

He Is Depending on You: Militarism, Martyrdom, and the Appeal to Manliness in the Case of France's 'Croix de Feu', 1931-1940.

Geoff Read

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine le discours masculin du *Croix de Feu*, la plus grande formation politique de la France vers la fin des années 30, contre les exemples des parties conservatrices républicaines – le *Fédération Républicaine*, l'*Alliance Démocratique*, et le *Parti Démocrate Populaire* – ainsi que la gauche socialiste et communiste. Fondé sur les papiers de François de La Rocque, l'auteur discute; le mouvement du journal « Le Flambeau », les archives des figures politiques principales, et aussi la presse des autres parties. Tandis que le *Croix de Feu* préférait la masculinité, ceci était semblable à l'élément masculin retrouvé en plusieurs regards chez le parti républicain. Le mouvement, empruntant fortement de l'esthétique masculin du loin gauche, était engagé dans la construction d'un « nouvel homme fasciste. » « Il dépend sur vous, » démontre qu'en général, le *Croix de Feu* était fasciste dans son discours masculin, synthétisant le conservatisme social avec un élan radical. Puisque le *Croix de Feu* était incontestablement populaire, avec presque 1 000 000 adhérents durant la fin des années 30s, le fascisme et le nouvel homme fasciste n'étaient pas des phénomènes insignifiants dans la politique, la culture, et la société française comme certains ont réclaté.

He Is Depending on You: Militarism, Martyrdom, and the Appeal to Manliness in the Case of France's 'Croix de Feu', 1931-1940.

GEOFF READ¹

Abstract

This article examines the masculine discourse of the Croix de Feu, France's largest political formation in the late 1930s, against the examples of the republican conservative parties – the Fédération Républicaine, the Alliance Démocratique, and the Parti Démocrate Populaire – as well as the Socialist and Communist left. The author argues, based on the François de La Rocque papers, the movement's newspaper, Le Flambeau, the archives of key political figures, as well as the other parties' presses, that while the Croix de Feu's preferred masculinity was similar to that found on the republican right in many regards, the movement, borrowing heavily from the masculinist aesthetic of the far-left, was engaged in the construction of a fascist "new man." He is Depending on You, therefore, maintains that the Croix de Feu was typically fascist in its masculine discourse, synthesizing social conservatism with a radical élan. Since the Croix de Feu was undeniably popular, with roughly 1,000,000 adherents by the late-1930s, fascism and the fascist new man were by no means marginal phenomena in French politics, culture, and society as some have argued.

Résumé

Cet article examine le discours masculin du Croix de Feu, la plus grande formation politique de la France vers la fin des années 30, contre les exemples des parties conservatrices républicaines – le Fédération Républicaine, l'Alliance Démocratique, et le Parti Démocrate Populaire – ainsi que la gauche socialiste

1 The author thanks Hugues de La Rocque for graciously granting him permission to consult the François de La Rocque Papers. He also thanks the following friends and colleagues for their invaluable comments on this manuscript: the anonymous readers at *The Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, W.D. Irvine, Stephen J. Brooke, Colin Read, Pascal Maeder, Samuel Huston Goodfellow, Sean Kennedy, Samuel Kalman, Shirley Tillotson, and Kristina Guiguet.

et communiste. Fondé sur les papiers de François de La Rocque, l'auteur discute; le mouvement du journal « Le Flambeau », les archives des figures politiques principales, et aussi la presse des autres parties. Tandis que le Croix de Feu préférait la masculinité, ceci était semblable à l'élément masculin retrouvé en plusieurs regards chez le parti républicain. Le mouvement, empruntant fortement de l'esthétique masculin du loin gauche, était engagé dans la construction d'un « nouvel homme fasciste. » « Il dépend sur vous, » démontre qu'en général, le Croix de Feu était fasciste dans son discours masculin, synthétisant le conservatisme social avec un élan radical. Puisque le Croix de Feu était incontestablement populaire, avec presque 1 000 000 adhérents durant la fin des années 30s, le fascisme et le nouvel homme fasciste n'étaient pas des phénomènes insignifiants dans la politique, la culture, et la société française comme certains ont réclamé.

WRITING IN NOVEMBER 1938, in *L'Étudiant Social*, the student journal of the *Parti Social Français* (PSF), party leader Colonel François de La Rocque reminded his young readers that, "He is depending on you...."

"He," as it turned out, was the figurative fallen soldier of World War One (WW1), and "he" was "depending on your spirit, your labour, your recognition in facing current problems that the boss and the worker, the chief and the soldier, united within the hierarchy of industrial, military, or agricultural enterprise, are collaborators and friends."² La Rocque thus evoked a number of themes typical of the *Croix de Feu*, or *Parti Social Français* as the movement was renamed in June 1936. He called on a lineage of masculinity within French nationalism, from the soldiers of WW1 to the young students of 1938, to stress that, just as France's soldiers had performed their duty for *la Patrie* at the battles of the Marne and the Somme, subordinating their own interests to those of the nation, so their heirs should put aside the self-interested and counterproductive agenda of class struggle to work with their social betters for the collective good.

The *Croix de Feu* was originally a veterans' organization, founded in 1927 by Maurice d'Hartoy, but it was when La Rocque became the group's President in 1931 that it began to expand rapidly and, arguably, take on a fascist tone.³ The *Croix de Feu* attracts a great deal of scholarly attention in French historiography for a variety of reasons.

2 François de La Rocque, "Il Dépend de Vous ...," *L'Étudiant Social: Organe de la Réconciliation Française Chez les Étudiants*, November 1938, 1, Carton 105, François de La Rocque Papers, *Archives Nationales de France* (hereafter ANF).

3 Sean Michael Kennedy, "Reconciling the Nation Against Democracy: The Croix de Feu, The Parti Social Français and French Politics, 1927-1945," (Ph.D. Dissertation, York University, 1998), 2.

Alone among the fascist or quasi-fascist formations of France's interwar right, the *Croix de Feu* enjoyed truly mass support, boasting a membership of roughly 500,000 by the end of 1935 and nearly 1,000,000 by 1937. By French standards of the time, this was enormous and made the *Croix de Feu*/PSF the country's most populous political party.⁴ Historians who argue that homegrown French fascism was a significant phenomenon begin with the *Croix de Feu*, while those seeking to classify domestic fascism as of marginal importance attempt to demonstrate the movement's republican credentials.⁵ Studies of the *Croix de Feu* are therefore central to the historiographies of French and European fascism, as well as of late Third Republican politics.

This article seeks to contribute to this literature using a gender approach to examine *Croix de Feu* masculinity. Gender historians have built on Joan Scott's seminal "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" using her concept of binary opposition or more complex derivatives such as the theories of Judith Butler or Robert Connell that argue for a multiplicity of genders, to provide invaluable insights to an ever-growing number of fields.⁶ Such analyses shed new light on social, political, and cultural realities, and above all else, on the *mentalité* of a given time and place.⁷ Despite this, gender is a rela-

4 Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 36, 108. Kennedy estimates that the *Parti Social Français* had the largest membership of any party in France by 1938: Kennedy, "Reconciling the Nation," 3.

5 Robert Soucy and William D. Irvine are foremost among the former group. See Soucy, *French Fascism*, 104-203; William D. Irvine, "Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu," *The Journal of Modern History* 63, no. 2 (June 1991): 271-95. The latter group includes René Rémond, *Les Droites en France* (Paris: Aubier, 1982); Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, Antisémitisme et Fascisme en France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990); Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); Jacques Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque, 1885-1946, ou les Pièges du Nationalisme Chrétien* (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 1996). Kevin Passmore holds the middle ground, arguing that the *Croix de Feu* was fascist, but that the *Parti Social Français* was not. See Passmore, "Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français," *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 527-57.

6 Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, revised ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28-50; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

7 There are far too many examples to list. Two recent contributions to the French historiography are Christopher E. Forth's examination of the Dreyfus Affair, which successfully demonstrates the centrality of gender in the conflict between the Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard camps, and Mary Louise Roberts' study of the "New Woman" in late nineteenth century Paris, which, using Butler's notion of "performativity", argues that women such as actress Sarah Bernhardt and feminist Marguerite Durand deliberately destabilized gender norms through their nonconformist performances of gender: Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin de Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

tively underdeveloped line of inquiry in French history, due in large part to the almost total lack of interest in the approach among historians of French nationality.⁸ Thus, gender in the French interwar period is almost exclusively developed by Anglophone scholars, including, most famously, Mary Louise Roberts.⁹

The gendered aspects of the *Croix de Feu* have been all but ignored, and yet concepts of masculinity were central to French culture, as the work of Robert A. Nye on the importance of a male code of honour among nineteenth-century French politicians,¹⁰ and Joan Scott's observations about the centrality of masculinity to French conceptions of republicanism and citizenship both suggest.¹¹ Gender analysis of the *Croix de Feu* has only been approached by Mary Jean Green's examination of the appeals to and representation of women in *Le Flambeau* (*The Torch*), the movement's official paper until July 1937, and by Kevin Passmore's more substantial work on the paramilitarism of the movement, where he briefly considers questions of masculinity, as well as his research on the involvement of *Croix de Feu*/PSF women in social welfare work. These two efforts echo recent work by Daniella Sarnoff and Cheryl Koos who place women at the centre of their analyses of French fascism in that they posit the importance of women to the *Croix de Feu*, and hence to fascism.¹²

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- 8 The one very notable exception to this is Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy et l'Éternel Féminin* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996). This is of course not to say that there is not a considerable amount of excellent work done by French historians on women's history using feminist analyses. See Christine Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne: Histoire des Féminismes, 1914-1940* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1995); Françoise Thébaud, "Maternité et famille entre les deux guerres: Idéologie et politique familiale," in *Femmes et Fascismes*, ed. Rita Thalmann (Paris: Éditions Tierce, 1986), 85-98.
- 9 Roberts argues that French women experienced a misogynist backlash post-WWI as men, angry at their suffering in the trenches while women enjoyed relative comfort at home, sought to reassert their masculine hegemony by enforcing traditional gender roles with renewed vigour. Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Following this line, historians of gender and French fascism have generally, though not exclusively, seen the rise of fascism as indicative of the phenomenon Roberts documents; they read fascism, in other words, as anti-feminist and masculinist. See David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 147-70; Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- 10 Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honour in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 11 Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 12 Passmore, "Boy-Scouting" and idem, "Planting the Tricolour in the Citadels of Communism: Women's Social Action in the Croix de Feu," *Journal of Modern History* 71, no. 4 (1999): 814-52; Mary Jean Green, "Gender, Fascism and the Croix de Feu: The Women's Pages of Le Flambeau," *French Cultural Studies* 8 (1997): 229-39; Cheryl Koos, "Fascism, Fatherhood, and the Family in Interwar France: The Case of Antoine Rédier and the Légion," *Journal of*

Interestingly, Passmore and Green both approach the *Croix de Feu* as fascist, although Passmore sees the PSF differently, arguing that it was evolving towards a mass mobilizing form of traditional conservatism.¹³ Green states at the outset that she accepts Robert Soucy and William Irvine's arguments that the *Croix de Feu* was fascist,¹⁴ and proceeds on that basis to apply her conclusions about the movement to French fascism generally. This is problematic, as a scholarly consensus has not yet been reached on the important question of the *Croix de Feu*'s membership in the fascist pantheon, although all agree that the *Croix de Feu* was significantly different from other fascist groups in some respects. While supporters of the Soucy/Irvine perspective are persuasive that the *Croix de Feu* shared many characteristics with fascist movements, including paramilitarism, authoritarianism, and a cult of the leader, others remain unconvinced. The latter point to La Rocque's and other leaders' near-constant assurances of their fidelity to the republican order, their adoption of parliamentary tactics in 1936 concomitant with the change in name to the PSF (a change necessitated by Léon Blum's Popular Front government, which outlawed paramilitary leagues, including the *Croix de Feu*, forcing La Rocque and his collaborators to reinvent the movement as a proper political party),¹⁵ and La Rocque's later activities in the French resistance. Further, the most recent monograph on the *Croix de Feu*, by emerging scholar Sean Kennedy, concludes that while the movement was certainly violently anti-communist and anti-democratic, it was not fascist, but rather a new form of conservative authoritarianism.¹⁶ One of Kennedy's arguments is that an effort to construct "a new man," so central to other fascisms, was missing from the *Croix de Feu*.¹⁷

Family History 24, no. 3 (1999): 317-29; Daniella Sarnoff and Cheryl Koos, "France," in *Women, Gender and the Extreme Right in Europe, 1918-1945*, ed. Kevin Passmore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 168-88; Daniella Sarnoff, "In the Cervix of the Nation: Women and French Fascism, 1919-1939," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 2001). This body of literature includes Green's study of Thérèse Delhayde de Marryhac, a novelist involved in the movement: Mary Jean Green, "The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman," in *Gender and Fascism in Modern France*, eds. Melanie Hawthorne and Richard Golsan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 49-68. An earlier article of Koos' falls more in Roberts' tradition, suggesting the misogyny of fascism: Cheryl Koos, "Gender, Anti-Individualism, and Nationalism: The Alliance Nationale and the Pronatalist Backlash Against the Femme Moderne, 1933-1940," *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 699-723.

13 This argument is not terribly convincing as the movement was forced into this transition by the outlawing of the fascist leagues in 1936, and because both Hitler and Mussolini's parties took parliamentary routes to power. See Passmore, "Boy-Scouting."

14 Soucy, *French Fascism*; Irvine, "Fascism in France."

15 *Ibid.*, 112-3.

16 Kennedy, "Reconciling the Nation." For the more radical argument that the *Croix de Feu* was the predecessor to post-war Gaullism, see Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de la Rocque*.

17 Kennedy, "Reconciling the Nation," 83-5.

Given that historian George Mosse, among others, believes that the attempt to create this new man was a key component of the fascist project, the time is ripe to investigate what gender can tell us about the *Croix de Feu*.¹⁸ Was its gender discourse identifiably fascist? Is Kennedy right to assert that the *Croix de Feu* did not favour the advent of a fascist new man?

The answers are complex. The *Croix de Feu*'s masculine discourse contained both important convergences and divergences from that propagated by interwar French republican conservatives. Like the conservative ideal, the *Croix de Feu*'s masculine exemplar was to be hardworking, selfless, patriotic, paternalist, paterfamilial, and "racially" French. These characteristics were clearly borrowed from the mainstream right. There was nothing specifically fascist about them.

However, there were other key elements to what we might term "*Croix de Feu* masculinity," which were indeed novel, and representative of the fascist new man. While all interwar French political parties celebrated their deceased leaders and notables, the *Croix de Feu* developed a particularly poignant cult of martyrdom. Its commentators used the movement's dead to pontificate about masculine ideals, much as did the National Socialists in Germany around figures such as murdered *Sturmabteilung* leader Horst Wessel.¹⁹ Mosse, in fact, argues that the exaltation of masculine martyrs was typical of fascisms, fingering Gabriele D'Annunzio as an important pioneer in this regard.²⁰ The *Croix de Feu*'s cult was decidedly militaristic, and reflected the general militarization of masculinity within the movement – a militarization irrefutably in common with the ideal man of fascist parties and movements. Further, like fascist parties, the *Croix de Feu* issued a call to men to rally to its banner in hyper-masculine terms. It used intemperate language, not often found on the republican right, and offered a vision, as did La Rocque in addressing the readers of *L'Étudiant Social*, of French manhood marching towards the future united in an organic hierarchy modelled on the nationalist masculine harmony purportedly found in the Great War's trenches.²¹ Finally, La Rocque's appeal to students was indicative of another element of the *Croix de Feu*'s ideal man: he was preferably young, virile and vigorous, with a well-developed and robust physique, an

18 Mosse describes the fascist new man thus: "The inner characteristics of this new man were ... clearly defined: athletic, persevering, filled with self-denial and the spirit of sacrifice. At the same time, the new fascist man must be energetic, courageous and laconic. The ideal fascist was the very opposite of muddleheaded, talkative, intellectualizing liberals and socialists – the exhausted, tired old men of the old order." See George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1980), 185. The most recent macro-history of fascism likewise highlights the fascist attempt to construct a new man (and a new woman): Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 143.

19 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1998), 325-6.

20 Mosse, *Masses and Man*, 95, 170.

21 La Rocque, "Il Dépend de Vous...."

image in stark contrast to the more aged, tempered and respectable one propagated by the parties of the republican right.

In contrast to the mainstream elements of *Croix de Feu* masculinity, these more radical components were closer to Communist masculinity than to that found on the republican right. The Communists too developed a cult of martyrs, constructed a militarized manhood, and praised youthful virtues such as dynamism, athleticism, and a predilection to act rather than intellectualize. But this does not mean that the *Croix de Feu* was somehow communistic: rather, as Robert Paxton has recently reemphasized, it was precisely this sort of synthesis of the conservative and Marxist aesthetics that characterized fascism.²² The *Croix de Feu* sprang from the conservative right, but adopted the style of the far-left, including its appeal to a radical manliness, in order to mobilize the working class in defence of the nation and social order. This was absolutely typical of fascisms. By looking at *Croix de Feu* masculinity, it is possible both to perceive the movement's fascism with new clarity and to see exactly how the *Croix de Feu* achieved the fascist synthesis in its gender politics, while also gaining insights into French society and culture in the interwar period.

Third Republican politics were notoriously splintered, complex, and confusing. In part, this was because Deputies and Senators tended to function as autonomous political actors, free from the encumbrances of party discipline. Moreover, parties at various times allowed their members and parliamentarians to belong simultaneously to other groups. Since there were over 600 Deputies and Senators in France, the picture of shifting alliances and groupings was predictably chaotic (see Figure 1).

There were, however, three parties of note on the republican right with which one can compare the *Croix de Feu*: the *Alliance Démocratique* (AD), the *Parti Démocrate Populaire* (PDP), and the *Fédération Républicaine* (FR). There were important differences among these three parties. The PDP, for example, was explicitly Christian Democratic while the AD was much more secular in its orientation. Nonetheless, combined, they promoted a coherent and consistent conservative republican masculinity.²³

22 Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 9-12.

23 For studies on each of these three parties, see Donald G. Wileman, "L'Alliance Républicaine Démocratique: The Dead Centre of French Politics, 1901-1947," (Ph.D. Dissertation, York University, 1988); William D. Irvine, *French Conservatism in Crisis: The Republican Federation of France in the 1930s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Jean-Claude Delbreil, *Centrisme et Démocratie-Chrétienne en France: Le Parti Démocrate Populaire des Origines au M.R.P. (1919-1944)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990). For two regional studies of the interaction between the right and far right in this period see Kevin Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism: The Right in a French Province, 1928-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Samuel Huston Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascisms in Interwar Alsace* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois

**Figure 1: Prominent Political Parties/Movements in France, 1919-1940
(founding date included where relevant)**

CENTRE-LEFT TO LEFT		
Radical-Socialist Party (Radical Party) <i>Leader(s)</i> : Édouard Daladier, Édouard Herriot	Socialist Party (SFIO) <i>Leader(s)</i> : Léon Blum, Paul Faure	Communist Party (PCF), 1921 <i>Leader(s)</i> : Marcel Cachin, Maurice Thorez
CENTRE-RIGHT TO RIGHT		
Alliance Démocratique (AD), 1933 (re-founded) <i>Leader(s)</i> : Pierre-Étienne Flandin	Parti Démocrate Populaire (PDP), 1925 <i>Leader(s)</i> : Georges Thibout, Jean	Fédération Républicaine (FR) <i>Leader(s)</i> : Auguste Isaac, Louis Marin Raymond-Laurent
EXTREME RIGHT		
Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français (PSF), 1927 <i>Leader(s)</i> : Col. François de La Rocque	Parti Populaire Français (PPF), 1936 <i>Leader(s)</i> : Jacques Doriot	Action Française (AF) <i>Leader(s)</i> : Charles Maurras, Léon Daudet

Since the *Croix de Feu* drew many of its members, among both the rank and file and the leadership, from the parties of republican conservatism, it unsurprisingly adopted many of the masculine values held by the AD, PDP, and FR. *Croix de Feu* leaders and commentators accordingly extolled the virtues of hard work and dedication, self-abnegation, paternalism, fatherhood, and the so-called French race.

Hard work and dedication to the cause were foremost among the masculine characteristics espoused by *Croix de Feu* leaders, thinkers, and members. The unnamed author of the party pamphlet, “Why I Joined the *Parti Social Français*,” published in 1936, indicated that one of the primary reasons he joined the party was to “rehabilitate work,” which implies that he felt France to be suffering from widespread indolence.²⁴ Likewise, in a tribute to deceased member Michel Gouriand, *Le Flambeau* emphasized that his “life [was] full of work and devotion,” and called on readers to follow his example.²⁵ Work was

University Press, 1999). For a detailed analysis of interwar conservative masculinity, see Geoff Read, “Des Hommes et Des Citoyens: Paternalism and Masculinity on the Republican Right in Interwar France, 1919-1939,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, forthcoming.

24 “Pourquoi J’ai Adhéré au Parti Social Français,” (Paris: Siège Social, 1936), Carton 28, François de La Rocque Papers, *Institut des Sciences-Politiques* (hereafter ISP).

25 “Michel Gouriand, Victime du Devoir,” *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l’Avant: Organe du Mouvement Croix de Feu*, 11 January 1936, 3.

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seen as regenerative: France would be saved through the sweat and toil of *Croix de Feu* members.

This theme of revivification through work was particularly evident in calls on men to labour unflinchingly for the movement. The *Croix de Feu*, adherents were consistently told, would return France to glory through the common enterprise of its cadres. Jean Ybarnégaray, the leader of the then-nascent PSF's parliamentary group, called on PSF men, in October, 1936 to "Work intensely for our goals in the ranks of the PARTI SOCIAL FRANÇAIS. ... follow LA ROCQUE, and lead France behind him."²⁶ Similarly, propagandist François Veillot, who claimed to be unaffiliated with the PSF but whose tone was decidedly partial, exalted La Rocque as a man who was "desirous of working for the welfare of his country...."²⁷

This valorization of faithful labour for the cause could become near-comic, as even the most mundane of activities became infused with an aura of patriotic heroism. Antoinette de Préval, for example, the most prominent woman within the organization, applauded "the kindness, the discipline, the courage, and the faith," of male volunteers who had provided security at a youth rally. This devotion, Préval continued, was bound to lead to the "great patriotic victory," for which all members were striving.²⁸

This tendency to exalt men's work ethic and cast it in exaggerated patriotic terms was far from unique in interwar French politics. Louis Marin, for example, the leader of the *Fédération Républicaine*, remembered the recently deceased Georges Ducrocq, the editor of the FR's weekly, *La Nation*, as "an exceptional worker for the welfare of the country...."²⁹ Note that, like *Croix de Feu* speakers and authors, Marin equated work for his party with work for the nation. In the same vein, electrician and secretary of the *Parti Démocrate Populaire*'s youth group in Perreux, F. Durand, outlined in an interview his own devoted efforts to spread the party's doctrine and so save the country from the threat of communist revolution.³⁰ Like the *Croix de Feu*, the PDP saw its own goals as synonymous with those of France and placed a high value on men's work as furthering those interests.

A key component of this work ethic was selflessness, most often expressed as "self-abnegation" or "disinterestedness." This fitted perfectly with the *Croix de Feu*'s organicism: the individual was unimportant, what mattered were the move-

26 Transcript of the "Réunion du Comité Exécutif du 8 Octobre 1936," Carton 15, Rocque Papers, *ISP*. Capitalization in original.

27 François Veillot, *La Rocque et Son Parti: Comme Je les ai Vu* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1938), 87, Carton 28, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

28 Mademoiselle de Préval to M. Danner, 12 May 1937, Carton 133, Rocque Papers, *ANF*.

29 Louis Marin, "'La Nation' en Deuil: A Mon Ami Georges Ducrocq, Rédacteur en Chef de 'La Nation'," *La Nation: Bulletin de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 8 October 1927, 1.

30 "Pourquoi 'Ils' Souscrivent Encore!" *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Démocrate Populaire*, 8 April 1928, 6.

ment, the party, and the nation, all of which a true man would serve without question. The *Croix de Feu* section in Royan struck exactly these chords in a letter to La Rocque in a response to a speech of Ybarnégary's in the Chamber of Deputies, saying that its members, "congratulate their Chief Colonel de La Roque [sic] for the courage and self-abnegation that he demonstrated in extending a loyal hand to his adversaries in the hopes of achieving the great *National Reconciliation*."³¹

La Rocque himself often expressed this theme of selflessness in his own correspondence. For example, one of his more interesting practices was to write personally to members who had been injured while participating in *Croix de Feu* events. In so doing, he solidified the bonds between the rank and file and its leadership, and he also drew lessons from the recipient's comportment. On 13 October 1936, for example, he wrote Raymond Guenard, a member from the Marne, who was reportedly shot by a Communist Party (PCF) agitator: "I don't doubt for a second, my dear friend, that you remain devoted to our cause. But, after the sacrifice that you have already made in so generously spilling your blood for our Country, I hesitate to again abuse your self-abnegation."³²

Selflessness was a theme in common with the republican right (though engaging in street combat with the Communist Party was not). In many ways, this obsession with unity and self-effacement was a legacy of WWI as politicians repeatedly stressed that it was the selfless "National Union" of the war years that had secured victory. Conservative Raymond Poincaré, then President of the Republic and a member of the *Alliance Républicaine Démocratique*, the forerunner to the AD, in a speech read on his behalf to the Chamber of Deputies in 1920, made exactly this point.³³ In keeping with this memory of the utility of self-sacrifice for the nation, interwar conservatives, just like the *Croix de Feu*, continued to valorize this masculine trait. Robert Cornilleau, for example, the editor of *Le Petit Démocrate*, the PDP's journal, praised the "magnificent disinterestedness" of party militant Marcel Robert in his obituary,³⁴ while *Alliance Démocratique* notable Pierre Auscher proclaimed that party leader Pierre-Étienne Flandin's, "disinterestedness [was] absolute."³⁵

As one might gather from these examples, selflessness could have different implications for different men. For a simple party member, it usually meant following orders and sacrificing for the cause, while, for party leaders, it might

31 Les Croix de Feu, Briscards, et V.N. de la Section de Royan to François de La Rocque, 13 December 1935, Carton 91, Rocque Papers, ANF. Underlining in original.

32 François de La Rocque to Raymond Guenard, 13 October 1936, Carton 24, Rocque Papers, ISP.

33 "Message de M. Le Président de la République," *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Débats Parlementaires. Chambre des Députés*, 17 February 1920, 199.

34 Robert Cornilleau, "Un Militant Modèle: Marcel Robert," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Démocrate Populaire*, 19 April 1936, 1-2.

35 Pierre Auscher, "Pour que Dure la Paix Intérieure," *Bulletin Tirhebdomadaire de la Presse Démocratique Française*, 13 February 1939, 1, Carton 5, Alliance Démocratique Papers, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

involve making the difficult decisions necessary for the greater good, or showing concern for underlings in the manner of a concerned father. This political paternalism was another prominent feature of the *Croix de Feu* aesthetic, and was inherited from the conservative political milieu. La Rocque, in particular, liked to position himself as a father to "his children" in the movement. In one instance, he inaugurated a new page of *Le Flambeau* dedicated to the "Sons and Daughters of *Croix de Feu*," the party's youth group, in the following manner: "My children, my friends, I give you your journal," and signed the message "Your old President-General who loves you so much."³⁶ Indeed, evidence suggests that La Rocque took an active interest in the welfare of his *Croix de Feu* children, and received messages from underlings in the organization's social services and charitable divisions about the plight of his more unfortunate "offspring," often intervening personally in cases he deemed worthy.³⁷ Antoinette de Préval, for instance, explained that, "The Colonel desire[d]" that she and Madame de Gêrus, the leader of the Feminine Section, become the Godmothers of a young boy whose *Croix de Feu* father had recently died.³⁸ As *Le Flambeau*'s I. Montaudoin proudly reported on the occasion of the opening of a *Croix de Feu* children's centre in 1935, this paternalist attention paid dividends: "The children give all their affection to the colonel. One of them even told me, 'I love him like a second father.'"³⁹

The public portrayal of La Rocque's private life also suggested a loving and protective father. This was most evident upon the death of his daughter, Nadine, in August 1934. Nadine was eulogized at length in *Le Flambeau*, constructed as a female martyr for the movement (even though she died of natural causes unrelated to her political activities), and her father's grief was made apparent in the paper's pages.⁴⁰ Further, on the death of his own child, La Rocque received a flood of oftentimes touching letters of condolence from his proverbial *Croix de Feu* children.⁴¹

36 François de la Rocque, "A Ceux d'Après-Guerre: Aux F.F.C.F.," *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu et Briscards*, 1 November 1932, 8. Emphasis in original.

37 See, for example, a series of reports to La Rocque such as one marked: "Cas D....," which summarized the personal circumstances of given members and their families and the actions taken by the party's organs on their behalf. Cartons 87/88, Rocque Papers, ANF.

38 A. de Préval to Miss de Gimard, 6 October 1937, Carton 163, Rocque Papers, ANF.

39 I. Montaudoin, "Le Foyer des Moins de Treize Ans," *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l'Avant: Organe du Mouvement Croix de Feu*, 1 January 1935, 4. This comment was indicative of a phenomenon that Victoria De Grazia documents in the Italian example: while fascists preached family values and promised to maintain or restore fathers' privileges, they, in fact, displaced fathers and thereby undermined their authority. See Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 77-115.

40 See for example, Noël Ottavi, "Nadine....," *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l'Avant: Organe du Mouvement Croix de Feu*, 3 August 1935, 2; "Nadine de La Rocque," *Le Flambeau: Organe du Mouvement Croix de Feu*, 1 September 1934, 3.

41 See for example, Françoise Blouin to François de La Rocque, 10 August 1934, Carton 23, Rocque Papers, ANF.

La Rocque also got messages from well-wishers unaffiliated with the movement upon Nadine's death, including the prominent FR Deputy, Pastor Edouard Soulier.⁴² Soulier's missive reflected the paternalist ethos, similar to if perhaps not always as overt as that of the *Croix de Feu*, found among conservative republicans. Louis Marin, for example, much like La Rocque, practised a form of patronage where he, like a good father, intervened when he felt it appropriate to secure special treatment and employment for FR members, friends, and acquaintances, and maintained a healthy interest in the welfare of his FR "family."⁴³

One aspect equally crucial to *Croix de Feu* and republican conservative masculinities was fatherhood. Men were encouraged not only to act as good fathers, but to become fathers, preferably of large families. This confirms Cheryl Koos' finding that pro-natalism was an area of considerable crossover both intellectually and literally between fascists and rightwing conservatives.⁴⁴ *Croix de Feu* commentators, throughout the period under examination, evinced considerable anxiety about France's unimpressive birthrate. In early 1936, for example, a Dr. Orth published two articles in *Le Flambeau* raising the alarm that the number of deaths in France had exceeded the number of births in 1935, while comparing that frightening statistic with the German example, where, thanks to the Nazis' policies, births were once again on the incline.⁴⁵ In accordance with this concern, the PSF declared in its founding programme in 1936, that

The family is at once the goal of, the justification, and the recompense for human effort.

The Parti Social Français fights for the rights of the family. There is no better 'politics of the family' than a truly social politics, unabashedly French: protection of and respect for children, and for the mother of the family in the home; support for their material and moral interests; vigilance concerning their patrimony; encouragement to save, support for small property owners, the promotion of hygiene and of teaching; a cult of tradition and spirituality.⁴⁶

42 Edouard Soulier to François de La Rocque, 10 August 1934, Carton 23, Rocque Papers, ANF.

43 See, for example, the following letter, likely to his friend Colonel Blaison, where Marin discussed one such case: Louis Marin to Mon Colonel, 20 December 1920, Carton 228, Louis Marin Papers, ANF.

44 Koos, "Fascism, Fatherhood, and the Family in Interwar France;" and idem, "The (Anti)Republican Right and the Gendered Politics of the Family: The Case of Louis Duval-Arnould and Georges Pernot (1919-1936)," unpublished paper presented at the Society for French Historical Studies, 2004.

45 Docteur Orth, "Dénatalité Française," *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l'Avant*, 26 January 1936, 5; Docteur Orth, "Le Problème de la Dénatalité: Une Expérience Concluante," *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l'Avant*, 14 March 1936, 3. Orth was careful in the second article to declare himself, "in no sense Hitlerian."

46 *Parti Social Français: Une Mystique*, *Un Programme* (Paris: 1936), Carton 28, Rocque Papers, ISP. Passage bolded in original.

HE IS DEPENDING ON YOU: MILITARISM, MARTYRDOM, AND THE APPEAL TO MANLINESS IN THE CASE OF FRANCE'S 'CROIX DE FEU', 1931-1940

Clearly, "the family" was front and center in the movement's worldview. The *Croix de Feu*/PSF's official slogan was, after all, "Work, Family, Fatherland." This, infamously, was later adopted by the Vichy regime.⁴⁷

While in its defense of the traditional family, the *Croix de Feu* seemingly went beyond the parties of the republican right, those parties were also energetic in representing themselves as the family's champions. FR Deputy Georges Pernot, for one, was a steadfast defender of the family. In 1928, for instance, he penned an article criticizing the government's budget on the grounds that it did not sufficiently promote the family's interests.⁴⁸ Prominent conservative feminist Madame Le Vert Chotard, the leader of the *Union Nationale Pour le Vote des Femmes*, who aligned herself with the PDP, likewise defined feminism's *raison d'être* as, "to struggle against immorality, slums, and alcoholism, which are so destructive to the family."⁴⁹ Even the *Croix de Feu* found it hard to outdo the PDP in defense of the traditional family. Reflecting the PDP's social Catholic roots, barely an issue of *Le Petit Démocrate* did not feature at least one article about problems confronting French families.⁵⁰

The PDP, like the FR and AD, advocated policies in agreement with its familialism. This was both an appeal to male breadwinners' votes, and a reflection of the party's heartfelt social conservatism. Foremost among these planks in the party's platform were its calls for the "family vote" and the "family wage." The family vote had many incarnations, but in principle its advocates desired that heads of families ("*pères de famille*") should have extra votes due to their increased responsibilities.⁵¹ Most often, the suggestion was that the *père de famille* should exercise an extra vote for each of his dependents. *Le Petit Démocrate* came out in favour of a form of the family vote a few months before the PDP itself was constituted. Its unnamed editorialist outlined the logic of the argument very neatly:

The husband represents his wife in civil claims; he has the duty to protect her, to meet her needs and those of his children; he is responsible for the imprudent behaviour or offenses committed by these children. It is therefore just that he represent his wife and his children in the legislative process.⁵²

47 Green, "Gender, Fascism, and the Croix de Feu," 230.

48 Georges Pernot, "À Propos du Projet de Budget: Et La Famille?," *La Nation: Organe de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 8 September 1928, 849.

49 Madame Le Vert Chotard, "Le Féminisme," *Questions Féminines, Questions Féministes*, September-October 1928, 239.

50 For example, see Louis Blain, "Comment le Problème des Salaires se Pose dans la Famille Ouvrière," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Républicain Hebdomadaire*, 6 June 1926, 3.

51 *Père de famille* had a special significance on the interwar right. See Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4.

52 "Une Intéressante Proposition sur le Vote Familiale," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Républicain Hebdomadaire*, 20 March 1925, 2.

The *Croix de Feu* shared this logic, and supported the family vote accordingly. Indeed, the movement's oft-trumpeted support for women's suffrage was conditional on its being adopted in partnership with the family vote.⁵³ Supporting the traditional family came before, and would have been seen as synonymous with, women's rights.

Similarly, all the parties of the republican right advocated different versions of the family wage, which would allow mothers to stay at home to raise their children while fathers earned enough to support everyone in their families. Most often, the parties proposed that men's wages be indexed, in some fashion, to the number of their dependents. Commentators felt that this would have the added benefit of providing an incentive for couples to reproduce: if you wanted the family wage, you would have to produce the family.⁵⁴ The *Croix de Feu*, in comparison, went somewhat beyond the traditional parties and came out in favour of a national programme of family allocations to supplement all fathers' incomes, regardless of their occupations. The other parties were a bit more cautious, not wishing to either do too much harm to profit margins, or to stimulate unnecessary state interventionism.⁵⁵ This willingness to use state power to promote large families on the part of the *Croix de Feu* was shared by the Italian Fascists and German Nazis.⁵⁶

Of course, while desiring to promote large, robust French families, neither the *Croix de Feu* nor its equivalents on the republican right wanted to see a similar expansion among the "foreign" population in France. Most commonly, this xenophobic or racist aspect to rightwing pro-natalism was apparent in the frequent conflation of nation and race. For example, in one sentence, an author might discuss the future of the nation, and in the next lament the degeneration of the race. Sometimes, however, even on the republican right, racism could

53 See, for example, a party brochure from 1935 called "Programmes?" Cartons 82/83, Rocque Papers, ANF. The moderate right, with some individual exceptions notably in the PDP, supported women's suffrage without this reservation. See, for example, Custos, "Vers la Démocratie Intégrale: Suffrage Féminin et Suffrage Familial," *La Nation: Organe de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 24 February 1928, 187-188.

54 See E.-A. Beaudoin, "Pour le Foyer: Les Allocations Familiales Doivent Etre Généralisées et Portées à un Taux Suffisant," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Républicain Hebdomadaire*, 28 February 1926, 3; "Extraits du Programme de Politique Sociale," 1935, Carton 265, Louis Marin Papers, ANF; Marcel Ventenat, "Une Oeuvre de Justice Sociale," *Bulletin Trihebdomadaire de la Presse Démocratique Française*, 7 August 1939, 3, Carton 5, Alliance Démocratique Papers, *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*.

55 J. Chamdes, "Il Faut Soutenir et Sauver la Famille: Sans Enfants, la Nation est en Péril Mortel – Ayons une Politique du Foyer," *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 17 April 1937, 4.

56 De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 55-57; Gisela Bock, "Antinatalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism," in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s*, eds. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), 233-55.

play a more explicit role, as some commentators pointedly remarked that immigration would not solve the problem of depopulation.⁵⁷ Thus, while the *Croix de Feu*'s language around issues of immigration, as in the following extract, was generally a bit more extreme than that of its republican counterparts, its sentiments were far from unique. Writing of "... all the horde from ethnic areas, steppe or desert, who burden our economy, our social laws, our hospitals, our asylums and our prisons," it declared that "Immigration and nationalization are not remedies to the continued decline of the birth rate. They are not even palliatives."⁵⁸ It seems safe to conclude, then, that the *Croix de Feu*'s ideal man was both a father and "French."

Anti-Semitism is of special interest to historians of the far right. While historians generally concur that it was not an essential element of fascism, given its relative unimportance, in particular, to the Italian Fascists,⁵⁹ the spectre of the Holocaust, and in France, of events such as the Dreyfus Affair, necessitate its investigation. As for the *Croix de Feu*, while it rarely displayed an overt anti-Semitism, following the tradition of the anti-Dreyfusards, it equated "Jewishness" with effeminacy. "The Jew" represented urbanity, modernism, internationalism, finance capital, and "the intellectual": in short, all the things the radical right despised.⁶⁰ Accordingly, a "real man" could not be Jewish, or at least, if he was Jewish, he had to overcome his Semitism.

This anti-Semitic element to *Croix de Feu* masculinity was usually phrased in code. A favourite keyword, for example, was "parasite." An official propaganda pamphlet asked the question, "What Kind of Men do We Want?" The answer was revealing:

Let us disdain intellectuals, opportunists, combinationists, idlers, parasites, profiteers! Out with them. No more discoursing lawyers, windbag committeemen, parliamentarians! With us, men of faith and character above all ... Catholics, Protestants, freethinkers, good Jews!⁶¹

The catalogue – intellectuals, opportunists, and so on – contains all the typical bugaboos of the radical right, but the "parasites [and] profiteers," reference,

57 Etienne-Martin Saint-Léon, "D'Abord Vivre ... Puisque la France se Dépeuple Faut-Il Faire Appel à l'Immigration Étrangère?" *Le Petit Démocrate Journal Républicain Hebdomadaire*, 26 October 1924, 1-2; Jean Bourdon, "Soyons Clairvoyants dans Notre Hospitalité: l'Immigration Étrangère – Peut-Elle Reconstituer la Population Française?" *La Nation: Bulletin de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 26 June 1926, 555-6.

58 "Invasion Étrangère," *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu et Briscards*, 1 December 1933, 3.

59 For a dissenting view, see Alexander De Grand, "Mussolini's Follies: Fascism in its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935-1940," *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 2 (2004): 127-47.

60 Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 21-59.

61 "Buts Généraux des Croix de Feu," Carton 81, Rocque Papers, ANF.

in particular, reads like an allusion to Jews and finance capital, usually assumed to be Jewish. The suggestion that the movement welcomed “good Jews,” of course, indicates that there were “bad Jews.” What made one Jew good, and the other bad, presumably, was that a good Jew would not have belonged in any of the aforementioned categories, categories which mirrored the typical rightwing conception of “Jewishness.”

Indeed, *Croix de Feu* leaders sometimes had to define this crucial difference more carefully. In one such instance, for example, a member wrote the head office to inquire as to the group’s position *vis à vis* the “Jewish question.” The head of propaganda replied, quoting liberally from La Rocque’s book, *Public Service*. On the one hand, La Rocque, as he did quite consistently, insisted that Jews were welcome in the movement and that French identity was not defined by religion: what mattered was “French devotion.” On the other, La Rocque and his propaganda chief by proxy, drew the classic distinction of a particular kind of French anti-Semite, between “good” French Jews, and “bad” foreign ones supposedly “invading” France:

... among the latter, numerous islets form for whom persecution is but a cover for espionage. To point this out is not to commit an anti-Semitic act. I know many Israelites for whom this latent invasion appears like a menace not only for the country, but for their coreligionists privileged with the rights of citizenship; I know many Israelites in whose eyes this rush of German Jews represents the peril of provoking an anti-Semitic reaction.⁶²

Anti-Semitism, in this view, was the fault of Jews themselves. Foreign Jews, in this case German, were flooding France causing an understandable and justified backlash. In a speech to the PSF’s departmental congress of the Rhône in 1937, La Rocque again blamed Jews for the spread of anti-Semitism, focusing his accusation, this time, on the Jewish Socialist Léon Blum, then the Premier of France’s Popular Front government: “I call on all the patriotic Israelites and Lord knows that we have many of them, very dear to us, in our ranks, and I invite them to put on trial Léon Blum, a member of their religion all of whose activity unfolds as though he wants to unleash in France an unjust and fearsome wave of anti-Semitism.”⁶³ It seems likely, therefore, that while it was theoretically possible for an exemplary *Croix de Feu* man to be Jewish, he would have had to exude the sort of rugged, patriotic masculinity considered by the far-right to be antithetical to Jewish identity in order to compensate for his Semitic handicap. A good Jew, in other words, would not be a Jew.

62 Le Chef de la Propagande to a “Cher Camarade,” 25 October 1935, Carton 10, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

63 François de La Rocque, “Extraits du Discours Prononcé par le Colonel de La Rocque au Congrès Départemental du Rhône du 14 Février 1937,” Carton 20, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

This xenophobic brand of anti-Semitism, sadly, was not the exclusive property of the extreme right. It surfaced somewhat infrequently in the *Croix de Feu*; it was perhaps less apparent on the republican right; but it was there, and sometimes openly so as when Paul Archambault, a Deputy from the PDP, penned the lead article for *Le Petit Démocrate* on 12 June 1938, "The Jewish World and Its Destiny." In this piece, Archambault evinced considerable hostility to France's Jewish population, which, according to him, had "a place manifestly disproportionate to its numerical importance" in the economic life of the country.⁶⁴ Blum, in particular, seemed to bring out the worst instincts of the right. Even the AD, whose leader, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, was at pains to distance himself from anti-Semitism, was prone to diatribes laced with anti-Semitism about Blum's lack of patriotism, his insidious internationalism, and his being "the High Priest" of socialism.⁶⁵ In sum, while Robert Soucy remains correct that anti-Semitism was not central to the *Croix de Feu* ethos, he is also right to assert its presence both within the movement, and within La Rocque's thinking.⁶⁶ However, this hardly made the *Croix de Feu* unique or qualified it as fascist: the movement's anti-Semitism was very much a product of its time and rightwing milieu.

While these masculine traits – a strong work ethic, selflessness, patriotism, paternalism, fatherhood, and being French – converged with those promoted on the republican right, the *Croix de Feu*'s discourse on masculinity also possessed characteristics more specifically fascist in nature. For one, the movement created a hyper-masculine cult of the dead, evoking and constructing the memories of its martyrs to serve as masculine exemplars for surviving militants. These martyrs served as reminders to *Croix de Feu* militants of their responsibilities as men. Unsurprisingly perhaps, for a group which began as a veterans' organization, this cult of martyrs reflected a wider militarization of masculinity within the movement. Good men conducted themselves as good soldiers, showing discipline, following orders, and sacrificing for the greater good. In turn, this militarized manliness was part and parcel of a much more aggressive and hyper-masculine character to *Croix de Feu* masculinity than that found on the republican right, with the result that the movement wholeheartedly embraced the mobilization of youth and celebrated youthful attributes, including physically fit bodies, as the epitome of manliness. This stood in stark contrast to the parties of traditional conservatism, which remained very cautious about both

64 Paul Archambault, "Le Monde Juif et Son Destin," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Démocrate Populaire*, 12 June 1938, 1.

65 See, for example, "Provocation à l'Assassinat!" *L'Alliance Démocratique*, 1 March 1935, 1. For an occasion where Flandin defended himself, by proxy, from charges of anti-Semitism, see Emmanuel Berl, "M.P.-E. Flandin et l'Antisémitisme," *L'Alliance Démocratique*, 30 September-14 October 1938, 5.

66 Soucy, *French Fascism*, 152-8.

the material and discursive merits of youthful vigour. Indeed, this radical side of *Croix de Feu* masculinity had more in common with Communist manhood: the *Croix de Feu*, in keeping with the mimicry of fascism argued for by Robert Paxton,⁶⁷ borrowed from the Communist aesthetic in its construction of masculinity. It doubtless also imitated Nazism and Italian Fascism, themselves copying the far-left.

Throughout its relatively brief history, the *Croix de Feu*/PSF cast its dead as martyrs for the movement. The canon could include simple party members or national heroes, such as Marshall Hubert Lyautey, who, though not affiliated officially with the *Croix de Feu*, exemplified the virtues the movement sought to instill in its men.

The *Croix de Feu*, in *Le Flambeau* and elsewhere, constantly evoked the memory of those who had died in World War One as a reminder to its followers to honour them by living in the appropriately masculine fashion. The Great War set the tone, in a very tangible sense, for the movement, as La Rocque and his fellow travelers' compulsion to remember those who had fallen for France between 1914 and 1918 translated smoothly into doing the same for the movement's own dead. The official anthem of "The Association of Those Decorated to the Peril of Their Own Lives,"⁶⁸ revealed clearly the links between the War, masculinity, and the movement's paramilitarism. As the last verse declared,

Are we going to lose the benefit
Of our twenty centuries of glory and honour?
Will we have made a vain sacrifice,
Of so much blood and so much pain.
This insignia adorning our buttonholes⁶⁹
Must remind us, Friends, at all times
That the Fatherland wants that our proud souls
Work together for its greatness.⁷⁰

A particularly common device for *Croix de Feu* commentators was to castigate their political opponents for dishonouring the memory of the war dead. In "To Our Dead," for example, published on Remembrance Day, 1931, an

67 Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 85.

68 This title seems to refer to the requirement that the original *Croix de Feu* members – all veterans – had to have received a medal or other distinction for their service in WWI to be admitted to the organization. It also borrowed from the subtitle of the Legion of Honour. See "Mouvement Social Français des Croix de Feu," Carton 6, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

69 All *Croix de Feu* members wore an insignia, as opposed to a full-blown uniform. See "Les Croix de Feu et Briscards: Statuts," Carton 6, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

70 Marcel Dambrine, "Les Croix de Feu: Chanson Marche Officielle de l'Association des Décorés au Pêril de Leur Vie," (Toulouse: Éditions de "L'Oie du Capitole"), Cartons 82/83, Rocque Papers, *ANF*.

anonymous *Le Flambeau* contributor lamented the state of France's affairs, declaring them a disgrace in the light of the sacrifice of the dead soldiers of the Great War: "Your companions, your guides under the shellfire have been dispersed, their voices extinguished. Other men appeared suddenly who dared to speak in your name. These men were unknown in our sectors."⁷¹ In short, feminine men who had not done their duty for the fatherland had usurped the nation's leadership and were robbing it of its pride and greatness. The answer to this problem was renewed vigilance, as indicated by a President of one of the local sections in Paris, who asked "the veterans of the front to 'keep watch loyally over the doors of Memory.'"⁷² Decorated *Croix de Feu* veterans, paragons of masculinity, were the proper watchers of those doors. Even Edouard Daladier, the seemingly leftwing Radical,⁷³ historically remembered for his appeasement of Hitler at Munich in 1938 and a figure universally despised on the right, was partially redeemed through his service in the war. La Rocque wrote him several times over the years, and paid his respects to Daladier for his "having understood his duty during the war."⁷⁴ La Rocque clearly anticipated a measure of apolitical comradely solidarity in return from Daladier – he might have reminded Daladier that "He [a fallen veteran] is depending on you."⁷⁵

Prominent personalities from WWI came in for particular adulation upon their deaths. Marshall Hubert Lyautey, the pacifier of Morocco, achieved heroic status within the *Croix de Feu*. La Rocque had served under Lyautey and viewed him as a mentor. Accordingly, Lyautey was listed among the pantheon of great French heroes in *Croix de Feu*/PSF literature, alongside Vercingetorix, Joan of Arc, and others, whom members, particularly young members, were told to emulate.⁷⁶ As a martial figure, Lyautey was an ideal masculine example. Furthermore, he also preached interclass national reconciliation, a theme which La Rocque wholeheartedly adopted. In fact, "The Organ of National Reconciliation" became the subtitle of *Le Flambeau* in 1936. Indeed, when La Rocque made what his followers interpreted as attempts at this reconciliation,

71 "À Nos Morts," *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu et Briscards*, 11 November 1931, 2.

72 "Avec Nos Grands Morts," *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu et Briscards*, 1 December 1932, 2.

73 Peter J. Larmour argues convincingly that Daladier's leftism was merely political opportunism as he positioned himself in opposition to his great rival within the Radical Party, Edouard Herriot. See Peter J. Larmour, *The French Radical Party in the 1930's* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 12, 35-6.

74 François de La Rocque to Edouard Daladier, 25 July 1932, Carton 1, Edouard Daladier Papers, ANF.

75 La Rocque, "Il Dépend de Vous"

76 See, for example, the following undated communication from the head office in Paris regarding the education of party youth at its summer camps. "Annexe V 1: Conseils d'Ordre Général pour les Moniteurs et les Monitrices des Groupes de 14 à 16 Ans," Carton 133, Rocque Papers, ANF.

he received letters comparing him to the great Marshal.⁷⁷ La Rocque continued to cast himself as being part of a line of masculine authority descended from Lyautey. He did so right to the end, with his last publication, *In the Service of the Future*, published posthumously in 1946.⁷⁸

More pedestrian figures in the movement could also serve as martyrs, particularly if they died in the performance of their *Croix de Feu* duties. Such was the case with Charles Muntz, a member from Mulhouse, who was killed, apparently by a Communist bullet, in 1936. The article mourning his passing was entitled, "A New Martyr."⁷⁹ If Kevin Passmore is correct, it is quite likely that Muntz was killed by a PCF agitator. Passmore's research indicates that, while the *Croix de Feu*/PSF could be provocative in its behaviour, the Communists almost always initiated actual violence, so much so that La Rocque decreed a change of tactics to avoid confrontation with PCF militants.⁸⁰ At any rate, *Le Flambeau* followed Muntz's death with a bitter condemnation of the Popular Front government for not finding and prosecuting Muntz's murderer(s).⁸¹ There was a certain irony in the *Croix de Feu*, which claimed to be the only organization capable of dealing with Communist aggression, turning to the Popular Front government, dominated by Socialists and leftwing Radicals, for protection from the PCF.

The *Croix de Feu* had, in fact, imitated the far-left in its construction of a militant brand of masculinity. The Communists and the Socialists had pioneered the rituals and testimonials typical of the *Croix de Feu*'s cult of martyrs. Certainly, the messages on the left were different – party militancy was to be in the cause of the revolution or class solidarity rather than the nation – but the style was essentially the same. Both the Marxist parties, for example, held elaborate yearly rituals in memory of Jean Jaurès, the French Socialist leader murdered in July, 1914, and plastered their publications with glowing tributes to him. These were invariably, in a fashion similar to the *Croix de Feu*, careful to highlight Jaurès' masculine fortitude and perseverance and to hold him aloft as an example for others to follow. As Marcel Sembat told his fellow Socialists, in remembering Jaurès' qualities, "we will rediscover the taste for struggle and the strength to continue this eternal combat that he never tired of."⁸²

77 Robert Dubillet to François de La Rocque, 7 December 1935, Carton 91, Rocque Papers, ANF.

78 François de La Rocque, *Au Service de l'Avenir: Réflexions en Montagne* (Paris: Société d'Édition et d'Abonnement, 1946), 12.

79 "Un Nouveau Martyr," *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 22 August 1936, 1. Goodfellow briefly comments on this incident in the context of Alsatian fascism (Muntz was active on the Alsatian far-right). See Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, 138.

80 Passmore, "Boy Scouting."

81 "Les Émouvants Obsèques de Victor Muntz," *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 5 September 1936, 2.

82 Marcel Sembat, "La Gaïeté de Jaurès," *L'Humanité: Journal Socialiste*, 31 July 1920, 1.

While the *Croix de Feu* revered a past captured by its cult of martyrdom, it, like the National Socialist Party in Germany, sought to blend the past, the present, and the future in its innovative use of technology. Sean Kennedy has documented the affinity for aviation in the *Croix de Feu*.⁸³ La Rocque, like Hitler, would travel the country by plane and, on grander occasions, the *Croix de Feu* would use airplanes in its exercises. No man more embodied this aspect of *Croix de Feu* masculinity than Jean Mermoz. Mermoz was one of France's great interwar pilots, and he became the *Croix de Feu*'s equivalent of Nazism's Hermann Goering or Italian Fascism's Italo Balbo.⁸⁴ His daring exploits, particularly in crossing the South Atlantic, were legendary. In 1935, he was recruited to the movement and placed in charge of its aviation programme.⁸⁵ Mermoz quickly ascended to a place of considerable privilege in the *Croix de Feu* hierarchy, becoming one of four members of the executive committee of the PSF upon its formation.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, on 7 December 1936, his plane disappeared while traversing the South Atlantic.⁸⁷ A veritable cascade of tributes to him followed in *Croix de Feu* literature, and continued intermittently long after his death. La Rocque himself set the tone in the days following Mermoz's disappearance with several first page homages to his friend in *Le Flambeau*. These were hopeful at first that Mermoz would be found, but acceptance followed, and La Rocque quickly signalled Mermoz's martyr status:

Not having the honour to be a pilot, I will not describe in detail here his professional virtuosity or science. My respect for faithful heroism, for simple self-abnegation, for technical expertise, forbids me all profane incursions into his noble profession. [I recall instead] the inner flame of his ardor, of his intelligence, and of his purity.⁸⁸

The cult constructed around Mermoz's memory was truly formidable. The PSF was particularly aggressive in pushing his example upon its youth. Party

83 Sean Kennedy, "The Croix de Feu, the Parti Social Français, and the Politics of Aviation, 1931-1939," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 373-99. See also Colin Cook, "The Myth of the Aviator and the Flight to Fascism," *History Today* 53, no. 12 (December 2003): 36-42.

84 George Mosse comments on the desirability of aviation for fascism because it blended modern technology with individualized and romanticized combat and heroism. See Mosse, *Masses and Man*, 182.

85 Kennedy, "Reconciling the Nation," 144-5.

86 "Réunion Constitutive du Parti Social Français," 10 July 1936, Carton 15, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

87 When Mermoz died, he was proclaimed as a masculine hero, but when female pilots similarly perished in pursuit of glory they were criticized for orphaning their children and abandoning their homes. See Siân Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 79.

88 François de La Rocque, "Un Chef: Mermoz," *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 19 December 1936, 1.

flying clubs, targeting youths for recruitment, were set up in February, 1937, named the “Jean Mermoz Aero-Clubs.”⁸⁹ *Le Flambeau*, in part as tribute to Mermoz, and in part to capitalize on his popularity following his death, began to dedicate an entire page to aviation, and its youth page regularly featured pieces such as, “Young Men of France: Listen to ... Mermoz, Your Guide,” which expressly set him up as a masculine exemplar.⁹⁰

Mermoz lived on in other publications. On 14 July 1937, the PSF assumed direction of *Le Petit Journal*, a Parisian daily with wide circulation; *Le Flambeau* ceased publication and *Le Petit Journal* became the party’s mouth-piece. The date chosen for the official launch of *Le Petit Journal* under PSF auspices was timed, as Sean Kennedy has said, for “maximum patriotic effect:” July 14 is Bastille Day, France’s national holiday.⁹¹ The first issue was also inundated with stories and images of Mermoz. Bernard Boringe’s text was typical of the paper’s hyperbole in its praise of Mermoz’s masculine qualities: “...Mermoz had to have a legendary end worthy of a superhuman hero.”⁹² Similar tributes likewise appeared in the party’s youth publications, indicating the omnipresence and persistence of “the cult of Mermoz.”⁹³ The aviator, like Lyautey, became a Croix de Feu martyr.

Provocatively, the fascist *Parti Populaire Français* also appropriated Mermoz’s memory for its cause. Not only did the party’s paper, *L’Émancipation Nationale*, eulogize him repeatedly in near-identical terms to the *Croix de Feu*,⁹⁴ but the PPF too used him as an example to its youth, naming one of the six “phalanges” of the “Sporting Union of French Youth,”

89 “Les Aero-Clubs Jean Mermoz,” *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 13 February 1937, 5. These competed with the Popular Front’s attempts to encourage working class youth to learn to fly. While there was growing enthusiasm on the left for aviation, the SFIO and PCF did not embrace it with quite the same verve as the *Croix de Feu*, evidenced by the fact that the “Popular Federation of Aeronautic Sports,” did not hold its first congress until April 1939. See Pierre Mars, “Chez les Perceurs de Ciel, Après le Congrès de la F.P.S.A. à Lyon: Vive l’Aviation Populaire!” *L’Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste Français (S.F.I.C.)*, 4 April 1939, 4. In this particular instance, the left followed the fascists, and not the reverse. Centrists also belatedly joined the rush to the skies. See J. Pélissier, “Avant l’Envol: Le Centre Laïque d’Éducation Populaire et d’Éducation Préaérienne de la Jeunesse,” *La Lumière: Le Grand Hebdomadaire des Gauches*, 13 January 1939, 8.

90 “Jeunes Hommes de France: Ecoutez... Mermoz, Votre Guide,” *Le Flambeau: Organe de la Réconciliation Française*, 1 May 1937, 5.

91 Sean Kennedy in conversation with Geoff Read, June 2004.

92 Bernard Boringe, “‘Mes Vols’, par Mermoz,” *Le Petit Journal*, 14 July 1937, 5. This was a preview of and promotion for a book of Mermoz’s accounts of his adventures.

93 Jean Bernard, “Son Exemple,” *L’Étudiant Social: Organe de la Réconciliation Française Chez les Étudiants*, December 1938, 1; La Rocque, *Au Service de l’Avenir*, iii.

94 Claude Popelin and Jacques Doriot, “Mermoz: Héros Français du Vingtième Siècle,” *L’Émancipation Nationale: Hebdomadaire du Parti Populaire Français*, 12 December 1936, 8; Jean Lafarge, “Mermoz,” *L’Émancipation Nationale: Hebdomadaire du Parti Populaire Français*, 21 July 1939, 6.

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founded in December 1938, after the dead pilot, and telling its young summer campers to emulate him.⁹⁵ This use within the two parties of Jean Mermoz as a masculine model suggests how valuable he was for the purveyors of fascist masculinity and demonstrates the proximity of the *Croix de Feu* to the PPF.

The last martyr for the *Croix de Feu*, fittingly, was François de La Rocque. La Rocque's and the PSF's record in World War Two (WW2) and under Vichy was notable. Predictably, given Vichy's authoritarianism, rhetoric about national unity, and emphatic familialism, La Rocque and his followers supported Pétain in the regime's early days. Interestingly, however, the Colonel became disenchanted with Vichy, particularly after Pétain began to pursue a policy of open collaboration with the Germans. La Rocque thereafter moved into resistance work, gathering intelligence for the English among other things, was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, and then was thrown into prison for collaborating after the Liberation. His health suffered greatly; he died in 1946.⁹⁶ The preface to *In the Service of the Future*, cast the Colonel as a martyr for his political beliefs: On April 26 1946, La ROCQUE corrected the proofs of his book [*In the Service of the Future*] from captivity.

On the 27th, he underwent an exceptionally grave operation, made inevitable by the depredations of a long deportation to Germany, and rendered hopeless by eight months of illegal detention in liberated France.

On the 28th, he left, in a breath, this cruel and absurd world.⁹⁷

While martyrdom, in itself, is certainly not inherently fascist, the militarized nature of the *Croix de Feu*'s cult of martyrs was. It was meant to inspire followers with martial values – a sense of duty, obedience to superiors, courage, heroism, a love of order. La Rocque's masculine image demonstrates this well. Unlike more moderate leaders like Louis Marin or Pierre-Etienne Flandin, who sought to exude competence, experience, and respectability,⁹⁸ La Rocque cul-

95 Jacques Cartonnet, "L'Union Sportive des Jeunesses Françaises Doit tre le Refuge de Tous les Jeunes," *L'Émancipation Nationale: Hebdomadaire du Parti Populaire Français*, 4 March 1938, 2; Henri Lebre, "Au Camp des Vacances de Ferté-Milon: Doriot Chez les Enfants," *L'Émancipation Nationale: Hebdomadaire du Parti Populaire Français*, 27 August 1937, 8.

96 For an excellent account of La Rocque and the movement's record during the occupation, which emphasizes the Colonel's attempts to maintain his autonomy within the Vichy framework, see Sean Kennedy, "Accompanying the Marshal: La Rocque and the Progrès Social Français Under Vichy," *French History* 15, 2 (2001), 186-213.

97 Jean G.-L. d'Orsay and Jean Brumeaux, "Préface," in La Rocque, *Au Service de l'Avenir*, i. La Rocque was treated shabbily upon the Liberation and his incarceration was undeniably politically motivated.

98 See, for example, Louis Marin, "Les Deux Visages," *La Nation: Organe de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 20 January 1934, 33-5; Pierre-Etienne Flandin, "Communication du Gouvernement," *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Débats Parlementaires. Chambre des Députés*, 13 November 1934, 2291-2.

tivated an image of steely determination, discipline, and commanding presence. Accordingly, he did not present himself as a great or fiery orator, but rather as a plain-speaking military man who knew the value of action over words.⁹⁹ As he modestly told an audience in Bordeaux, “If I have had citations, it’s because, more lucky than others, I was not killed. [...] But apart from all that, I, quite simply, did my duty.”¹⁰⁰

This kind of heroic masculine stoicism was both similar and dissimilar to the image constructed around the PPF leader, Jacques Doriot. Doriot, an ex-Communist Deputy who formed his own party in 1936 after having been unceremoniously dumped by the PCF in 1934, ostensibly for refusing a summons to Moscow from Stalin,¹⁰¹ projected a decidedly hyper-masculine persona, full of martial imagery, which epitomized the fascist “new man” in many respects. Like La Rocque, Doriot and his henchmen drew attention to his wartime heroism and his cold determination in the armed struggle.¹⁰² Unlike La Rocque, Doriot was a charismatic speaker and was often, like Mussolini, portrayed doing physical activities.¹⁰³ That Doriot had earned his masculinist spurs first with the *Jeunesses Communistes* campaigning against militarism and colonialism,¹⁰⁴ only underscores the crossover of the radical components of the extremes’ masculine discourses. This intersection, moreover, may have eased Doriot’s passage from one end of the political spectrum to the other.

As in the realm of image and discourse, the *Croix de Feu* arranged its men into militaristic formations. The group’s founding manifesto declared, “We have simply maintained from our time in the military the spirit of camaraderie, the spirit of discipline necessary for the success of our organization, for the execution of our ideas; the deference that our chiefs deserved; the respect for order; the love of our country; the devotion to the flag.”¹⁰⁵ It was only logical, then, that the movement organized itself along martial lines. There was a rigid, well-defined hierarchy with La Rocque at its apex. There were gradations within the membership denoting different functions and status. The actual *Croix de Feu*

99 See Passmore, “Boy Scouting,” 535-6.

100 François de La Rocque, “Discours du Colonel, Bordeaux, 5 Aout 1937,” Carton 20, Rocque Papers, *ISP*.

101 See Philippe Burrin, *La Dérive Fasciste: Doriot, Déat, Bergery, 1933-1945* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003), 56-68.

102 See, for example, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Doriot ou la Vie d'un Ouvrier Français* (Paris: Les Éditions Populaires Françaises, 1936).

103 See “Jacques Doriot Donne à Tous l'Exemple de l'Activité,” *L'Émancipation Nationale*, 24 December 1937, 6.

104 Jean-Paul Brunet, *Jacques Doriot: De Communisme au Fascisme* (Paris: Balland, 1986), 53-70. For a Communist account of Doriot’s heroic comportment at his trial for sedition, see “Jacques Doriot Condamné à 4 Mois de Prison,” *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste*, 22 December 1923, 1.

105 “Manifeste des Croix de Feu,” *Le Flambeau des Anciens Combattants de l'Avant, Organe des Croix de Feu*, 1 November 1929, 1.

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were decorated war veterans;¹⁰⁶ the “*Briscards*”¹⁰⁷ were simple veterans with at least six months in the trenches; the “National Volunteers” were those too young to have served in WW1; the “Dispos” (short for “*Disponibles*” – “*Disponibles*”) and their successors, the “Voluntary Propaganda Teams,” engaged in street-fighting and other forms of militaristic activism; there were different youth groups organized according to age and sex; and women’s groups dedicated to suitably feminine tasks. In turn, the military organization continued within these sub-groups, as the National Volunteers, for example, were broken into sets of five facilitating their mobilization.¹⁰⁸ Further, the authoritarianism of this elaborate apparatus was underlined by La Rocque’s insistence that he be the head of every group – everyone was responsible to him personally.¹⁰⁹ In short, as Kennedy remarks, like other totalitarian fascisms, the *Croix de Feu* set about constructing a “counter-society” in opposition to its democratic pluralistic counterpart.¹¹⁰

Nor was this militarizing merely for show. As Passmore’s research makes abundantly clear, the movement staged elaborate military maneuvers where volunteers, for example, would storm into city centers in motorized columns and seize temporary control of town squares, often in front of the town hall.¹¹¹ These certainly appeared to detractors as dress rehearsals for a violent seizure of power;¹¹² it was impossible to imagine the parties of the republican right behaving in a similar fashion.

It would also have been unthinkable for republican conservatives to engage in storming the National Assembly, but, on the other hand, the *Croix de Feu*’s members were involved in just such an attempt on 6 February 1934, when a demonstration involving far right groups protesting the infamous Stavisky corruption scandal got out of hand, whether by design or accident, and moved on the *Palais Bourbon*, housing the Chamber of Deputies.¹¹³ True, La Rocque

106 The movement’s “golden book” contained an entry on every member of this cherished rank, detailing his or her (there were a few women) wartime exploits and awards. See *Livre d’Or des Croix de Feu*, Carton 90, Rocque Papers, ANF.

107 “Briscard” referred to “a professional soldier who wears traditional chevrons,” or perhaps, as in a “vieux briscard,” to “a man endowed with great experience.” *Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1996), 263.

108 Passmore, “Boy Scouting,” 543-4; idem, “Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism,” 814-5.

109 See, for example, “Règlement Général de l’Association ‘Les Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu,’” 17 February 1935, Carton 6, Rocque Papers, ANF.

110 Kennedy, “Reconciling the Nation,” 88.

111 Passmore, “Boy Scouting,” 544-6.

112 See, for example, Demos, “Les Grandes Manoeuvres de la Guerre Civile,” *L’Ère Nouvelle: Organe de l’Entente des Gauches*, 30 September 1935, 3.

113 For an account of this episode, see Serge Bernstein, *Le 6 Février* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975). For an excellent history of the *Stavisky scandal*, see Paul Jankowski, *Stavisky: A Confidence Man in the Republic of Virtue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

himself opposed this violence, but not from a principled objection to such tactics; rather, the Colonel felt that public opinion was insufficiently prepared for a coup d'état.¹¹⁴ Moreover, in the period prior to 6 February, La Rocque continuously suggested to his underlings that, "The hour will sound, for the *Croix de Feu* and *Briscards*, to save the country a second time."¹¹⁵ This ruminating about a future seizure of power seems more in keeping with a fascist than a republican organization.

The Communists were also in the street on 6 February. Not only did the Communists and fascists share a desire for and a mythology surrounding a violent attack on the Republic, but the Communists too militarized masculinity. This was in keeping, of course, with the Leninist ideology of the vanguard of the proletariat: Communists had to be highly disciplined and well-organized. This militarization of Communist masculinity prefigured or at least accompanied fascism's, and was apparent in the Communist idolization of the Red Army.¹¹⁶

The militarization of masculinity typical of the *Croix de Feu*, was also evident in fascist literature. The works of Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, in particular, consistently stressed the theme that true men sought out adventure in war, while effete weaklings stayed on the home front.¹¹⁷ Even Robert Brasillach, certainly no manly prototype in his own right, painted his ideal man as a warrior in his novel, *La Conquérante*.¹¹⁸ It seems fair to conclude, therefore, that the militarization of manhood in the *Croix de Feu* was more typically fascist than republican conservative.

Another component of the *Croix de Feu*'s masculine ideal that appears representative of fascism, and almost antithetical to rightwing republicanism, was its youthfulness. The movement, especially post-1934, went to great lengths to mobilize and organize youthful adherents. It set up summer camps, established clubhouses in urban areas, ran activities, organized picnics, and created *Croix de Feu* student groups, complete with their own press.¹¹⁹ As a document out-

114 Passmore, "Boy Scouting," 533.

115 François de La Rocque, "Instruction Urgente au Sujet de l'Activité Générale de l'Association," 25 April 1933, Carton 81, Rocque Papers, ANF.

116 "Glorieux Dix-Neuvième Anniversaire: Vive l'Armée Rouge, Sentinelle du Socialisme! L'Armée du Peuple," *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste (S.F.I.C.)*, 23 February 1937, 8; M. Magnien, "Vive l'Armée Rouge, Rempart de la Liberté et de la Paix: L'URSS Veut la Paix mais Écrasera Ceux Qui Voudront l'Attaquer," *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste (S.F.I.C.)*, 21 February 1939, 8.

117 See Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1939); *idem*, *L'Homme à Cheval*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

118 Robert Brasillach, "La Conquérante," in *Oeuvres Complètes de Robert Brasillach, Volume III*, ed. Maurice Bardèche (Paris: Au Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1963), 1-340.

119 See Cartons 114 and 133, Rocque Papers, ANF.

lining the goals of the group for children under thirteen specified, "The purpose is to introduce the youth to the *Croix de Feu* movement and to develop in them the national spirit."¹²⁰ Clearly, this mobilization of youth was not disinterested: it was politically motivated.

In this too, the *Croix de Feu* followed the Communist Party. The PCF busily organized youth from its inception, having inherited the apparatus of the pre-1921 *Jeunesses Socialistes*, and this was very much part of the Communist attempt to construct a new man. For, as then Party Secretary Albert Treint declared, "Youths are the future of communism!"¹²¹ Youths' masculinity, militancy, and activism were accordingly celebrated regularly in the Communist press.¹²²

In contrast, the republican right made at best tepid attempts to incorporate youth into its parties. The values espoused by the AD, FR, and PDP's youth organizations seemed more designed to stifle and contain youthful exuberance than to encourage and exploit it. The AD youth group's founding manifesto, for example, called on members to, "maintain liberal traditions[:]"¹²³ a worthy goal, perhaps, but hardly one designed to fire youthful passions. *Le Petit Démocrate* ceased carrying a youth page altogether in 1935, deeming the announcement of the page's demise so unimportant that it buried it on page three.¹²⁴

The PPF and the *Croix de Feu* also glorified "action," which they associated with youth, versus oratory and debate, which were classified as the purview of "mediocrities and incompetents."¹²⁵ Dynamism and energy, coded as youthful qualities, were highly valued within both organizations, as both sought to promote the advent of a "new man." As R. Fallay commented approvingly in a report on the Croix de Feu Federation of the Somme, its leader, "comrade Bouchet," was "full of good will, [and] very dynamic."¹²⁶

120 "Groupe A (Mixte) (Moins de 13 Ans), 1935, Carton 93, Rocque Papers, ANF.

121 Albert Treint, "Les Jeunes sont l'Avenir du Communisme," *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste (S.F.I.C.)*, 5 August 1923, 1.

122 For example: Paul Vailant-Couturier, "Hardi les Jeunes!" *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste (S.F.I.C.)*, 16 September 1923, 1.

123 "Le Manifeste Constitutif de la Jeunesse Républicaine Française," *Alliance Démocratique*, 7 March 1934, 2.

124 Louis Bour, "Appel aux Jeunes: Il Nous Faut un Journal," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Démocrate Populaire*, 27 January 1935, 3.

125 Jean Bernard, "11 November 1938," *L'Étudiant Social: Organe de la Réconciliation Française Chez les Étudiants*, November 1938, 2, Carton 105, Rocque Papers, ANF. Drieu La Rochelle contrasted the vigorous PPF with the indolent, feminine bourgeois men of the Republic, in Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Nous et la Bourgeoisie," *L'Émancipation Nationale*, 3 April 1937, 2.

126 R. Fallay, "Rapport sur la Fédération de la Somme," 4 March 1940, Carton 29, Rocque Papers, ISP. Armand Lanoux of the PPF likewise extolled the virtues of toy soldiers as they instilled in children a thirst for action and adventure. See Armand Lanoux, "Monde des Jouets Reflet le Monde des Hommes," *L'Émancipation Nationale*, 30 December 1938, 8.

La Rocque, in fact, made a point of privileging youth in the movement. This led him, for example, to withdraw the *Croix de Feu*'s support from the campaign of respected Deputy and ardent champion of pro-natalism, Louis Duval-Arnould, in the 1936 elections, with the result that the septuagenarian Duval-Arnould lost his seat to a much younger man who enjoyed La Rocque's continued patronage.¹²⁷

Such a betrayal would have been unimaginable in any of the FR, PDP or AD, where age and experience were not just respected, but venerated. A commentator in *La Nation*, the FR's weekly, for instance, touched on both his party's respect for its elders and its ambivalence towards youth as he wrote, "Our French youth maintain their excellent qualities of loyalty and enthusiasm. Our middle aged men are always happy to profit from their life experiences," but opined that, because too many young boys were missing their fathers' guidance, thanks to WW1, they were flocking to the PCF.¹²⁸ Youth, in other words, could not be trusted to its own devices. That age and experience were valued on the republican right was clear, as well, in the *Le Petit Démocrate* series, "Our Militants." On 30 October 1927, for example, the six men profiled were all in their forties, fifties, or sixties, and "his experience" was oft-listed among each man's virtues.¹²⁹ Respect for one's elders was institutionalized in the republican system: at the opening session of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the eldest among the members of the House presided as speaker and gave a speech to his colleagues, imparting the wisdom of his years.¹³⁰ It is difficult to imagine that this tradition would have persisted in a future *Croix de Feu* state.

Within the *Croix de Feu* the glorification of youthful masculinity intersected with an emphasis on physically fit male bodies. This tendency has long been noted by observers as central to fascist gender discourse,¹³¹ and some, such as Theodor Adorno and Jean-Paul Sartre, have even used it to denigrate fascists as effeminate homosexuals.¹³² More recently, scholars have distanced

127 Koos, "The (Anti) Republican Right and the Gendered Politics of the Family."

128 "Jeunes et Vieux," *La Nation: Organe de la Fédération Républicaine de France*, 28 April 1928, 388.

129 "Nos Militants," *Le Petit Démocrate: Journal Démocrate Populaire*, 30 October 1927, 5.

130 This could lead to funny circumstances, such as in 1936 when the "Doyen d'Age," Maurice Le Corbeiller, had to awkwardly explain that the four Deputies older than him had either recently passed on or fallen gravely ill, and thus he had been rushed into service and his speech was ill-prepared. Maurice Le Corbeiller, "Allocution de M. le Président," *Journal Officiel de la République Française. Débats Parlementaires. Chambre des Députés*, 14 January 1936, 1-2.

131 See, for example, Carroll, *French Literary Fascism*, 147-70.

132 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce qu'un Collaborateur?" in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 43-61; Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (Surrey: The Gresham Press, 1974), 45-6.

themselves from such unfounded and value-laden classifications,¹³³ but the consensus remains that fascism was, in some respects, a celebration of the male body. The *Croix de Feu*, again like the Communists,¹³⁴ certainly made sports and physical activities the focus of its advances to and cultivation of young boys and men. The constitutive meeting of the "Sons of *Croix de Feu*," decreed that the following activities would instill the proper sense of "honour" and "duty" in participants:

... hiking, camping, swimming, running obstacle courses, high, long and lateral jumping, pole-vaulting, Greek and Roman wrestling, ball games, packing lunches, flying, and swimming in teams, fencing, discus, javelin, and spear throwing, archery and target shooting, cycling, and military preparation at summer camps.¹³⁵

The documentation suggests that the Sons of *Croix de Feu*'s subsequent activities followed this intensely physical regimen quite faithfully.¹³⁶ As Gaëtan Maire, the President of the "Society for Preparation and Sporting Education," a PSF organization founded in 1934, explained, "the physical perfecting of a race is indispensable in order to maintain it among the first rank of great modern nations."¹³⁷ The *Croix de Feu* organized its manhood accordingly.

The *Croix de Feu*'s masculine discourse was a "mixed bag." It contained elements in common with its republican conservative equivalent, but also diverged from it in important respects. Like the ideal rightwing republican man, the *Croix de Feu*'s masculine archetype was hardworking, he was selfless, patriotic, paternalist, a father, and he was most definitely "French." That these qualities were valued across the right of the political spectrum permits a good deal of insight into interwar French society. A picture emerges of a racist, xenophobic, nationalistic, hierarchical, and patriarchal France existing alongside that more romanticized and enlightened version of the revolutionary tradition.

133 See Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7-9.

134 See, for example, Doriot's insistence that the young Communist "loves sports, the manifestation of strength and of life." Jacques Doriot, "La Semaine Internationale des Jeunes," *L'Humanité: Organe Central du Parti Communiste (S.F.I.C.)*, 26 August 1924, 1.

135 Ph. L. de Villeneuve Breix, "Les Fils de 'Croix de Feu,'" *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu*, July 1930, 4.

136 See, for example, "Programme de Février des F.F.C.F.B.," *Le Flambeau: Organe des Croix de Feu et Briscards*, 1 February 1933, 8.

137 G.A. Maire, "Discours," 16 May 1939, Carton 155, Rocque Papers, ANF. Nobécourt emphasizes that this organization's purpose was to mobilize and organize children, and to give them, in Maire's words, "'the taste for physical education linked to moral values....'" Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque*, 658.

This France was occupied, at least in theory, by hardworking breadwinners, their obedient and abundant French children, and their deferential wives.

The similarities across the right, however, should not blind the observer to the fact that the *Croix de Feu* was innovative and engaged in the construction of a new man, just like openly fascist intellectuals such as Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and parties like the PPF. In so doing, François de La Rocque and his followers borrowed heavily from the Communist example, as well as from their Nazi and Italian Fascist forerunners. Thus, contrary to Sean Kennedy's assertion that the movement cannot be called fascist because it did not attempt to construct a new man, it was classically fascist in its synthesis of conservative and radical leftwing masculinities. Moreover, by looking through the prism of gender, one perceives that movements with broad popular appeal at both ends of the political spectrum were constructing militarized and anti-democratic men: this can only have boded ill for the Third Republic. The *mentalité* of 1930s France, it seems, was increasingly unhealthy for democracy.

The *Croix de Feu*, a movement with upwards of 1,000,000 adherents, was fascist. Thus, fascism was a significant phenomenon in interwar France, despite the efforts of René Rémond and his disciples to classify it as marginal. As Robert Paxton argues in his *Anatomy of Fascism*, fascism was a general phenomenon of the interwar period.¹³⁸ The *Croix de Feu* was an important part of this phenomenon, and studying it is crucial to understanding the significance and impact of fascism in France. That the *Croix de Feu's* ideal man had so much in common with his republican conservative counterpart, for instance, might help explain the widespread enthusiasm, at least initially, for Vichy's gender politics in 1940. Parties advocating similar policies enjoyed widespread popular support long before France's "strange defeat."¹³⁹

In conclusion, through a hyper-masculine cult of martyrdom, the *Croix de Feu* impressed a sense of manly responsibility upon its men to hold high the torch of their male forebears. In order to accomplish this sacred task, and to protect France from its internal and external enemies, the *Croix de Feu*, like other fascisms, militarized masculinity, imbuing it with martial values, youthful vigour, and muscularity. As François de La Rocque preached to his young male followers:

138 Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 21. Curiously, Paxton argues that the *Croix de Feu* was not fascist, because it was insufficiently anti-Semitic, and it was too nationalistic to embrace either Hitler or Mussolini. This finding contradicts his argument for a broad understanding of fascism. It also seems misguided given that, first, anti-Semitism was significant within the movement; second, Paxton argues elsewhere in the book that anti-Semitism was not a necessary component of fascism; third, Paxton maintains, in contrast, that hyper-nationalism was an essential ingredient. See *Ibid.*, 69-70, 218-220.

139 For a good study of the corporatist elements of those policies, see Eric Jennings, "Discours Corporatiste, Propagande Nataliste, et Contrôle Social Sous Vichy," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 49, n. 4 (October-December 2002): 101-31.

HE IS DEPENDING ON YOU: MILITARISM, MARTYRDOM, AND THE APPEAL
TO MANLINESS IN THE CASE OF FRANCE'S 'CROIX DE FEU', 1931-1940

The author of this article is a veteran who wishes, under the rubric of the fraternity of the trenches, to pass the torch to you while binding you to the heroic past by whose example the country's recovery can still be achieved.¹⁴⁰

* * *

GEOFF READ completed his Ph.D. in history at York University in October 2006. His thesis is entitled "The Republic of Men: Gender and the Political Parties in Interwar France, 1919-1940."

GEOFF READ a rempli son doctorat en histoire à l'Université de York en octobre 2006. Sa thèse est intitulé "The Republic of Men: Gender and the Political Parties in Interwar France, 1919-1940."

140 La Rocque, "Il Dépend de Vous"