



Nicholas Atkin, Frank Tallett, eds. *The Right in France, 1789-1997*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. xiv + 306 pp. \$59.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-86064-197-8.

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This ambitious anthology evolved out of a conference on the right in France held at the University of Reading in July 1996. Although many of the contributions are rather narrow in scope and the editors make no attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the modern French right, this book nevertheless constitutes a serious attempt to shake up the historiographical status quo.

A brief synopsis of the contributing essays will reveal some of the themes linking these essays. Michael Broers describes Napoleon as a "Caesar of the left" and points to the "radical, positivist, almost Voltairian character of the First Empire" (p. 32). The point here seems to be that the right, in this instance, was not really right at all, but actually Left. Then Pamela Pilbeam examines Orleanism, which she describes as a "flickering magic lantern" which essentially compromised between right and left. Orleanism was a constitutional monarchy with liberal backing. Geoffrey Cubitt takes a different approach, focusing on the symbolic importance to Legitimists of dynastic inheritance, fidelity, and sacrificial suffering. The Bourbons represented right-wing, and indeed national virtues. In his analysis of the great French historian, Hippolyte Taine, Michael Biddiss argues that his views were a hodge-podge of Burkean conservatism and elite liberalism with a dash of Orleanist sympathies.

Michael Hefferman attacks the notion that pre-World

War I imperialism was a product of right-wing ideology. Instead, both the left and the right agreed on the civilizing mission of France. The article on the pre-war *Action française* by Richard Griffiths argues that much of the vitality of Charles Maurras stemmed from the movement's tactical pursuit of workers, even to the extent of proposing direct action. This infused the by-then moribund royalist strands with new blood. Martin Alexander surveys the attitudes of French officers from 1900 to 1962 and finds that the military elite tended to be "insufficiently professional" (p. 131) in times of crisis. Rather than deal with the technical short-comings of the military, the officers favored political scapegoats.

D. L. L. Parry takes the somewhat revisionist tack that the Cagoule, that mysterious right-wing conspiracy, was not fascist so much as it was authoritarian. Lacking a populist component, the Cagoule simply wanted to carry out a coup d'état to defend France from the left, although Parry does demonstrate that the Cagoule had more support than previously thought. Looking at the *Parti populaire français* (PPF) in Lyon, Kevin Passmore identifies the PPF as a "synthesis of conservatism and radicalism" in his article "Class, Gender, and Populism: The Parti Populaire Français in Lyon, 1936-1940." The PPF's treatment of gender, for example, generally excluded women from active roles, although middle-class

women did use the PPF's populism to advance their interests. Kay Chadwick examines the responses of intellectuals of the Catholic Church to German National Socialism and finds them somewhat split on the issue. The majority opposed National Socialism, although those who obsessed about the threat of communism did support the message of the Nazis.

Miranda Pollard confronts the issue of the right's view of women, arguing that the ideas of women, right, and politics were in a state of flux from the 1930s to the 1950s. Nevertheless, the right had in her view an "intensely antifeminist and intensely political" discourse about women that was alternatively mute on the issue of women and obsessed with women's collective role as the regenerators of France. The next article by Jonathon Watson examines the traditional view of Gaullism as a somewhat passive party subordinate to the whims of General Charles de Gaulle and finds it lacking. Gaullists were quite active in parliamentary activity and participated in the formulation of policy. Watson links Gaullism more closely to Orleanism than the more traditional Bonapartism.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front national* is not, in the view of Jim Wolfreys, simply a national-populist movement espousing a Thatcherite economic philosophy, but a new and sophisticated form of fascism generated out of the changed conditions of the post-World War II period. In the final essay, Charles Hauss concludes that the mainstream right has become the establishment, Le Pen has made his peace with the republican tradition, and that left and right are no longer clearly differentiated.

The term "the right" has always projected an imposing sense of unanimity. Yet as this collection of articles demonstrates, such was not the case. Over the last two hundred years, the French right has been anything but pure, consistent, or righteous. Indeed, that which we call the right is a constantly shifting and evolving set of political ideas that cannot be comfortably shoe-horned into a single ideology. In the introduction, Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett correctly note that these contributions describe "a right which is always fluid, diverse and adaptable" (p. 3). The right is difficult to pin down because its strands cross over and because at times it cannot even clearly distinguish itself from the left. Placing fascism in the typology of the right is a good example of the difficulty with the boundaries here. Kevin Passmore undercuts the hitherto accepted belief that the PPF was fascist by placing it in a complex nexus of conservative and radical right ideologies. Jim Wolfreys, conversely, resound-

ingly labels the *Front national* as fascist. Bear in mind that the PPF never repudiated the fascist classification, while Le Pen, leader of the *Front national*, frequently denies a direct connection with it. Both authors make a reasonable case for their statements, but both statements undermine whatever vestiges of consensus which might be remaining from the tattered definitions of fascism. The always contentious issue of fascism looms, for better or worse, over the longitudinal typologies of the right because of the necessity (and contentiousness) of clarifying the relationship between the right and fascism.

Atkin and Tallett also argue that the right is not best understood as a social movement or even as a political movement, but as a "collection of ideologies" (p. 3). I am not so sure that the right can be understood solely as a set of ideologies, or even that these contributions systematically demonstrate this. On the contrary, the strongest part of many of the articles is sociological. Martin Alexander's discussion of soldiers or Kevin Passmore and Miranda Pollard looking at the connection between gender and the right are studies where social categories rudely intrude on the formation of ideology. Arguably, the very discontinuities in the right's ideology as it shifted over time were related to the shifting sociology of support within a broad-almost indefinable-set of values. The interaction between social support, political activity, and ideology is crucial to capturing the essence of the right's evolving fluidity.

Where does this book fit into the overall historiography of the French right? The main contribution is not so much the addition of putatively anglophone issues of gender and ethnicity (although this is a plus), but lies in tackling the tripartite typology laid out by Rene Remond, which views the right as consisting of three strands—Legitimist, Orleanist, and Bonapartist—stretching from the French Revolution to the present (Rene Remond, *Les Droites en France* [Paris, 1982]). In these essays Legitimists are not simply cartoon royalists, the Orleanists do not toe a party line, and Bonapartists seem at times to be more Radical than conservative. The tacit acceptance of an indigenous fascist strand also contradicts Remond's typology. The editors maintain this book is a qualified endorsement of Remond's schema, but in the end the discontinuities at key points (e.g., the 1848 revolution, the Dreyfus Affair, and the 1936 Popular Front) predominate and the Legitimist, Orleanist, and Bonapartist movements seem to reconfigure themselves dramatically, perhaps to the point that they are no longer recognizable.

For those interested in synthesizing the trends of the

French right since the Revolution, this is an invaluable book. Although not as systematic as Francois Sirinelli's multi-volume, *Histoire des droites*, the composite picture of the complex shadings of ideology within the right, and even between the right and left, over the last two centuries provides fruitful new interpretations which should

invigorate an already healthy historiography about the French right.

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