Griffiths argues convincingly that the radical right borrowed from Barrès a thread of nationalism with a socialist tinge and a language of rootedness that contained the seeds of xenophobia, racial identity, and anti-Semitism. Although emphasizing the anti-Semitic nature of Barrès's nationalism, it is to Drumont that Griffiths attributes the most violent strain of this influence on the far right. Yet for Drumont, he claims, anti-Semitism was tied more closely to anti-capitalism and an association of Jews with wealth than it was for Barrès. In his anti-capitalist crusade, Drumont was joined by the anarcho-syndicalist Sorel whose glorification of violence and admiration for bold seizures of power and authoritative leadership led him to admire both Mussolini and Lenin. Finally, there was Maurras, whose influence on right-wing thought through the Action Française was unparalleled during the decades leading to WWII. Under the leadership of Maurras, the Action Française would be "nationalist, royalist, anti-capitalist, corporatist, authoritarian, anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, anti-protestant, anti-masonic and Catholic" (p. 10).

According to Griffiths, with these guiding principles and Maurras's talent for gathering and galvanizing a following, there was little discernable difference between the pre-war Action Française and the interwar fascist movements. And it is with this assurance of the debt the interwar fascist right owes to the Action Française that Griffiths proceeds into his next chapters. While he is perhaps right to see the figure of Maurras loom large over the interwar radical right, the contributions of his other three founders, Barrès, and to a greater extent Sorel and Drumont, tend to be lost by the wayside until the book's conclusion. The hegemonic presence of Maurras and the Action Française in interwar France has been thoroughly covered by Eugene Weber and Paul Mazgaj among others. Had Griffiths traced the other three threads in the European radical right and French native fascism a bit more thoroughly, it would have provided an even more unique contribution.

In the first three chapters, Griffiths explores the impact of French ideas on the radical right outside its own borders. He argues that Catholicism, often considered incompatible with fascism, is in reality one of the essential forces in the radical right. The Action Française was, he says, a "Catholic pre-fascism" (p. 25) and its influence on other Catholic, nationalist movements of the far right outside France was substantial. Griffiths includes among those international movements influenced by the Action Française the Integralismo Lusitano movement in Portugal, the Movimento Nacional Sindicalista that emerged from it, and most significantly the Estado Novo of Salazar. Salazar's Portugal was, according to Henri Massis, a transplantation of Action Française ideology to a regime where the ideas could be put in to action.^[2] But, if Salazar's regime was the truest imitation of the Action Française program, it was not the only movement of the authoritarian radical right to borrow from it. Franco's Spain, the Belgian Rexists, and even Ioannis Metaxas's Greek Orthodox-inspired dictatorship, Griffiths argues, took inspiration from the program of the Action Française. Surprisingly, the one regime that Griffiths warns readers not to consider a Catholic, Action Française-inspired movement is Mussolini's Fascists. Mussolini took great pains to nurture a perception of Fascism as a Catholic movement; a perception strengthened by the Lateran pacts of 1929 and by his efforts to court the support of the Action Française. But, Griffiths argues, seeing Mussolini's Fascists as Catholic in nature is a "false trail" (p. 25).

While many of the continental radical-right regimes borrowed from the Action Française, England would prove immune to its lure. Griffiths confirms the usual tendency among scholars to view English political movements as primarily influenced by the Germans and Italians. But,

he suggests the French did have a foothold of influence through the English intellectual and literary circles. Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton were both devotees of the Action Française and T.E. Hulme's Imagists and T.S. Eliot's self-identification as a Tory were both based on Anglican versions of Maurrassian thought. While Maurrassian influence may have existed only in the literary circles of the English far right, Griffiths finds Wales much more receptive. The Plaid Cymru led by Saunders Lewis was a Welsh nationalist movement that drew inspiration from the French radical right. Although Griffiths acknowledges that Lewis was particularly influenced by the work of Maurice Barrès and distanced himself from Maurras, he notes that others within the upper echelons of Plaid Cymru leadership, like Ambrose Bebb, took their vision of an independent Wales from the Action Française.

In the five chapters that follow, Griffiths returns to the transformation of the radical right within interwar France. He begins with an exploration of French social anti-Semitism which existed long before the rise of the radical right and was often as present on the left as it was on the right. Griffiths justifies the inclusion of this chapter as essential for understanding the success of the far right in France despite the fact that it strays a bit from the focus of the book. "Interwar extremist movements that we shall examine," he says, "existed against a backdrop of more moderate public opinion, of which some elements, though apparently innocuous, at times provided a form of support for their views and activities" (p. 59). The work of André Gide and Jacques de Lacretelle's novel *Silbermann* provide the exemplars of this social antisemitism. Those engaging in this social form would not have recognized themselves as antisemitic and they often rejected the racial policies of Nazism, Griffiths explains, but they contributed to an environment of discrimination, scorn, and stereotyping that provided fertile ground for radical-right movements.

Griffiths then turns his attention to the interwar leagues within France and their distinctive contributions to right-wing politics at the time. He warns readers that he will avoid fruitless attempts to differentiate conservative from fascist leagues since the members of these bodies did not make any great effort to define the differences for themselves and many crossed from one to another seamlessly. He begins as expected with the Action Française and then follows the threads of those who, disillusioned once the Action Française began to cater to a middle class, capitalist, and conservative clientele, broke from it to form more radical variations. Griffiths gives a quick glimpse at leagues formed before 1934 including the Faisceau, the Ligue des Patriotes, the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Croix de Feu, the Solidarité française, the Francistes, and those formed after 1934, including the Parti Populaire Français and the Cagoule. For Griffiths, as for many other scholars of the French far right, the Stavisky Affair riots of 6 February 1934 served as a point of radicalization for both the right and the left. Although calling it a myth, Griffiths also seems to embrace the idea that the February 6 riots were the turning point when "a young generation of the right saw themselves, from now on, as part of a new, vital, right-wing wave, and as belonging to a movement of 'international fascism'" (p. 87). This claim that the far right saw themselves as part of an international fascist movement after 1934, rather than part of a uniquely French national revolution, is far from self-apparent, however, and more support on this particular claim is needed for it to be convincing. Where Griffiths does convince is in his reminder that although the leagues began to fade and were eventually banned in 1939, radical right league supporters didn't just disappear. Though these former league members were a disorganized force, they were one ready to be tapped after 1940.

Griffiths next provides a brief chapter comparing the British and French responses to Nazism before 1940 that is both a unique contribution to the usual approach to French interwar fascism and a reminder of his extensive work in the field of British collaboration. The British far right was significantly more enthusiastic about Nazism than the French far right and they tended to embrace collaboration with the Germans at a higher rate, at least before 1940. Such pro-Nazi attitudes, other than the early enthusiasm of Alphonse de Châteaubriant, are, Griffiths says, relatively rare. Instead, the French far right tended to be more hesitant about Nazi Germany and even the most ardent collaborationists after 1940, like Robert Brasillach, retained a bit of Germanophobia that Griffiths attributes directly to their Maurrassian foundations.

In the following chapter, Griffiths continues his look at the French approach to Nazi collaborationism with a comparison of two of its most prolific writers: Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle. This chapter, while providing excellent insight into the responses of both men to the defeat and the possibilities of fascism for France, might give pause to those who have followed the debates about fascist writers. Griffiths is exceedingly careful to warn readers about the pitfalls of past scholarship that has viewed writers like Brasillach as “romantic fascists” enamored of the aesthetics of the movement and therefore in some sense excused for their enraptured participation in it. But the warning in the final pages of the chapter that Brasillach is no lovely butterfly to be pitied for his death sentence is in contrast to the image of him throughout the chapter as a hopeful enthusiast looking for an adventure. Griffiths has done his due diligence in warning his reader, but the approach to Brasillach is still a bit jarring in light of these previous works touting romantic fascism.

Griffiths then turns to the question of those on the radical right with left-wing roots. While the fascist trajectories of those on the left have garnered some scholarly attention already, Griffiths provides a needed tempering of this pursuit. He warns of the pitfalls in assigning fascist labels to individuals like Marcel Déat and Henri de Man whose own self-identification and the assessment of their peers do not support it. Griffiths disagrees with Zeev Sternhell’s assessment of de Man’s Planism as a fascist movement, arguing instead that both he and his peers viewed it as neo-socialist and very “un-fascist” (p. 134). He argues that the wartime collaboration by Déat may have been only from desire for an authoritarian state that could help realize his own program. For both Déat and de Man, the motivating factor may have been more opportunism than ideology. Griffiths’s ability to tease out the complexity of motivations and responses, exemplified in this chapter, continues into the remainder of the book.

The last three chapters of the book address the radical right during the Occupation and address the complex questions surrounding collaboration and resistance. His chapter on Breton nationalism is a unique contribution to a well-traversed field and provides a new approach to the question of motivation for collaboration and the complexity of choices and compromises involved. The chapter on non-political collaboration recovers old ground as well, but provides a useful overview of the scholarship on accommodation with special attention to the work of Robert Gildea. It also gives new insight into the question of how collaboration was viewed from the outside by examining the writings of Ernst Jünger on collaborationists. Even Griffiths’s assessment of horizontal collaboration reveals his careful consideration of diverse motivations and a reminder that judgment should be withheld since no one can truly know the factors that contributed to difficult decisions during this time.

The final chapter explores the political and ideological collaborators of the Occupation from the political leaders to the committed writers. Griffiths highlights the influence that the Action Française had over Vichy and the tendency of Maurrassians to gravitate toward Vichy, while more ardent supporters of the Nazi program remained in Paris. But he reminds us too that Vichy policy was not the work of the Action Française alone. The later sections of the chapter focus on those of the interwar radical right who, after the defeat, joined De Gaulle in London or supported Henri Giraud in Algiers. Some among these radical-right exiles rejected German occupation, but continued to support Maurras. Perhaps Griffiths's most important reminder in the book is that any attempt to predict an individual or group's wartime position based on pre-1940 radical-right ideology or membership is doomed to failure. There were simply too many motivations and factors involved and too many potential trajectories to make such predictions.

The only disappointment readers may have in *France's Purveyors of Hatred* is that the book ends in 1945 with only a brief conclusion looking forward to the extreme right of the postwar and modern day. It would have been fascinating to see Griffiths take on the radical right since 1945 in a conclusion similar to his pre-1918 introduction. But of course, that is a disappointment arising not from any failing by Griffiths but rather from a wish to see his evenhanded approach to the diverse groups and motivations of the far right continue past the stated confines of the study. The book is yet another exceptional addition by Griffiths to the conversation about the French interwar and wartime far right.

NOTES

[1] See *Fascism* (New York: Continuum, 2005); *Marshal Pétain* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011); and *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British Anti-Semitism, 1930-1940* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

[2] Henri Massis, *Chefs* (Paris: Plon, 1939).

Sarah Shurts
Bergen Community College
sshurts@bergen.edu

Copyright © 2021 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor republication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.