
H-France Review Vol. 2 (October 2002), No. 101

Claire Andrieu, Gilles Le Béguec, and Danielle Tartakowsky, Eds., *Associations et champ politique: La loi de 1901 à l'épreuve de siècle*. Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, 2001. 723 pp. Notes, appendices, and bibliography. 35.00 Euros (pb). ISBN 2-85944-424-6.

Review by Lynne Taylor, University of Waterloo.

This collection of essays, exhaustive in scope, is the result of a conference held in Sénat in November 2000 that addressed the relationship between associations and the political arena in France during the twentieth century. For the purposes of this conference, "associations" was used in its broadest sense to refer to popular organizations—a wing of a political party, a political organization not affiliated with a political party, or even an ostensibly apolitical organization such as a cultural, sports, and charitable organization—created by like-minded people with the purpose of affecting, changing, or defending what they perceive as political or social norms. Officially, prior to the passage of the law of 1901, it was illegal for the French to organize themselves into such organizations, making the passage of the law an important turning point in French politics, at least in theory. Although the ostensible focus of the conference was on the law of 1901, which legalized associations in France, this collection is much broader in range than that. Chronologically, it stretches from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s and beyond. It touches on the history of political and civil (or non-political) associations, their formation, their relationships with one another, with political parties, and with the state. The evolution of those relationships can be traced through these essays as the authors explore associational life in France over the course of more than a century.

Those relationships have always been problematic ones, a source of tension in French society and politics. For the state and the elites, they are a potential source of challenge to their authority and legitimacy and so to be regarded with suspicion. For others, especially the politically marginalized, they are a means of gaining a voice, to indirectly participate in, to shape and even to challenge the political hegemony. It becomes clear that the law of 1901, while an important step in that evolution, and in the shaping of the political and social arenas in France, was only one of many. By the 1880s, associations were flourishing in France, and so the law of 1901 was a confirmation of something already in place rather than a spectacular break with the past. Then the crucibles of World War One, the Vichy period, the Algerian crisis, and the fall of the Fourth Republic, followed swiftly by the turmoil of 1968, all had their own impact on the nature, shape, extent, and influence of associations.

The discussion addresses, sometimes *sotto voce* some larger questions about associational life in France the associations role in the development of democracy, their waxing and waning, constantly mutating role in the politics of France, whether affiliated with political parties or ostensibly holding themselves outside or above the parliamentary fray. It goes to the heart of debate of what constitutes politics. Should the study of politics be confined to the formal political arena, such as parliamentary politics in the case of France, or should it go beyond that? In doing so, the study of politics would include not just those involved in formal politics, but all those actors and agents who influence parliamentary decision-making, either directly or indirectly, but who may not be a part of the formal political process. This latter is a category into which the associations under discussion fit neatly.

The book is divided into four parts. The first acts as an introduction, providing the historical context for the law of 1901 and for a discussion of associational life in the twentieth century. The essays in this section review the strong presence of associations in spite of being officially banned. The second part deals with the turn of the twentieth century, when the law of 1901 was passed. It is made clear that although a plethora of laws existed banning associations, the laws were seldom enforced and more than 45,000 associations existed according to the official statistics published in 1900 (p. 144). The laws remained in place, however, out of a fear of the potential threat associations might pose to the state. Support for the freedom of association could be found throughout the political spectrum. Yet, efforts from all sides to change the laws repeatedly failed until 1901, when an attempt to create an exception for religious congregations became a general law allowing the freedom of association. The details of that shift are carefully recounted in several of the essays.

The third part deals with the law from the perspective of the political parties. With its passage, the opportunities created for political parties seemed boundless. New political associations were created, some of which evolved into political parties. Other cultural or sports associations were formed, mostly at the municipal level, some with political party affiliations (especially the French Communist Party, it appears) and some without. Whether they were openly affiliated with a political party or not, these authors argue that these organisations had a significant influence on the broader political arena. The relationship between parties and associations was a complex one, and it is explored from a variety of angles.

The fourth part takes the view of the associations. Here, the point is made again, forcefully, that associational life in France was a rich one well before 1901. The authors argue that 1901 merely made legal what had already been established. However, 1901 also provided opportunities previously denied to the associations for their expansion in both size and in scope. It gave them a legal visibility that they had been denied previously and, in so doing, a legitimacy that could only add to their influence and stature. These essays continue to explore the relationship between parties and associations. They also explore the importance of political ideology in shaping the associations themselves, for those forming and joining the associations come to the organizations politically literate. The education they had received in the formal political arena, either through participation or observation, shaped the way in which they understood, constructed, and ran their own, new associations. Political ideology informed the way in which the associations organized and administered themselves, as well as the way in which they pursued their goals, whether critical or supportive of the political regimes. It is only unfortunate that there is relatively little material about post-1968 associations, which promises to be a rich area of study for those interested in contemporary social movements.

In the process, one of the bigger questions being explored is that of what distinguishes a party from a movement or association. In fact, as these authors demonstrate, the line often gets blurry. Associations are very fluid entities, able to recast themselves as circumstances require. This can grant them an unexpected effectiveness in the political arena. Further, the relationship between political parties and associations (political or not) is a complex and constantly changing one. Ideas, people, and causes move freely between them and in both directions. That exchange has resulted in important changes for both political parties and associations over the past century and more and accounts for the blurred line between them. This discussion is part of a much larger reconsideration of what constitutes politics and what is a legitimate subject of study for political historians. As these authors have amply demonstrated, politics is about more than just parliamentary debate. There are agents other than political parties who must be considered if one is to truly understand how political decisions are made.

Taken together, the essays gathered in *Associations et champ politique* provide a useful compendium of the state of research in France on associational life in that country during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will prove a useful resource for any scholar interested in the subject.

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ISSN 1553-9172