

*H-France Review* Vol. 9 (October 2009), No. 129

Samuel Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix de Feu*. Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. x+ 265 pp. Bibliography and index. \$99.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6240-2.

Review by Samuel Huston Goodfellow, Westminster College.

One of the greatest challenges in writing about fascism and the right in the interwar era is the problem of definition. What is fascism? How is it different from the extreme right or even conservatism? Is fascism an outgrowth of the left? The impulse towards differentiation, although it has its purposes, obscures the messy reality of the bundle of political and social organizations that operated on the right. Lack of a clear foundational ideology, the moral taint associated with fascism, and the often experimental quality of these new movements further complicate the task of creating clear categories.

Samuel Kalman sidesteps many of these questions by resorting to a different terminology. Instead of dwelling on the now stale question of whether the Faisceau or the Croix de Feu/ Parti Social Français (CdF/PSF) was, or was not, fascist, Kalman simply refers to them as part of the extreme right and chooses to focus instead on the strands that ran through the groups as well as on the internecine struggles within the groups. This is not a book about the definitional purity of the term fascism or even the extreme right, but about two issues: the linkages over time and across issues and the discord within movements.

The Faisceau and the CdF/PSF represented the most successful French right-wing leagues in the 1920s and 1930s respectively. Both shared a desire to “develop comprehensive plans for an extensive transformation of the French nation and state” (p. 38). Neither group advocated a liberal democratic state while both vehemently opposed any sort of socialist state. The first chapter explores the different ways that the two leagues sought to renovate the state. Both the Faisceau and the CdF/PSF advocated a third path between the left and the Republic. In the case of the Faisceau, a fairly deep divide emerged between the vision of Georges Valois, who sought a more modern, totalitarian state, and the conservatives who pushed for a more traditional authoritarian government. The important point here is that even within the Faisceau, ostensibly an ideologically uniform movement, there were profound disagreements. The CdF/PSF had less disagreement over the form of the future state, adopting a more traditionalist model. This reflected the movement’s broader base.

The next chapter deals with the two leagues’ views of the economy. Both leagues recognized a need to modernize the economy, but faced the question of how to steer among liberal, Marxist, and conservative economic ideas. Kalman argues that in both cases, their economic doctrines had considerable resonance across a much broader ideological spectrum. The pro-republican extreme right, the technocrats who favored a rational society, and even socialist and syndicalists shared some basic economic concepts with the Faisceau and the CdF/PSF. The Faisceau’s head Georges Valois, for example, admired American Taylorism and envisioned a rationalist, technically advanced economy directed from above by competent elites. François de La Rocque oversaw a CdF/PSF divided between social Catholicism and

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*planisme*. Kalman argues that there was no single “fascist” economic doctrine. What one sees instead is an internal debate that had resonance outside the narrow boundaries of political affiliation and that resulted in a mishmash of capitalist, social Catholic, and *planiste* ideas.

Chapter three examines the role of women and family laid out by the two leagues. The demographic collapse of a generation of men, along with the changing roles of women, placed gender issues at the center of social and political discourse. Surprisingly, both the Faisceau and the CdF/PSF advocated fairly mainstream conservative positions. Nevertheless, considerable tension between conservative and progressive elements existed within the two movements. On the one hand, women, especially married women, were supposed to fulfill their essential duties in the home. On the other hand, it was incontestable that the surplus of women meant more women in the workplace. The compromise for some circles in the CdF/PSF was to concede equal pay for single women and even viable daycare centers where necessary, but to push for higher birthrates for married women, who would be excluded from the work place. At a time when bachelor girls were redefining the fundamental tenets of female emancipation, a conservative position reaffirming traditional values while negotiating limited progressive change was popular.

The development of youth was yet another strand central to the renovation of France. The Faisceau tended to adopt the militarized experience of the war as a model for organizing and educating youths. Young men were the bulwark against communism and the source of energy for change. The Faisceau argued for a more radical organization of youth, but generally was unsuccessful because of the brevity of its existence. Both groups supported what Kalman calls “conservative” values for youth: religious values, health, discipline, and morality. The CdF/PSF with its broader umbrella was somewhat less radical in its approach than the Faisceau, advocating working through the resources of the state to reach a wider population than those already ideologically committed to the cause.

The last chapter explores the role of Jews and foreigners in the imaginary future France. From the Dreyfus Affair through the long intellectual reach of the Action Française, the interwar era, and eventually the Vichy regime, xenophobic activity sustained a notable degree of continuity. Both the Faisceau and the CdF/PSF harbored extreme antisemites, who manifested their views either individually or in local organizations. At the same time, Valois and La Rocque temporized, arguing that individual Jews (veterans, for example) could prove themselves to be good Frenchmen, although a heavy burden rested on Jews to demonstrate that they were not beholden to some outside group. For the most part, neither group consistently espoused the sort of overt racial antisemitism of the German Nazis, favoring instead a corrosive cultural antisemitism.

The continuity across two decades in these two groups is in many ways striking. Both sought to recreate a radically new French nation, both intended to reimpose traditional gender roles while grudgingly conceding a limited degree of female emancipation, both saw the indoctrination of youth as central to the new state, and both shared a fundamental xenophobia. Kalman makes very clear that Vichy was part of this continuum. The significance of this book lies in the explicit strands he identifies that unite the movements of the far right, regardless of whether we call them fascist, extreme right, far right, or whatever. Understanding the commonalities is more important than the nomenclature.

Threads of commonality, however, did not preclude considerable diversity inside each of the movements. Kalman also does an excellent job of showing that both the Faisceau and the CdF/PSF sheltered a variety of views, some radical and some more conservative. The breadth of ideological viewpoints within the two movements enabled them to attract and hold (if, in the case of the Faisceau, only briefly) a diverse membership, and was an essential part of their relative success. When Georges Valois first inaugurated the Faisceau at the Arc de Triomphe in November 1925, for example, the small group probably had a fairly consistent ideological message cohering around the views of Valois. As the movement grew, new members joined who brought with them their own perceptions of what the

Faisceau should be. This process led to internal debates, but also changed the character of the movement. As the Faisceau, and indeed all of the extreme right movements, grew, they absorbed and reified a variety of mainstream ideas.

The CDF/PSF did the same thing. In 1936, the Croix de Feu recreated itself as a parliamentary party. Moving from a fairly extreme right wing veterans' group to a larger mass party involved a number of compromises and changes. The core ideas remained, but their implementation was contested. Much depended on the leader of the movement. A number of French groups such as the Solidarité Française or the Jeunesses Patriotes did not last long, in part because their leaders resisted the accommodations necessary to move to a mass party. The Faisceau collapsed when Valois withdrew his support. La Rocque's success hinged on his ability to be all things to all people—a trait he shared with other successful extreme right-wing leaders. It is not an accident that the PSF was the largest extreme right party prior to the outbreak of war.

By comparing just one extreme right wing movement each from the 1920s and from the 1930s, Kalman ignores a host of other movements. But, he drives home the continuities in ideology without losing sight of the internal divisions. This book is a significant contribution to the literature on France's interwar politics.

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ISSN 1553-9172