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Introduction: Contextualising the Immunity Thesis

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Brian Jenkins is the editor of this collection of essays. His interest in the interwar French extreme Right dates back to the 1970s when he prepared his doctoral thesis on the Paris riots of 6 February 1934. Since then he has worked mainly on the history and theory of nationalism, both in the context of France and within a wider contemporary European framework. He has written extensively on these questions, and in particular he is the author of *Nationalism in France: Class and Nation since 1789* (1990) and co-editor of *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (1996). His approach emphasises the plurality of nationalism(s), their political and ideological malleability, their dependence on the specific political dynamics of each historical context, the dangers of taking their self-proclaimed lineage and rationale at face value.

In some respects, he brings a similar methodological perspective to bear on the debate about France and fascism between the wars: one which is suspicious of typologies based on fixed *essences*, sensitive to the nuances of historical context and political conjuncture, sceptical about the way political movements define themselves. His articles in this field include a critical evaluation of Robert Soucy's work (in *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1996) and a recent essay on Action Française (in M. Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme*, 2003).

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In an edited collection like this one it seems necessary to prepare the ground for the reader. Experts in a specialised field have little time in the restricted space of an essay to introduce their subject; they must move quickly to a sophisticated level and assume the reader can follow them. Thus it falls to the editor to make the terrain more accessible by providing some helpful signposts and reference points. In this particular case, for example, it seems necessary to fill in some historical background and to offer a synoptic overview of the political crisis of the 1930s in France. But before we begin to address the substance of our subject, we should first draw attention to the fact that this is a deeply sensitive field of study, and one which has become increasingly controversial over the last thirty years. While it would be inappropriate in an introductory essay to start exploring the key elements of that debate, it seems important to recognise from the outset that we are dealing with an area where passions run high and where more is at stake than purely academic pride.

The immunity thesis

The nature of France's response to the rise of European fascism during the 1930s, and subsequently to the Nazi occupation of 1940–44, has been a difficult subject for the nation's historians. In the three decades that followed the Liberation, what might be described as an 'optimistic' version of events (already embedded in political discourse and in popular consciousness) was given the *imprimatur* of academic respectability, rationalised and institutionalised into an historical orthodoxy. According to this, France's democratic culture and its well-established indigenous ideological traditions had rendered the country largely immune to the appeal of fascism between the wars. Those movements that displayed fascist characteristics were for the most part superficial imitations of something essentially 'foreign', and their political significance was anyway marginal. As for La Rocque's Croix de Feu, a real mass movement which has to be taken more seriously, this was authoritarian conservative rather than genuinely fascist, a prefiguration of postwar Gaullism, respectful of '*la légalité républicaine*'. And anyway, by 1938 the Republic had largely 'seen off' the extremes of Right and Left, and had found stability under Daladier's two-year centrist coalition when external events intervened. Vichy was an artificial by-product of military defeat and occupation, a regime that would never have come about in the normal run of things and whose excesses were perpetrated under pressure from the occupying power. By the same token Vichy's popular roots were shallow, collaboration was a limited phenomenon effectively dealt with by the *épuration*, the majority of French people had been sympathetic to the Resistance, and the Liberation allowed France to revert to democratic norms after what was essentially an historical parenthesis or aberration.

This picture has gradually been subverted, not least by the work of non-French historians. It was the American Robert Paxton who in the early 1970s first

assembled and presented exhaustive evidence of the extent of collaboration, and above all of Vichy's direct and willing implication in the persecution of Jews and their transportation to the death camps.¹ In this field of study at least, some of the taboos that inhibited historical enquiry have gradually been lifted and a more balanced picture has begun to emerge. There is certainly greater willingness to acknowledge and explore the Vichy regime's true record and the extent of its responsibilities. This does not of course resolve the persistent question of whether or not it was fascist, which still remains contentious. Nor does it necessarily help us evaluate the nature of Vichy's popular support - was it largely circumstantial or was it more deep-rooted? But the growing body of research certainly favours the view that the regime had a considerable historical hinterland, both intellectual and political, arguably stretching back to the closing years of the nineteenth century.

This perspective inevitably exposes the interwar period to greater scrutiny, but here the proposition that France was largely immune to fascism in the 1930s, first developed by René Rémond and subsequently refined by another generation of French historians,² has remained obstinately intact. It has been challenged from various angles, again largely by foreign scholars like the Israeli Zeev Sternhell and the American Robert Soucy,³ but although quite significant theoretical adjustments have sometimes been made in order to accommodate new research data, the proponents of what Michel Dobry has called the *thèse immunitaire* (immunity thesis) have refused to abandon its central tenets.⁴ Unlike the Vichy case, where the sheer weight of empirical evidence eventually shifted the terms of debate, the bone of contention over the *entre-deux-guerres* seems to be interpretive rather than factual. As Dobry himself notes below, when they are writing more discursively about the politics of the period, these selfsame historians are often quite happy to concede that France experienced a profound political crisis in the 1930s.⁵ It is only when they have their 'immunity thesis' hats on that the emphasis suddenly switches from the Republic's vulnerability to its proven resilience.

What is at stake is a set of interrelated questions. Did fascism have roots in France, or was it a foreign import? Did fascism have a significant following in interwar France? Were conditions in France conducive to the development of fascism? Bearing in mind, of course, that all of these formulations invite another vital question - namely how to define 'fascism', and indeed whether it should be seen primarily as cultural phenomenon, political ideology, political movement, developmental process or regime - the 'immunity thesis' is fairly unequivocal in its conclusions. While it is willing to acknowledge that some of the ideological antecedents of fascism are to be found in France (so the phenomenon is not entirely 'alien'), and that some of the extraparliamentary movements active in interwar France displayed fascist characteristics (so the phenomenon is not entirely 'marginal'), it nonetheless maintains that French society was strongly resistant to the contagion.

In support of this argument, mainstream French historiography insists on the differences of ideology and temperament that distinguish authentic 'fascism' from

indigenous French right-wing political traditions, claiming for example that the French extraparliamentary Right lacked certain *essential* or *typical* features of fascism such as social radicalism, incipient totalitarianism, or aggressive expansionism. The case is powerfully supplemented by references to those historical conditions which allegedly made France particularly unreceptive to fascism: its deeply-entrenched democratic political culture, the lack of ideological ‘space’ for new movements, the absence of French territorial ambitions after 1918, the relatively low levels of recorded unemployment in France during the Great Depression, and so on. As we shall see, there are weaknesses, contradictions and inconsistencies in all these arguments, but this intricate web of defences with its numerous fallback positions is nonetheless an impressive construction. Equally remarkable is the united front maintained by so many leading French historians in their commitment to this cause.

The immunity syndrome

These are, of course, profoundly sensitive issues for a country that has prided itself on being in the vanguard of democratic progress and enlightenment, and where intellectuals (and historians not least)⁶ enjoy unusual status and public visibility. Coming to terms with these difficult areas in the nation’s past has been a long and painful process, which has underlined the profoundly political and ideological nature of historical interpretation and enquiry. A whole generation of postwar political leaders was legitimated by the Resistance ‘myth’ and therefore had a stake in the ‘optimistic’ version of events referred to above. The much-publicised trials for crimes against humanity of Klaus Barbie, Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon, as well as the increasing salience of race issues with the rise of the Front national, have ensured the contemporary resonance of historical debates. Only in this context is it possible to understand how intellectual disagreement has sometimes bred deep personal animosity between academics working in this field, as exemplified by the so-called ‘Sternhell controversy’ of the early 1980s.⁷ The ‘immunity thesis’ (or what Robert Soucy, following William Irvine, has called ‘the consensus school of French historiography’)⁸ is very much the ‘ghost at the feast’ in the present collection of essays. Though not all our contributors have explicitly and deliberately set out to refute the ‘consensus’ position, their work has certainly helped to weaken its credibility. As we shall see, their individual approaches are very different, indeed they are often directly critical of one another. At this introductory stage, it would be premature to explore these differences, or to suggest how they might be reconciled. Nor shall we attempt to investigate any further the key characteristics of the ‘immunity thesis’ itself, for these emerge in some detail in the chapters that follow, and especially in the essays by Sternhell, Soucy and Dobry. It does seem appropriate in this introduction, however, to consider another question. Why have French historians generally been so resistant to the idea that their country produced a serious fascist movement between the

wars, or that the Vichy regime had significant fascist characteristics? It is perhaps not surprising that, with the exception of Michel Dobry, our contributors all come from outside the hexagon and bring to bear the sceptical eye of the outsider.

It is not our intention here to question the professionalism of the many distinguished historians who have aligned themselves with the so-called 'immunity thesis', nor indeed to suggest that they have consciously geared their historical interpretation to a particular political agenda. However, none of us can escape the prejudices and perceptions of the time and place in which we live, and it would be naïve indeed to imagine that the 'immunity thesis' emerged in a social and political vacuum. Henry Rousso has shown in his classic *Le syndrome de Vichy* how memories of the Occupation and representations of the Vichy regime have been constantly reappropriated and refashioned since the war in line with changing political strategies and historical circumstances.⁹ Similarly, the study of the French extreme Right between the wars (and its relationship to fascism) has also been conditioned by subsequent contextual factors. The two subjects are of course linked, and the authors of the 'immunity thesis' have often been subject to the same intellectual pressures that influenced historians of Vichy. However, because their terms of reference are different, they work in rather different registers. The official history of Vichy (pre-Paxton) rested on the assumption that it was the product of exceptional circumstances, somehow in historical parentheses, disconnected from what preceded and what followed. The political turmoils of the 1930s, however, required a more sophisticated theoretical explanation.

René Rémond's study of *La Droite en France* first appeared in 1954, was periodically updated, and since 1982 has been repeatedly reprinted as *Les Droites en France*. As Sternhell notes below, this book became virtually a 'bible' for successive generations of students¹⁰ and, through its coverage of the 1930s and Vichy, it made the 'immunity thesis' an established orthodoxy. But the original text dates, it should be remembered, from the early 1950s when a very distinctive and constraining political climate prevailed.

First of all, the atmosphere in postwar France was scarcely conducive to a spirit of open historical enquiry into the painful and divisive events of the 1934–44 period. Most people, irrespective of their individual experiences and allegiances, had little desire to probe too thoroughly into what had happened. And this public mood chimed perfectly with the great reforming agenda of immediate postwar governments, where the accent was on economic and social regeneration, on looking forward rather than back. The restoration of national pride and self-respect also required that, after the initial (emblematic) purges, the extent of wartime collaboration be played down and the issue be treated as resolved. All those political parties which could claim resistance credentials (and especially the Gaullists and the Communists) quickly recognised, not only that this was a vital source of legitimacy, but that it was in their own interests for as many people as possible to feel able to identify with this patriotic resistance legacy (and therefore with *them*). The aspiration to build broad-based popular movements therefore

meant defining collaboration as narrowly as possible and not discouraging those with a bad conscience. To delve too deeply into the past would anyway focus attention on events that the parties which now wore the Resistance mantle would rather forget – the eighty-eight Socialist deputies who had voted full powers to Pétain in July 1940, or the ambivalence of the PCF in the twenty-two months from the Nazi-Soviet pact until Hitler's invasion of the USSR.

Those who had much more to hide were happy to collude in this collective amnesia. Thus, for example, many conservative voters who had been receptive to Vichy's *Révolution nationale* now transferred their allegiance to formations with a resistance pedigree, first to the Catholic *Mouvement Républicain Populaire*,¹¹ and then to De Gaulle's *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (RPF). Anyway, at a more pragmatic level the postwar shortfall in administrative and political personnel with experience and expertise made it difficult to envisage a total renewal of elites, and a blind eye was inevitably turned to the *curriculum vitae* of those who had made themselves indispensable. In short, however tempting it was for the parties identified with Resistance to mobilise memories of Vichy and collaboration against their political enemies, in the new realities of the postwar era there were powerful countervailing factors which discouraged this from being done systematically.

By the early 1950s the hopeful mood of postwar reconstruction had very much given way to the new international realities of the Cold War, but this also contributed to the intellectual climate in which the 'immunity thesis' began to take shape. The concept of 'totalitarianism', launched by American political science at this time,¹² can now be seen more clearly in its ideological context. It was designed to cement the 'free world' against the communist bloc by focusing on features that the existing Soviet state supposedly shared with the defeated and universally reviled Nazi and Fascist regimes.¹³ However, to make the charge stick, fascism itself had to be defined in a way that emphasised its parallels with communism. Whence the tendency to insist on the radical or even revolutionary nature of fascist ideology and fascist movements; on their capacity to mobilise antibourgeois sentiments, to attract personnel from the Left, to appeal to the 'working class'. Whence also the insistence on the 'totalitarian' nature of fascist regimes, thereby distinguishing them from (less invasive) 'authoritarian' conservatism. As we shall see in later chapters, this view of fascism as radical is one that proponents of the 'immunity thesis' tend to share, though, ironically enough, so do some of their critics.¹⁴ The 'totalitarian' dimensions of fascism also allowed certain other regimes to be excluded from the definition, not least right-wing dictatorships (within the American sphere of influence) like Franco's Spain and Salazar's Portugal, but also – by retrospective association – Vichy and the prewar French extreme Right.

Rémond's initial framing of the 'immunity thesis' thus took place against this twin background: the multifaceted French reluctance to address the historical realities of the period, and the retrospective redefinition of fascism in line with Cold War imperatives. As Bruno Goyet has also noted, however, the updated

editions of *La Droite en France* from the 1960s onwards had to take account of the arrival of the Fifth Republic and the need to interpret the significance of Gaullism.¹⁵ Many on the Left regarded De Gaulle's return to power in 1958 essentially as a *coup d'état*, and his new regime as an elective dictatorship. The communists, indeed, who had depicted De Gaulle's earlier RPF movement (1947–53) as fascist, saw the Fifth Republic as a new form of concentrated political power typical of the era of 'State Monopoly Capitalism'. By contrast, Rémond's rival interpretation can be seen as a form of legitimisation. His famous model of 'les trois droites', whereby the whole history of the French Right since the mid-nineteenth century could be understood in terms of three enduring political traditions (Legitimism, Orleanism and Bonapartism)¹⁶, proved quite capable of dealing with these new developments. Gaullism is thus defined as a mature and modernised form of Bonapartism, where nationalism has finally been reconciled with the requirements of democracy, and where the more liberal impulses of the Orleanist tradition are effectively accommodated in practice. No need to look outside French history for explanations, no need to import extraneous concepts (whether fascism or anything else), the Gaullist Republic has its own distinctive and respectable national pedigree: one which incidentally includes La Rocque's prewar Parti Social Français, here presented as a pale precursor of Gaullism rather than as a fascist mass movement (see further below).¹⁷

It seems inevitable that this complex political environment weighed heavily on the initial articulation and elaboration of the 'immunity thesis'. What is harder to explain is how the interpretation was able to maintain its academic hold throughout the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁸ and was then endorsed, updated and systematised by a new cohort of historians in the early 1980s.¹⁹ Why this closing of ranks in response to the work of Zeev Sternhell? After all, the previous ten years or so had seen the subject of Vichy and collaboration opened up for discussion, not least by the dissemination of Robert Paxton's research and the intense media coverage of Marcel Ophüls's banned film *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*.²⁰ In the aftermath of 1968, the 1970s may indeed now be seen as a transitional period during which what George Ross has called 'Resistance-Liberation Left discourse'²¹ retreated before the more libertarian New Left values of a generation less afraid of digging into the sensitive past. So why did French historians react so violently to Sternhell's argument that fascist ideas were widespread in France before the war? And why do so many scholars, including those who have since become the leading authorities in the field, continue to build their arguments around the central tenets of the Rémondian model, when these tenets have been progressively undermined by subsequent research (including their own!)?

We will avoid speculation here about the ties of patronage, loyalty or collective solidarity that may or may not operate in this or any other section of the French academic community.²² We will merely note that the Rémondian framework for analysing the French Right has held sway for a very long time, that it is seductively neat and comprehensive, that the immunity thesis is an integral part of it, and that it would take nerve to bring such a venerable edifice crashing down. More

importantly, however, the notion that France was immune to fascism is also a vital component in a powerful historical narrative about French exceptionalism and the distinctive character of *la République*. It is perhaps this above all which explains why the immunity thesis has won support among academics of differing political persuasions, including some who almost certainly do not share the rather conservative perspectives of René Rémond himself. For what makes France exceptional, what makes *la République* exemplary for the rest of humanity, is not presented in identical fashion in rival political discourses.

For some, *la République* is a consensual term designed to unify the nation around widely accepted constitutional principles, and certain shared values like civil liberties and the rule of law. But for others it may denote the more radical and dynamic notion of the unfulfilled *République sociale*, those transcendent egalitarian ideals derived from the French Revolution and momentarily reincarnated in the period of the antifascist struggle and the Resistance. The story of that struggle has a powerful mythic quality. It is a key chapter in an unfolding historical metanarrative (democratic and socialist) about human progress towards a better society. Challenges to the immunity thesis may (superficially at least) appear to be debunking that story, to be casting doubt on the significance of the resistance legacy, and thereby undermining not only French faith in the Social Republic, but also the faith of all those who have seen France and its revolutionary heritage as a beacon for humanity at large.

Those who have challenged the immunity thesis would, of course, protest that they are not in any way setting out to devalue the antifascist movement and its ideals. Indeed, they might argue that the more we know about the extent of fascism in 1930s France, or the true character of the Vichy regime, the greater should be our admiration for those who opposed them. But, of course, books that set out to expose these unpalatable facts do not dwell long on the more positive features. As both Robert Paxton and Zeev Sternhell discovered to their cost,²³ this is dangerous territory, especially for foreign scholars who were also too young to have 'lived' the events they study. They are easily presented as unwelcome intruders into a domestic dispute, as irresponsible iconoclasts who do not respect the terrible dilemmas of those caught up in exceptional circumstances. Nonetheless, it is thirty years since Paxton's work was first published in France, twenty years since the 'Sternhell controversy'. Those who directly experienced the events are now thin on the ground, and it might be assumed that national sensibilities are now less easily offended. Certainly most of the historians who still defend the immunity thesis are not of the wartime generation, and yet there is no doubt that this remains a sensitive issue within the academic community.

In *Le syndrome de Vichy*, Henry Rousso makes the telling point that, in the aftermath of the Liberation, the resistance legacy of *minorités agissantes* (as celebrated in particular ideological groups like the Gaullists and the Communists) was progressively assimilated to the whole nation (*résistancialisme*).²⁴ There is an analogy here with the *thèse immunitaire*, which rather than focusing on the historical detail of the prewar political crisis and the antifascist struggle, imbues

the whole of French society with inbuilt defence mechanisms which spontaneously reject fascism (as if vaccinated by its 'democratic political culture'). This is undoubtedly a difficult position to retreat from, because it is strategically linked to totalising concepts of French exceptionalism and national identity, notions which are themselves under siege in the contemporary world. In the era of globalisation, when France is sometimes regarded as the only source in the developed world of ideological opposition to *la pensée unique*, it is perhaps unfortunate that the best-known critics of the immunity thesis come from the United States and Israel! But to attach any significance to that fact is to fall precisely into the trap we are endeavouring to warn against.

Contesting the immunity thesis

This volume brings together five authors whose work has played a key role in opening up this area of debate. While all of them would reject the notion of French society being somehow exempt from or especially protected against fascism, they approach the subject from very different directions and bring very different resources to bear. Indeed, they are often directly critical of each other, as we shall see. However, there is some common ground, and even evidence of a degree of convergence between several of our contributors, as they take stock of their own researches and the wider interpretative environment. To help the reader appreciate such revisions or shifts of emphasis, each essay is preceded by a brief editorial preamble which summarises that author's previous interventions.

It has not been easy to decide in which order to present the essays that follow, but for many reasons it seems natural to start with the contribution by Zeev Sternhell. It was, after all, his intervention that first made this such a controversial subject some twenty-five years ago, and his corpus of work is still regarded by French historians as the most significant challenge to their position. His insistence that the ideological origins of fascism are to be found in France between 1885 and 1914 gives his approach a broader historical sweep than that of other contributors, as well as a more radical cutting edge. In this particular essay, Sternhell develops the most comprehensive refutation of the immunity thesis to date, claiming that in 1930s France anti-democratic values and attitudes were widespread, and that this counterculture not only produced some of the most sophisticated intellectual elaborations of pure fascist ideology, but also a genuine fascist mass movement (the Croix de Feu) and, in Vichy, an authentic fascist regime.

Robert Soucy's essay focuses more sharply on the 1930s, and in particular on La Rocque's Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français. This movement, with at least a million members in 1938, is of course pivotal to this whole area of discussion. The argument that it was not fascist is absolutely crucial to the immunity thesis. Soucy sets out systematically to dismantle the case that has been developed by mainstream French historiography, making ample use of comparative data in

order to show that the supposed differences between the CF/PSF and ‘authentic’ fascist movements in Italy and Germany are more apparent than real. His chapter also provides an interesting contrast with Sternhell’s approach: a greater concern with the programmatic expression of ideology rather than with its intellectual underpinnings, a more sceptical view of the antibourgeois and anticapitalist components in fascist discourse, and deep reservations about the argument that ‘authentic’ fascism was a revision of Marxism.

Our remaining authors all seek, in different ways, to distance themselves from the definitional questions that have dogged the debate, and from the impulse to measure French examples against a single concept of fascism based on fixed essences. Robert Paxton thus argues that fascism is not driven by ideology or doctrine like other ‘-isms’, but that it should be perceived more in terms of the functions it fulfils. It is thus shaped by the political space and historical context in which it operates, and is best understood as a ‘process’ or indeed as a ‘cycle’ typically running through a number of stages, each of which requires different modes of analysis. Michel Dobry goes a step further, denying the utility of the whole notion of generic fascism, and seeking to break entirely with the *logique classificatoire*. His critique of the ‘immunity thesis’ focuses above all on its methodological flaws, and he advocates a *perspective relationnelle* whereby movements will be properly set in context, namely within a complex web of political relationships, rather than rigidly categorised according to ideological parentage.

Finally, Kevin Passmore’s essay may, in many ways, be seen as seeking to move beyond the whole debate about the impact of fascism in France. His investigation of the concept of the ‘stalemate society’ and of the tensions between conservatism and modernisation within French social and political elites between the wars, admittedly sheds tangential light on the question. The notion that the Third Republic was based on a conservative compromise between peasantry and middle classes, which was highly resistant to social and economic change (and therefore, for some historians, to fascism), has certainly underpinned the ‘immunity thesis’, and Passmore’s conclusion that there was no such consensus behind the regime’s institutions therefore has serious implications. However, his chapter also proves that there are other ways of conceptualising the political crisis in 1930s France than through the grid of the fascism debate, and that to ask new questions of historical events may be the best way to enrich our understanding of them.

The extreme Right in France and the political crisis of the 1930s

The task of setting the historical scene for this volume is a tricky one. How are we to provide an adequate introduction to our subject without getting bogged down in detail or intruding too much on the patience of the informed reader? A comprehensive chronological narrative has therefore to be ruled out: it would anyway raise difficult questions about where to begin and how far afield to look

geographically. A more selective thematic approach seems the best option, though here the risk is that the process of selection already involves a degree of interpretation. Where the subject is so contentious, all pretence to editorial neutrality evaporates. To see one particular event as more significant than another, to regard this set of explanatory factors as more relevant than that, is to intervene in the debate you purport to be introducing. Nevertheless, for all its pitfalls that is the approach we have chosen.

The main historical focus of the essays in this volume is the political crisis of the Third French Republic in the 1930s, as exemplified above all by the emergence of extraparliamentary movements of the extreme Right, whether in the shape of the 'leagues' or, after the 1936 ban on paramilitary formations, in the guise of full-blown political parties like La Rocque's Parti Social Français (PSF) or Doriot's Parti Populaire Français (PPF). However much historians have been divided in their interpretation of such organisations, there is nonetheless a measure of agreement that France in the 1930s did indeed experience something akin to a political 'crisis'. This, of course, is not a reference to the recurrent *crise ministérielle*, an unexceptional event which punctuated the life of the Republic at a frenetic rate throughout the decade (twenty-nine governments between February 1930 and June 1940) – though this in itself was symptomatic of more deep-seated problems. We refer, rather, to the remarkable effervescence of ideological innovation and experimentation, to the intensity of class antagonisms and pent-up social grievances, to the violent polarisation of party politics, to the radical dealignment of partisan allegiances especially on the Right of the political spectrum, and finally to the process which saw support for the liberal-democratic Republic dwindle (in enthusiasm as much as in extent) in favour of an increasing willingness to endorse more authoritarian solutions.

The 'longue durée'

There are several different 'time frames' that may be invoked to help with the interpretation of these developments. First of all, there is a *longue durée* stretching back at least as far as the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, but also taking account of the whole legacy of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. On the one hand, this perspective can be used to remind us that the ideals associated with liberal democracy have a long history in France, and that in the interwar period the French people already had fifty years' continuous experience of adult male suffrage,²⁵ elective and accountable government at both local and national level, open access to public office, freedom of the press and association – in contrast with neighbouring Italy and Germany, where such practices were arguably far less developed. Hence the proposition that France had a well-established 'democratic' political culture which was highly resistant to fascism. This same timescale was also a reminder, of course, that the embryonic Republic had struggled to survive the clerical-monarchist challenge in the 1870s, and that it had warded off further attacks from Boulangism in the late 1880s and from the

anti-Dreyfusard coalition at the turn of the century. Recognition that the Republic had enemies, especially on the Right, might be seen as a corrective to an over-complacent view about the solidity of French democracy. However, this notion of an ongoing '*guerre franco-française*' dating back to the Revolution also favours an interpretation of the interwar right-wing leagues exclusively in terms of French historical traditions (like Rémond's '*trois droites*'), as the recurrent flourishes of *la Réaction* – troublesome but ultimately not dangerous, and therefore a further reason to be dismissive about the influence of fascism in France.

The 'age of mass politics'

Where Rémond's *trois droites* (Legitimism, Orleanism, Bonapartism) imply a pedigree extending back to 1815, some of his successors, like Serge Berstein and Michel Winock, are more willing to acknowledge that the last quarter of the nineteenth century was an historical watershed in France as in other European countries. Against a background of rapid economic modernisation and social change, these years saw the consolidation of the modern nation-state and the entry of the masses onto the political stage, and consequently the emergence of movements and ideologies (socialism, syndicalism, nationalism) designed to attract, organise and mobilise these masses. In this context, for example, French historians have recognised that the new racist and populist nationalism that developed in the years between the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs cannot be adequately understood just as a derivative of Bonapartism, and have invented terms like 'national-populism' to encompass it²⁶ (and, once again, to avoid equating it with fascism). By contrast, Zeev Sternhell has seen the intellectual encounters between 'integral nationalism' and branches of revolutionary syndicalism in France in the early years of the twentieth century as the very birthplace of pure fascist ideology, which was thus initially a French product before it was first used effectively as an instrument of political mobilisation in Italy.²⁷

The 'Great War and Russian Revolution' perspective

From another angle, the Great War and the Russian Revolution were an equally decisive watershed, and are the primary historical reference points in any discussion of the rise of fascism, or indeed of the French extraparliamentary Right in the 1930s. Sternhell has been criticised for adopting a history-of-ideas approach that neglects the importance of such vital contextual factors, though the classic Rémondian model²⁸ seems no less guilty in this respect. The human costs of the 1914–18 conflict, both physical and psychological; the economic and demographic repercussions; the social dislocation and bitter political animosities; the deep resentments, anxieties and unresolved tensions bequeathed by the Versailles settlement; the unprecedented bourgeois fear of social revolution that followed the establishment of the Soviet Union as the first workers' state; the deep divisions that the same event created on the European Left: the effect of all these developments

was to destabilise societies internally, and to destabilise the international order. On the one hand, this perspective warns against parochialism, and reminds us that France was locked into a much wider European experience in these years. On the other hand, arguments have been deployed to suggest that France was crucially different from Italy or Germany in at least one important respect – victorious rather than humiliated in 1919, a net beneficiary of the Versailles Treaty with no frustrated territorial ambitions, deeply impregnated with a politically diffuse pacifism between the wars, the country was supposedly unpropitious terrain for the aggressive expansionism that some see as an essential element in fascism.²⁹

The ‘société bloquée’

To return briefly to the longer timespan, the durability of the Third Republic has often been attributed to a ‘psycho-social compromise’ between the middle classes and the peasantry.³⁰ The regime consolidated its mass base above all by safeguarding the interests and values of these key property-owning constituencies. However, the cultivation of this social consensus (for example via low taxes, protectionism etc.) antagonised not only industrial workers eager for social welfare and labour reform, but also the more dynamic sectors of big business. It appeared that in order to preserve the social and political stability supposedly afforded by widespread property-ownership, policies were designed to suppress the natural forces of urbanisation and economic modernisation – France was, in Stanley Hoffmann’s phrase, a ‘*société bloquée*’.³¹ In this context, the question arises of how far this model of society had been disrupted by the Great War and its revolutionary aftermath, how far the balance and nature of social class relations in France were transformed, and how far the political system was undermined by any shift in its social foundations. On the one hand, it certainly seems that the Republic faced unprecedented social and economic problems between the wars, and that the traditional model of economic liberalism was under challenge in France as much as elsewhere. It was no doubt this widely perceived need for greater state intervention, and thus for stable government and continuity of policy, that made the endemic problem of ministerial instability suddenly appear so much more serious in the interwar period. On the other hand, commentators traditionally point out that the world economic Depression of the early 1930s, which was such a vital backdrop to Hitler’s accession to power in Germany, had a much less spectacular impact in France; that although the effects of the Depression were prolonged and debilitating, the diversified structure of France’s less developed economy did in fact cushion the country against the social upheavals on which fascism supposedly feeds.³²

The conjunctural perspective

Another approach would give much greater weight to the changing political conjuncture of the interwar years. From this perspective, no matter how

important the various contextual factors mentioned above in shaping attitudes, it was the response of political organisations to the specific issues of the day that determined their likelihood of success. The themes exploited by extraparliamentary movements of the extreme Right between the wars were carefully chosen. In the 1920s the main preoccupation was the campaign against the scaling down of German war reparations ('L'Allemagne paiera'), which of course tapped into the longstanding Germanophobia of right-wing nationalism ever since the Boulanger episode, but which also fed on the financial uncertainties caused by inflation and the collapse of the franc. In the early 1930s the switch to the theme of political scandal, culminating in the Stavisky Affair and the riots of 6 February 1934, also drew on a well-established extreme-Right tradition of targeting Republican corruption, though again public receptiveness was sharpened by the first inroads of the world Depression into France. In the mid-to late 1930s the threatening international situation increasingly affected how other issues were perceived, and in this context there was ample scope for linking together the widespread fear of war with anti-Bolshevism and contempt for parliamentary democracy.

However, the intensity of extreme-Right activity correlates most closely with another political variable, namely the presence of a left-of-centre coalition in government. In three of the five general elections between the wars, the centrist Radical Party formed an electoral alliance with the socialist Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) and won a parliamentary majority as a result. Although in both 1924 and 1932 the SFIO refused to allow its deputies to become ministers in Radical-led cabinets, the mere fact that governments were Socialist-supported was enough to alarm conservative bourgeois opinion. The Popular Front election victory of 1936 was, of course, an even more threatening prospect – the government was now led by a Socialist, the electoral alliance had been extended leftwards to include the Communists, and the elections had triggered off a massive wave of strikes and factory occupations. The social and economic reforms introduced by the June 1936 Matignon Agreements were regarded by many employers as the first salvos of the social revolution, creating a climate of class warfare which lasted until the definitive collapse of the Popular Front coalition in October 1938. It is this calendar more than any other which reveals a developmental pattern in the growth and fortunes of the extraparliamentary extreme Right.

The period of the so-called Cartel des Gauches parliamentary majority saw the fall of seven Radical governments between June 1924 and July 1926, as big business interests withdrew their confidence. The nationalist extreme Right were quick to link the financial crisis to the Republic's failure to secure German reparations, and against the background of street demonstrations largely orchestrated by the Action Française, two new right-wing leagues emerged – Pierre Taittinger's Jeunesses Patriotes and Georges Valois's Faisceau. This first upsurge ran out of steam when the conservative Raymond Poincaré formed a government of National Union in July 1926, which stabilised the economy and

tied the Radicals into a Centre-Right coalition where they remained for the 1928 elections. Four years later, however, the Radicals renewed their winning electoral alliance with the Socialists, and this once again created propitious circumstances for the extreme Right. As Radical cabinets again tumbled, this time against the backdrop of the world recession and Hitler's accession to power, two new organisations were born in 1933 – Jean Renaud's *Solidarité Française* and Marcel Bucard's *Francisme*, while a little-known war veteran's association called the *Croix de Feu* was being transformed into a right-wing political movement under a new leader, Colonel François de La Rocque.³³

The events of February 1934 were a decisive turning-point in many respects.³⁴ The Stavisky scandal, which implicated several Radical Party politicians, provided a new focus for extreme-Right street mobilisations, culminating in the resignation of the Chautemps government at the end of January. The incoming Prime Minister Daladier, as part of an administrative reshuffle, sacked the conservative Paris Prefect of Police, Jean Chiappe, in what was perceived as an inept ploy to win Socialist parliamentary support. This triggered off the Paris riots of 6 February³⁵, orchestrated by the right-wing leagues, which claimed nineteen lives³⁶ and forced Daladier's resignation the following day. The immediate consequence was the setting up of a National Union government under former President of the Republic Gaston Doumergue, a repeat of the Poincaré formula of 1926, which detached the Radicals from the Socialists in favour of a Centre-Right parliamentary majority. This time, however, any hopes that this would stabilise the situation were soon dashed because a new dynamic had been set in motion, a process of popular mobilisation and political polarisation which would overshadow parliamentary politics for the next two years. The Left had quickly identified the riots as an attempted fascist coup, and this produced a massive counter-demonstration on 12 February where, for the first time, Socialists and Communists marched together. The new theme of antifascism launched the vast social movement of the Popular Front, which would bring with it organisational cooperation between the Socialist and Communist parties, and the eventual incorporation of the Radical Party into an electoral alliance that would win the April-May 1936 elections and pave the way for France's first Socialist-led government under Léon Blum. But in parallel to the rise of the Popular Front, La Rocque's *Croix de Feu* grew at a spectacular rate from an estimated 35,000 on the eve of the 6 February 1934 riots to 500,000 in early 1936, entirely eclipsing its rivals on the extraparliamentary Right and indeed giving it the largest membership of any party in France at that time.

As René Rémond himself recognised,³⁷ the *Croix de Feu* is the crux of the debate about whether or not there was a mass fascist movement in France, and the subject preoccupies nearly all of the contributors to this volume. A major question is how far the movement changed when it was transformed into the *Parti Social Français* in 1936, following the Popular Front government's dissolution of the right-wing leagues. For some historians, its continuing dramatic growth to around one million members at the end of 1937, more than the combined

membership of the Socialist and Communist parties, can only be explained by a supposed moderation of its image, making it more attractive to mainstream conservative voters. In this version, the PSF is often contrasted with Doriot's supposedly more combative Parti Populaire Français, which attracted many of the remnants of the other leagues and is often given the label 'fascist' by supporters of the immunity thesis. Others, however, would argue that La Rocque's movement grew consistently and dramatically from February 1934 onwards on a rising curve of anxiety about the prospect of a Popular Front government, and when this became a reality in May 1936, far from these fears abating they grew more intense. In other words, the PSF's continuing upward growth, against a background of domestic class conflict and heightened international tension, reflected not the movement's moderation but the radicalisation of conservative opinion.³⁸

Daladier's April 1938 government may have defused these tensions by reviving the Radicals' alliance with the parliamentary Right in October, revoking the Popular Front social reforms a month later and breaking the subsequent attempted general strike. Indeed, Daladier's two-year tenure until March 1940 recalled the longevity of Poincaré's term of office, and some have identified this as a stabilisation of the Republic, which would have survived but for external events. Others have argued, however, that the catastrophe of June 1940 was not just a military defeat, that France had been weakened and demoralised from within, and that the Republic had proved itself incapable of resolving the deep-seated social and economic problems that so divided the country in the 1930s.³⁹ Such speculation is of course fruitless, but it does at least reveal how tendentious it is to conclude unequivocally that 'the Republic survived', and to use this teleologically to minimise the extent of the challenge to liberal democracy in France between the wars.

The 'relational' perspective

There is one last 'perspective' on the political crisis of the 1930s which needs briefly to be identified, and to which we shall return in our conclusion. Dubbed '*perspective relationnelle*' by Michel Dobry, and made methodologically explicit in his essay below, this approach involves recognising that political movements operate in a dynamic competitive environment. Their ideology, programmes, discourse, behaviour are not manifestations of some fixed and bounded identity or essence, shaped definitively by historical tradition. They are also the product of constant interaction with other movements, of manoeuvres seeking to gain competitive advantage over rivals and allies, of attempts to reposition or even redefine the organisation in response to new strategic or tactical opportunities. Clearly such a perspective might involve taking account of the entire political spectrum, including the parties of the Left: for example, in the early 1930s the inability of Radicals, Socialists and Communists to work together caused acrimonious splits inside all three parties, raising the possibility of partisan realignment which might benefit the extreme Right. In the event it did lead some well-known politicians of the Left to succumb to what Philippe Burrin calls *La dérive fasciste*,⁴⁰ but in fact this had little

organisational or electoral impact on the parties they abandoned. Indeed, the subsequent development of the Popular Front temporarily produced a popular groundswell of Left unity which tended to stabilise working-class political allegiances in the mid-1930s. Admittedly, the process of political polarisation between 1934 and 1938 had taken its toll on the centrist Radical Party, which lost a sixth of its vote at the 1936 elections, but this seems above all to have benefited the parties to its left, thus helping to sustain an old argument – that fascism could only progress in France at the expense of the Radicals, and that their survival proves it never took root.⁴¹

However, many others would argue that the *sine qua non* of a significant fascist movement is that the main political formations regarded as the guardians of the existing social and economic order, namely the mainstream liberal and conservative Right, should begin to lose public confidence and support. There can be little doubt that this occurred in France. It is, of course, true that right-wing politics under the Third Republic had a history of fragmentation, weak discipline and volatility, but nonetheless what occurred in the 1930s, under the destabilising influence of economic depression and intense social division, has been described by Michel Dobry as ‘nothing less than a political earthquake across the entire political spectrum of the Right.’⁴² If by 1934 the credibility of the parliamentary Right (collectively ‘*les modérés*’) had already been undermined (the combined membership of the extraparliamentary leagues was probably around 300,000 by this time), the rise of the left-wing Popular Front movement triggered a process of polarisation whose effect on the Right at the 1936 elections was to weaken the more moderate elements (liberal Alliance Démocratique and Christian-democrat Parti Démocrate Populaire) in favour of the more conservative Fédération Républicaine. As we have seen, an even more dramatic effect was the exponential growth of La Rocque’s Croix de Feu which, as the Parti Social Français after 1936, had a membership whose size threatened to eclipse the electoral prospects of the Fédération Républicaine at the parliamentary polls due in May 1940.

Robert Soucy has, of course, long explored the interface between ‘conservatives’ and ‘fascists’ in France, insisting on the permeability of the boundaries between them.⁴³ The picture that emerges is one, not of rigidly demarcated ideological spheres, but of a common pool of similar ideas, sentiments and programmes; of regular interchanges and movements of personnel across the divide between parliamentary and extraparliamentary, mainstream and ‘extreme’; of multiple allegiances and constantly shifting loyalties among both activists and voters. And this proximity in itself bred intense rivalry. Kevin Passmore’s study of the *Right in a French Province 1928–1939* reveals a process of conflict and fragmentation on the Right, arguing that the spectacular growth of the Croix de Feu, both in the Rhône region and nationally, ‘represented a mobilisation of conservative rank-and-file in response to the divisions of the established Right’.⁴⁴

The competitive nature of this environment is nowhere better illustrated than in the affair of the so-called Front de la Liberté in the spring of 1937. This loose anti-communist alliance was devised by PPF leader Jacques Doriot, with the connivance not only of the remnants of the other leagues but also of Louis Marin’s

parliamentary Fédération Républicaine. All of these organisations shared a desire to neutralise the burgeoning PSF, and by inviting La Rocque to join the alliance, Doriot seems to have been setting a trap for him. If La Rocque accepted, Doriot hoped to outmanoeuvre and discredit him in the eyes of his followers, using the alliance to ‘pluck the PSF chicken’ (*plumer la volaille PSF*).⁴⁵ And if La Rocque refused, he risked being isolated and marginalised, possibly with the same effect.

The episode is instructive for a number of reasons. It certainly confirms how alarmed other right-wing organisations were at La Rocque’s growing ascendancy. But it also reveals that the real political dynamics of the time are too complex to be understood in terms of sharply defined ideological traditions. Why would the conservative nationalists of the parliamentary Fédération Républicaine form an alliance with the extraparliamentary PPF (supposedly the nearest thing to a mass fascist formation in France) against the (Bonapartist? authoritarian populist? national-caesarist? authoritarian republican? Christian-nationalist?) PSF?⁴⁶ To dismiss it as pure opportunism or as *une alliance contre-nature* whilst still insisting on the primacy and validity of these ideological distinctions is hardly convincing. The *perspective relationnelle* surely suggests that in a climate of destabilisation and radicalisation on the French Right, the behaviour of the various formations is not best explained by the traditional analysis of the ideological nuances that separated them, but rather by the intense competition and tactical calculations of organisations that were in fact drawing very much on the common stock of ideas referred to by Dobry below – antiparlamentarism, hatred of democracy, the seductive appeal of authoritarian regimes in neighbouring states, anti-Marxism etc.⁴⁷ And arguably, from this perspective the attempt to measure this or that individual French movement against generic definitions of fascism begins to look like a rather sterile exercise.

Notes

1. R.O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–44*, New York, 1972; M. Marrus and R.O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, New York, 1981.
2. R. Rémond, *La droite en France de 1815 à nos jours*, Paris, 1954 and subsequent editions, notably *Les droites en France*, Paris, 1982. See also S. Berstein, ‘La France des années 30 allergique au fascisme: à propos d’un livre de Zeev Sternhell’, *XXe siècle*, no. 2, April 1984; P. Burrin, ‘La France dans le champ magnétique des fascismes’, *Le Débat*, no. 32, November 1984; J. Julliard, ‘Sur un fascisme imaginaire: à propos d’un livre de Zeev Sternhell’, *Annales ESC*, 39 no. 4, July–August 1984, M. Winock, ‘Fascisme à la française ou fascisme introuvable?’, *Le Débat*, no. 25, May 1983; P. Milza, *Fascisme français*, Paris, 1987; P. Burrin, *La Dérive fasciste*, Paris, 1986; P. Burrin, ‘Le fascisme’, in *Histoire des droites en France* vol. 1, Politique, ed. J.-F. Sirinelli, Paris, 1992.
3. Notably Z. Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire: les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, 1978; *Ni droite ni gauche. L’idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris, 1983. R. Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924–1933*, New Haven, 1986; *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939*, New Haven, 1995.
4. See Dobry, chapter 5 below, p. 132.
5. *Ibid.*, section on ‘Political cultures, values and calculations’, pp. 145–47.

6. For example, the summoning of historians as expert witnesses during the 1998 trial of Maurice Papon (for his role in the deportation of Jews when general secretary of the Gironde préfecture 1942–43), and the very public divisions among leading historians during the so-called Aubrac affair (following the publication in 1997 of a book by the journalist Gérard Chauvy, which questioned the wartime role of Resistance heroes Lucie and Raymond Aubrac, and the veracity of their testimony). See G. Chauvy, *Aubrac: Lyon 1943*, Paris, 1997. Annie Collovald has given a telling evocation of this new social role of the historian: ‘If they find themselves virtually summoned to assume a “civic” role (as witnesses and judges in their specialist fields of political history) when there is in fact no agreement between them, they also find themselves required collectively to defend their historical interpretation of the Vichy regime, and their version of this past which has returned to haunt the present’. A. Collovald, ‘Le “national-populisme” ou le fascisme disparu. Les historiens du “Temps Présent” et la question du déloyalisme politique contemporain’ in *Le mythe de l’allergie française au fascisme*, ed. M. Dobry, Paris, 2003, p. 286. [Editor’s translation].
7. See Sternhell, chapter 2 below, p. 23.
8. *The Second Wave*, p. 6; W. Irvine, ‘Fascism in France and the strange case of the Croix de Feu’, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 63, June 1991, p.294.
9. H. Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy (1944–198...)*, Paris, 1987.
10. See Sternhell, chapter 2 below, ‘France immune to fascism?’, pp 27–35.
11. Summed up by the Communist jibe that MRP stood for *Machine à Ramasser les Pétaïnistes*.
12. For example, H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, 1951; J. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London, 1952; C. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism*, proceedings of a conference held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in March 1953, Cambridge, MA, 1954; C. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, MA, 1956.
13. See B. Goyet, *Charles Maurras*, Paris, 2000, pp.118–19.
14. Notably Sternhell goes much further in identifying some of the ideological roots of fascism as not just radical but distinctly left-wing (see in particular his *La droite révolutionnaire*). Earlier Ernst Nolte had identified fascism as a reaction to and imitation of communism (‘Fascism is anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvment of a radically opposed yet related ideology, and by the use of almost identical, but typically modified methods, always however within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy’, E. Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, London, 1965, pp. 20–21.)
15. Goyet, *Charles Maurras*, p. 125.
16. For more detailed discussion of Rémond’s model, see Sternhell, chapter 2 below.
17. For Rémond’s discussion of La Rocque’s movement, see *Les droites en France*, pp. 211–16. Rémond does nonetheless recognise that the question of whether or not the Croix de Feu was fascist is ‘le pivot du débat’ (p.211). That is why the analysis of the Croix de Feu/PSF is central to all the chapters in the present volume.
18. For example, the largely ‘Rémondian’ line taken in E. Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in 20th Century France*, Stanford, 1962; J. Plumyène and R. Lasierra, *Les fascismes français, 1923–63*, Paris, 1963; S. Berstein, *Le 6 février 1934*, Paris, 1975, and reproduced in most general histories of the Third Republic or of the interwar years published in the 1960s and 1970s.
19. See note 2 above.
20. Paxton, *Old Guard and New Order*; Marcel Ophuls’s film *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* was composed in 1967–68, and first screened in a small venue in the Latin Quarter in 1971, but it was not finally shown on French television until 1981. See Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy*, pp. 114–31.

21. G. Ross, 'Adieu vieilles idées: the Middle Strata and the Decline of Resistance-Liberation Left Discourse in France', in *Contemporary France: A Review of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Howorth and G. Ross, London, 1987, pp. 57–83.
22. Jean-François Sirinelli has referred to the Sciences-Po historians around René Rémond as the 'corporation' (see Sternhell, chapter 2 below, note 56).
23. For an account of the reception in France of Paxton's *La France de Vichy* (French translation of *Old Guard and New Order*) in 1972, see Roussio, *Le syndrome de Vichy*, pp. 267–71.
24. Roussio, *Le syndrome de Vichy*, p. 20.
25. Adult male suffrage was introduced by the Second Republic in 1848, and maintained under the Second Empire (1851–70) for elections to the Legislative Body. The powers of that assembly were, however, very seriously circumscribed. It was only under the Third Republic, therefore, that adult male suffrage was combined with parliamentary sovereignty and acquired real political weight.
26. For a critical discussion of the uses recently made by French historians of the term 'national populism', see Collovald, 'Le "national-populisme" ou le fascisme disparu'.
27. See Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, and Z. Sternhell (with M. Sznajder and M. Asheri), *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste*, Paris, 2000.
28. This applies in particular to Rémond himself, and to a lesser extent to Milza, Berstein and Burrin, none of whom (in this author's view) adequately convey how the Great War and the Russian Revolution transformed social and political attitudes in France. Michel Winock and Jacques Julliard both criticise Sternhell for failing to do just this, but they omit to point out that Rémond's model of 'les trois droites' is equally insensitive to such contextual factors. (Julliard, 'Sur un fascisme imaginaire'; Winock, 'Fascisme à la française ou fascisme introuvable?').
29. Burrin, 'Le fascisme', pp. 643–44.
30. See K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism: The Right in a French Province, 1928–1939*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 6–7.
31. S. Hoffmann, *In Search of France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1963.
32. Kevin Passmore does, however, point out that the economic depression in France did have a major impact on social groups that were vulnerable to fascism. See his discussion in *From Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 163–85.
33. The Croix de Feu had been founded by Maurice d'Hartoy in 1927, as an elite war veterans' association with no political vocation. La Rocque joined in 1929 and by 1931 had become its president. He quickly transformed it into a political movement with a mass membership.
34. Serge Berstein's study (*Le 6 février 1934*, Paris, 1975) confirmed the standard interpretation of the events developed in the 1960s, and was long regarded as the definitive work, remaining virtually unchallenged until Michel Dobry's 1989 article. See Dobry, chapter 5 below.
35. See Berstein, *Le 6 février 1934*; M. Le Clère, *Le 6 février*, Paris, 1967; M. Chavardès, *Une campagne de presse: la droite française et le 6 février 1934*, Paris, 1970; B. Jenkins, 'The Paris riots of February 6th 1934: the crisis of the Third French Republic', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1979); P. Pellissier, *6 février 1934*, Paris, 2000.
36. Pellissier, *6 février 1934*, p.320, records that 15 were killed by gunfire that evening, two more died shortly afterwards from their wounds, and a further four deaths can be attributed to wounds sustained on this occasion.
37. Rémond, *Les droites en France*, p. 211.

38. For an interesting recent discussion of these conflicting interpretations, see D. Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque', in Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme*. Leschi argues that between 1934 and 1940, La Rocque increasingly places his movement outside and against the parliamentary system, while Doriot (so often presented as La Rocque's more radical counterpart) plays the card of bourgeois respectability by doing a deal with the parliamentary Right via the 'Front de la Liberté'.
39. Julian Jackson finds evidence of an upturn in France's political mood in the last twelve months before war was declared, and confirms how difficult it is to reach a balanced judgement: 'It is too often alleged, in the light of defeat, that the French Republic in the 1930s was in a state of terminal decline. On the other hand, one should not go too far in the opposite direction. The divisions of the 1930s had not been forgotten. Hatreds bubbled close beneath the surface, and Daladier's public image of earthy solidity was a façade.' J. Jackson, *The Fall of France: the Nazi invasion of 1940*, Oxford, 2003, p.119.
40. P. Burrin, *La Dérive fasciste: Doriot, Déat, Bergery, 1933–1945*, Paris 1986.
41. As Michel Dobry has pointed out, many 'immunity thesis' historians seem to contradict their own case when they write about other topics. Thus, when Serge Berstein writes about the subject on which he is the leading expert (the French Radical Party), he has no hesitation in acknowledging that the party was 'in crisis' during the 1930s (S. Berstein, *Histoire du Parti radical*, vol. 2 'Crise du radicalisme', Paris, 1982). When arguing that France was largely immune to fascism, however, he again presents the resilience of the Radical Party as one of the foundations of France's 'democratic culture' (Berstein, 'La France des années trente allergique au fascisme'). M. Dobry, 'La thèse immunitaire face aux fascismes' in Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme*, p. 26.
42. See Dobry, chapter 5 below, 'The autonomisation of the non-parliamentary Right'.
43. Soucy, *The Second Wave*.
44. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 8.
45. Jacques Nobécourt reminds us that, as an ex-communist, Doriot was very familiar with the PCF tactic of establishing 'front' organisations, nominally nonpartisan alliances open to all comers, but really a device for drawing in and then poaching the membership of close rivals – usually the SFIO ('plumer la volaille social-démocrate'). As leader of the PPF, Doriot was simply using the same tactic, this time against La Rocque ('plumer la volaille PSF'). J. Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque 1885–1946 ou les pièges du nationalisme chrétien*, Paris, 1996, p. 572.
46. These various terms have been applied to the PSF by Rémond (Bonapartist), Passmore (authoritarian populist), Burrin (national-caesarist), Berstein (authoritarian republican), Winock and Nobécourt (Christian-nationalist).
47. See Dobry, chapter 5 below, 'On imprecision and the boundaries of ideologies', pp. 138–40.