

"Order, Authority, Nation": Neo-Socialism and the Fascist Destiny
of an Anti-Fascist Discourse

by

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List of Abbreviations

AF—Action Française

ARAC—Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants

CAP—Commission Administrative Permanente

CGT—Confédération Générale du Travail

CGTU—Confédération Générale du Travail

CSP—Centre Syndicaliste de Propagande

CVIA—Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes

FRN—Front Révolutionnaire National

FST—Front Social du Travail

GP—Groupe Parlementaire SFIO

JNP—Jeunesses Nationales Populaires

LBS—La Bataille Socialiste

LICA—Ligue Intertionale Contre l'Antisémitisme

LICP—Ligue Internationale des Combattants de la Paix

LVF—Légion des Volontaires Français Contre le Bolchevisme

LVS—La Vie Socialiste

MNP—Milice Nationale Populaire

MSR—Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire

PCF—Parti Communiste Français

POB/BWP—Parti Ouvrier Belge/Belgische Werkliedenpartij

PPF—Parti Populaire Français

PRS—Parti Républicain-Socialiste

PSdF—Parti Socialiste de France

PSF—Parti Socialiste Français

PSOP—Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan

RNP—Rassemblement National Populaire

SD—Sicherheitsdienst

SFIO—Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière

SPD—Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

UF—Union Fédérale des Associations Françaises d'Anciens Combattants

UNC—Union Nationale des Combattants

USR—Union Socialiste Républicaine

Abstract

In 1933, a faction of the French Socialist Party caused a scandal by proposing "Order, Authority, Nation" as a new basis for Socialist propaganda. Ten years later, some of these so-called "neo-socialists" became Nazi collaborators. In explaining their trajectory, the extant historiography has tended to highlight the elements of neo-socialist ideology that supposedly pre-disposed it toward fascism. But neo-socialism was first articulated as an explicitly anti-fascist discourse. How could an ostensibly anti-fascist discourse mutate into its political opposite?

I argue that a relational approach allows us to register the profound transformation in the neo-socialists' politics despite superficial continuities in their discourse. I draw on discourse analysis to trace the changing meanings of neo-socialism, and on a situational analysis to relate the different moments in its development to their respective political contexts. I claim that, far from being a coherent and fixed doctrine that drove the neo-socialists' political trajectories, the meaning of neo-socialism changed in relation to its position in a given discursive system and according to the conditions of the political fields in which its protagonists were invested.

In Part I, I examine the 1933 schism in which the neo-socialists were expelled from the Socialist Party. I show that neo-socialism was not a ready-made doctrinal revision at the origin of the

schism, but only came to be defined as such as a consequence of the schismatic dynamic itself. In Part II, I trace the evolution of neo-socialism from a moderate socialist dissidence in 1933 to an equivocal "third way" position in 1934, and its subsequent decomposition and marginalization during the Popular Front era. I argue that this trajectory was not reducible to inherent ideational features of neo-socialism, but represented at each step an adaptation to a particular state of the political field. In Part III I explain the neo-socialists' embrace of "totalitarianism" as a function of the competitive dynamics of the field of collaboration. I conclude that the neo-socialists' path to fascism was not a straight line, but was rather punctuated by a series of ideological adjustments to shifting political fortunes.

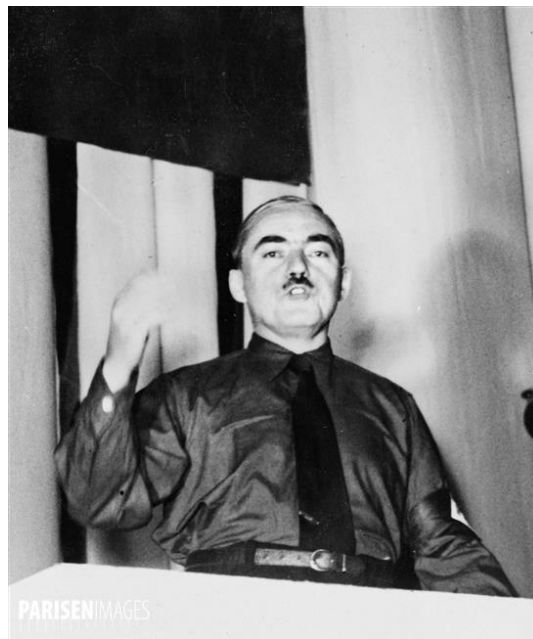
Introduction

Following the granting of constitutional powers to Marshal Philippe Pétain in July 1940, less than a month after France signed an armistice with Nazi Germany, Marcel Déat presented a report to Pétain advocating the creation of a one-party state. Lauding the liquidation of the parliamentary regime, Déat argued that the time was now ripe for France to make its revolution "from on high and in order." The Germans would be more likely to take the French seriously and collaborate if there developed "a great party analogous to those that in Germany, in Italy, in Spain, or elsewhere, were the instruments of national revolutions." The party's doctrine would be to "make of France a national community, of which the peasantry would be the essential armature, in which the wage-earning elements would be completely integrated, where the family would become again the social cell *par excellence*, and where the State will take complete control over all large economic and financial forces." All other parties would be banned, and all propaganda exterior to the party would be "prevented and penalized." Although the party's purpose would be to consult the people, its form would be hierarchical, with chiefs at every echelon responsible to their superiors and with authority over their subordinates. Such was, after all, the "veritable form of the new order." All Frenchmen of good will would be welcome, except

for Jews and those too recently naturalized. The party would "constitute a militant elite, almost a militant order," and would naturally draw on veterans and youth.¹

Rebuffed by Pétain, Déat moved to occupied Paris where in 1941 he founded the Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) as a vehicle for creating a one-party state. The RNP became one of the main pro-Nazi collaborationist parties in occupied France. From Paris it fiercely attacked Vichy's traditionalism and perceived lack of commitment to Franco-German collaboration. The RNP aligned itself with the Nazi war effort, and Déat called on the French to go "beyond collaboration" and participate in the "European Revolution" inaugurated by Germany.² To this end Déat co-founded, with other collaborationist leaders, a French volunteer force fighting on the German side on the Eastern Front. Déat even likened the German war effort to the Battle of Valmy, seeing the "German Revolution" as the ultimate realization of the principles of the French Revolution (Déat 1943).

Illustration 1. Marcel Déat, 1943



¹ Marcel Déat, "Rapport présenté à Monsieur le Maréchal Pétain sur la constitution d'un parti national unique," appendix to Cointet (1973).

² Marcel Déat "Au delà de la collaboration" *L'Œuvre* January 7 1942.

Déat speaking to the second congress of the Jeunesses Nationales Populaires, the RNP youth organization.

The RNP not only sought to accommodate France to a new European order under German hegemony, it sought also to remake France in a Nazified image. Explicitly anti-Semitic, anti-Bolshevik, anti-Masonic, and organizationally modeled on Nazism, it conceived of itself as a revolutionary national-socialist party that would animate an "authoritarian and popular state." The party called for the defense of the "French Ethnic Community" against "inassimilable or deleterious racial elements," through measures of "physiological, economic, and political protection." And although it continued to call itself socialist, the RNP in fact advocated an organicist form of corporatism wherein class interests would be subordinated to the national interest, with a mutual guarantee that workers have a right to a just standard of living so long as the "legitimate authority of the company boss be respected" (RNP 1943: 30-31).

The RNP mimicked many aspects of fascism, for example adopting military-style uniforms, the Nazi salute, a leadership cult around Déat, and a swastika-like winged odal rune—also used by other European fascists—as its insignia. The RNP also openly called for a "totalitarian" regime. For example, Déat criticized Vichy for being only "authoritarian" and not going far enough down the road of national revolution. Vichy, according to Déat, had "nothing in common" with an order like Germany's, which was consented to "gravely, joyously, by a grand people who have confidence in its Chief." In Nazi Germany, Déat wrote, "totalitarianism appears...as it is, that is to say first as an equilibrium, and then as a unity re-conquered and recovered." Only in a "totalitarian" regime could all aspects of society—the economic, the political, the social, and the spiritual—be "oriented toward unity and not toward disparity and dissonance." A "totalitarian" regime, Déat affirmed, was a "regime of harmony where the body

and soul each have their place and come together without crisis."³ A fully reconciled society under the tutelage of an exclusionary, hierarchical, and disciplined party-state was thus the ultimate goal of the RNP.

Illustration 2. Young women of the RNP give the Nazi salute in Paris



Déat's identification with the Nazi project placed him within the hardcore of French collaboration, and the RNP's emulation of Nazism made it an unmistakably fascist party.⁴ Yet what is surprising is that just ten years earlier, Déat had in fact been a leading figure in the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO)—i.e. the French Socialist Party. Moreover, many in the RNP's leadership also had their political origins in the SFIO. How did a cohort of

³ Marcel Déat "Civilisation totalitaire" *L'Œuvre* January 12 1942.

⁴ The historiography of French fascism is notoriously contested, with the debate revolving around whether there existed an indigenous fascist movement in France (see Berstein and Winock eds. 2014, Dobry ed. 2003, Sternhell 1986). While there is wide disagreement on how to classify various groups, including the Vichy regime, historians are nearly unanimous in characterizing the RNP as fascist.

Socialists become some of the most virulently pro-Nazi collaborators during the German Occupation?

Illustration 3. Marcel Déat at the 1932 SFIO Congress



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Déat (center right) in a grey pinstripe suit.

To explain this dramatic transformation in political identity, many have pointed to the significance of neo-socialism, a doctrinal revision of traditional socialism that emerged in the early 1930s and with which some in the RNP leadership were associated. In a 1930 book that has been called the "Charter" of neo-socialism, Déat advocated abandoning socialism's exclusive appeal to the proletariat in favor of a broad "anti-capitalist" alliance including the middle classes (Bergounioux 1978: 396). In it he also criticized the SFIO's revolutionary fatalism and its traditional hostility to the bourgeois state, arguing that socialists could use the state to control the economy and orient capitalist development toward social ends without, at least initially,

socializing property (Déat 1930). With the onset of the Depression in France, the neo-socialists called for a strong state to build an intermediary regime between capitalism and socialism to combat the crisis through the implementation of an economic "Plan." Moreover, they argued that socialism's emphasis on international class struggle had become outmoded, and that the future belonged to a cross-class alliance working for the general interest within a national framework.

Neo-socialism was epitomized in the slogan "order, authority, nation." Adrien Marquet, the mayor of Bordeaux, was the first to suggest that this become the new basis for Socialist propaganda at the 1933 Congress of the SFIO. He was joined in his attack on the SFIO establishment by Déat and Barthélémy Montagnon, whose interventions at the Congress were published together under the title *Néo-socialisme? Ordre-Autorité-Nation* (1933). Marquet's impropriety famously provoked Léon Blum, the SFIO's *de facto* leader, into exclaiming that he was "horrified" that such things could be said at a Socialist congress, and following the Congress the Socialist press denounced neo-socialism as a proto-fascist heresy. In November 1933, Déat and the other neo-socialists were expelled from the SFIO and founded a new party, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF). Eight years later, Déat would lead the RNP, with Marquet and Montagnon present at its creation.

On the surface it may seem natural that neo-socialism turned into fascism. Both sought to define a "third way" between capitalism and Marxist socialism by building an intermediary regime in which a strengthened state apparatus could exert control over the economy without socializing property. Both sought to transcend old class antagonisms by appealing to the middle classes and interpellating the nation as a privileged political subject. The two ideologies were also linked by a pragmatic and activist political style defined against the immobilism of old doctrines. No wonder, then, that many have seen a genetic affinity between neo-socialism and

fascism, and have highlighted this to make sense of the neo-socialists' transformation. Indeed, the RNP itself took pains to present its politics as essentially consistent with those defined by Déat and other neo-socialists ten years earlier.⁵ What, after all, could be more fascist than "order, authority, nation?"

To explain the RNP's fascism by its roots in neo-socialism, however, is to play a bit fast and loose with the facts. First, not all neo-socialists became fascists, and not all in the RNP—not even all those who came from the left—were neo-socialists. Second, the neo-socialists had their origins in the SFIO's reformist faction, and as committed republicans and democrats they had been staunch defenders of the parliamentary regime. Indeed, neo-socialism was originally born from a desire to justify an alliance with the center-left Parti Radical and further integrate the SFIO into the machinery of government. But perhaps most puzzlingly, neo-socialism had in fact originally been conceived as an anti-fascist discourse. Déat was among the first in the SFIO to sound the alarm over the rise of fascism, at a time when the SFIO leadership tended to underestimate its significance. The building of a broad "anti-capitalist" bloc, for example, was meant to pre-emptively undermine fascism's appeal to the middle classes. In calling for a cross-class alliance, neo-socialism presaged the Popular Front, and indeed the neo-socialists constituted the fourth political component of the Popular Front coalition which came to power in 1936 on a wave of anti-fascist sentiment. Even the infamous watchwords of "order, authority, nation" were proposed as a means of anti-fascist propaganda. Arguing that solving the economic crisis was the surest means of combatting fascism, the neo-socialists counter-posed "order" to the devastating chaos of laissez-faire capitalism. By "authority" they meant reinforcing the capability of the state to wrest control over economic policy from private interests. And the appeal to the "nation" did not initially express an intrinsic value, but was rather understood as a strategic

⁵ See especially RNP (1943).

imposition under conditions of economic autarky brought about by the Depression and by the effective collapse of the international Socialist movement with Hitler's destruction of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD).⁶ By rallying the nation around the common good and equipping the state to take vigorous action against the dislocating effects of the crisis, the neo-socialists hoped that France could avoid Germany's fate.

The puzzle of the neo-socialists is thus not only why and how a group of socialists could become Nazi sympathizers, but why and how an explicitly anti-fascist discourse could transform into its opposite. Simply identifying the commonalities between neo-socialism and fascism cannot adequately explain this transformation in political identification. If they were both part of what Karl Polanyi (1944) calls the societal "counter movement" against liberal capitalism, their particular form and meaning was not reducible to this fact. Making sense of the neo-socialists' transformation, then, requires going beyond the ideational affinities between neo-socialism and fascism toward an appreciation of the shifting political contexts within which they positioned themselves. An approach that isolates and confers an explanatory significance to shared elements of neo-socialist and fascist discourses so as to present an essential continuity between the two obscures the unmistakable shift in political position that occurred between 1933 and 1943, as well as the subtle discursive shifts that accompanied it. I argue that far from being a coherent and fixed doctrine that drove the neo-socialists' political trajectories, the configuration and meaning of neo-socialism changed with its relative position in changing political fields. The neo-socialists' path to fascism was thus not a straight line and their identities, commitments, and interests were not stable. Rather, their political identities were relational constructions, and their careers were punctuated by a series of ideological adjustments to shifting political fortunes.

⁶ Although the "nation" had by the 1930s attained clear right-wing connotations, it is important to remember that, especially in the French context, it was for a long time associated with the political left (Jenkins 1990). The polyvalence of the term is further demonstrated by its mobilization in the Resistance, even by those on the far left.

Other Cases of Political Conversion in Third Republic France

The neo-socialists were not the only leftists in France to be tempted by the radical right during the late Third Republic. An early example is a group of revolutionary syndicalists, influenced by Georges Sorel's unorthodox Marxism, who to various degrees flirted with Charles Maurass's monarchist Action Française (AF). Sorel's influence on Italian fascism is well known (Gregor 2005, 2009), and Zeev Sternhell has argued that fascist ideology in fact had its origins in France with the fusion of the AF's "integral nationalism" and Sorel's "anti-materialist" revision of Marxism (Sternhell 1986, 1987; Sternhell et al. 1994). Sorel himself briefly collaborated with members of the AF on several publications before World War I, as did his chief disciple Édouard Berth.⁷

More spectacular was the career of Georges Valois, a prominent intellectual and heterodox economic thinker in the AF whose revolutionary syndicalist past the AF used to extend its reach to the anti-republican left (Mazgaj 1979).⁸ Dissatisfied with the AF's traditionalism, Valois went on to found France's first explicitly fascist party, Le Faisceau, in 1925. Though attracting the majority of its support from the right, the party managed to attract a handful of Socialists, Communists, and syndicalists (Antliff 1997, Soucy 1986).⁹ The Faisceau, however, was short-lived, folding in 1928 due in part to tensions between Valois and his

⁷ Sternhell et al. (1994) claim that Sorel's abandonment of socialism and Marxism was complete by the time he approached the AF with a nationalist-syndicalist synthesis in mind. J.R. Jennings (1985), however, argues that the extent of this flirtation is exaggerated, and that Sorel never became a monarchist. Sorel and Berth both rallied to Bolshevism after the Russian Revolution.

⁸ On Valois, see also Douglas (1992), Guchet [1975] (2001), Levey (1973), and Soucy (1986).

⁹ Soucy (1986) claims that these were very much *ex-leftists* by the time they had joined the Faisceau, undermining the claim that the Faisceau represented a "left fascism". Among the more prominent figures were Hubert Bourgin, Hubert Lagardelle, and Philippe Lamour. Bourgin was a *dreyfusard* and Socialist professor close to Émile Durkheim who during World War I became a nationalist within the orbit of the AF. Lagardelle was the editor of *Le Mouvement socialiste*, a Marxist theoretical journal that played a key role in popularizing Sorelian revolutionary syndicalism before World War I, and cited specifically by Mussolini (1935) as a central influence. Lamour was a modernist intellectual close to Communist circles. After the collapse of the Faisceau, Bourgin and Lagardelle continued to drift to the right, with Lagardelle becoming Laval's Minister of Labor in Vichy. Lamour would eventually become an anti-fascist, though not before founding another short-lived fascist party (Antliff 2007).

bourgeois financial backers over his insistence on recruiting among leftists and industrial workers. Valois would return to the left, dying a committed anti-fascist at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

Another example of a left-to-right transformation is Gustave Hervé, an anti-militarist and anti-patriotic insurrectionist on the extreme left of the SFIO.¹⁰ As early as 1910, Hervé began to revise his anti-militarism, and by the time he ended a twenty-six month stint in prison in 1912 he was calling for a new strategy of "revolutionary militarism" (Loughlin 2001, Sternhell et al. 1994). When World War I broke out Hervé was already an ardent nationalist, and he enthusiastically supported the war effort. In 1919, he founded the Parti Socialiste National to promote his vision of a nationalist-socialist synthesis, though this effort was, according to Eugen Weber, "something of a damp squib" (Weber 1962: 280). Nonetheless, the party did draw some notable leftist defectors, such as the socialist old-timers Jean Allemane and Alexandre Zévaès. Through the various incarnations of his party, Hervé called for an authoritarian regime to unite and revitalize the nation behind a strongman. In the 1930s, Hervé campaigned to revise the constitution and draft Marshal Pétain as France's providential leader.¹¹

Perhaps the most famous other example of a dramatic transformation in political identity from left to right in this period is that of Jacques Doriot, a leader of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) who went on to found the fascist Parti Populaire Français (PPF) and who became Déat's leading competitor for Nazi patronage during the German Occupation.¹² A popular figure among the Communist rank-and-file due to his proletarian origins and his reputation as a street brawler, Doriot was an early critic of the PCF's sectarian "class against class" line that

¹⁰ On Hervé, see Heuré (1997), Loughlin (2001), Mazgaj (1979), and Sternhell et al. (1994).

¹¹ Ironically, when Pétain finally came to power with the establishment of the Vichy regime, Hervé took his distance from him and backed Charles de Gaulle, whom Hervé's now saw as the best hope for the establishment of the Christian authoritarian republic to which he had long aspired (Loughlin 2001).

¹² On Doriot, see Allardyce (1966), Brunet (1986), Burrin [1986] (2003), Soucy (1995), and Wolf (1969).

denounced the non-Communist left for being "social fascists". Following the February 6, 1934 riots in Paris by right-wing paramilitary leagues, an event that was widely interpreted by the left as an abortive fascist coup, Doriot went against the official party line by independently organizing joint anti-fascist demonstrations with local Socialists. As a result, Maurice Thorez, the Moscow-backed PCF secretary general, engineered Doriot's expulsion from the party in June 1934, ironically only weeks before the PCF would do an about face and sign a unity pact with the SFIO as the first step toward the constitution of the French Popular Front.

In 1936 Doriot founded the PPF, which asserted itself as a nationalist alternative to the Popular Front. Although conservative elements came to dominate the PPF, the party's virulent anti-communism also attracted a significant group of ex-Communist defectors.¹³ Having already mutated into an unmistakably fascist party by World War II, the PPF became one of the most notorious collaborationist forces in occupied Paris, outdoing even its competitors in its anti-Semitism and its emulation of Nazism. Indeed, Doriot would fight in a Wehrmacht uniform on the Eastern Front before being killed in 1945 in Germany.

Explanations of Political Conversion in France

Extant explanations of these other cases tend to lean on one of three themes. These are not mutually exclusive, however, and that they are frequently invoked together speaks to the eclectic and ad hoc character of many explanations of these political transformations. The first

¹³ Seven out of eight of the original members of the PPF's political bureau were ex-Communists. Sternhell has noted that "no other communist party lost as many members of its political bureau to a fascist party as the French one did" (Sternhell 1986: 15). On prominent ex-Communists other than Doriot within the PPF, see Barthélémy (1978), Fernandez (2008), Jankowski (1989), McMeekin (2000), and Soucy (1995). The weight of former Communists was much less pronounced within the rank-and-file. At the first party congress in 1936, former members of the PCF, SFIO, and Radical-Socialist party made up about 33% of the delegates, with about 28% coming from other right-wing parties and paramilitary leagues (Wolf 1969: 190- 191). But there was a dramatic decline in the share of working class delegates, many of them communists, from the 1936 (49%) to the 1937 (21%) party congresses (Soucy 1995: 237). Pascal Ory estimates that of 130,000 PPF members in March 1937 35,000 were ex-communists (Ory 1976: 26).

theme is that of cynical instrumentalism. The premise here is that reversals in political identifications and alliances are chiefly motivated by instrumental considerations, usually to achieve a specific end. This is a particularly convenient explanation, for it ignores any accounting of the potential dissonance of experience involved in dramatic political transformations, implying as it does a purely cynical subject with mastery over the situation who exploits circumstances in pursuit of a singular objective. For example, Madeleine Rebérioux (1964) downplays the significance of Hervé's transition to fascism by attributing it either to a play for amnesty, the result of a bribe, or a personal grudge against old comrades. Asking on what possible grounds an alliance between syndicalism and royalism could be built, Paul Mazgaj likewise concludes that "the most common ground...was calculated self-interest, the age-old game of *politique du pire*," with both the syndicalists and the AF seeking partners in their fight against the hated Republic (Mazgaj 1979: 11). Doriot is also often portrayed as a vengeful schemer. For example, in discussing the PPF's anti-communist fascism, Gilbert Allardyce cites Doriot's "obsession with getting even with the communists, with satisfying a grudge that was above all else deeply personal" (Allardyce 1966: 72).

Another major theme is that of "the god that failed", following the famous collection of ex-communist confessionals (Crossman ed. 1949). This theme emphasizes narratives of disillusionment or betrayal by the left. In explaining the syndicalists' nationalist turn, Sternhell (1986) highlights the political integration of the *dreyfusards*, the crisis of Marxism, and the defeated strikes of 1908-1910 as factors that created a profound sense of disillusionment with the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, and thus precipitated a genuine theoretical reckoning. In accounting for Valois's initial conversion from anarcho-syndicalism to royalism, Douglas (1992) and Guchet ([1975] 2001) cite his ethical and intellectual estrangement from what he saw

as the cynicism and manipulation of the syndicalist and socialist left. Drawing on autobiographical accounts, Sean McMeekin (2000) explicitly draws on the "god that failed" trope to explain the trajectories of three ex-communist leaders of the PPF.¹⁴ He primarily explains their alienation from the PCF and their subsequent turn towards fascism as a consequence of "Moscow's betrayal" (McMeekin 2000: 20). Witness to—and sometimes victims of—factional intrigues and opportunistic policy shifts, McMeekin argues that the Communist defectors came to see the PCF as "just one more *parti comme les autres*" (McMeekin 2000: 20).

The "god that failed" trope, however, is seriously limited in that while it points to the push factors that drove people from the left, it has nothing to say about the pull of fascism or the radical right specifically. For example, to the extent that McMeekin does hazard an explanation for why his subjects joined the PPF after abandoning the PCF, he suggests that they "had all tried to replace the camaraderie, excitement and purpose they had lost after breaking with the PCF" (McMeekin 2000: 31). But even if we allow for this desire, and even for their resentment against a party that they felt betrayed them, it remains unclear why their anti-communism should have taken a fascist form when other political options might have been available. The contributors to *The God That Failed*, after all, fancied themselves social democratic or liberal critics of communism. Ignazio Silone even warned against "the logic of opposition at all costs" that had "carried many ex-Communists far from their starting-points, in some cases as far as Fascism" (Silone 1949: 114).

This problem is completely side stepped in what is possibly the most common theme, usually latent but sometimes explicit, in explanations of dramatic political transformations—i.e. that of continuity. This theme stresses the continuous ideational threads that link the leftist and

¹⁴ The three are Henri Barbé, Jules Teulade, and Albert Vassart. Barbé would leave the PPF for the RNP during the Occupation.

fascist selves, and which presumably explain the transition from one to the other. A weaker form of the continuity thesis holds that the categories of left and right are largely useless in analyzing the political field of Third Republic France, and that the period was characterized instead by a non-conformist ideological nebula that straddled the political divide (Irvine 2008, Loughlin 2001). Because non-conformist ideas could just as easily take shape on the right as on the left, in this view it was association with this politically ambivalent milieu that explained the many political transformations of this era. Underlying these transformations, however, was a supposedly stable attachment to non-conformist values (Loubet del Bayle 1969, Touchard 1960).

Zeev Sternhell has been the most prominent—and controversial—defender of the continuity thesis (Sternhell 1986; Sternhell et al. 1994). He argues that the non-conformist left and fascism shared a common conceptual matrix that made collaboration and convergence not just easy, but practically inevitable. Sternhell has gone so far as to deny any fundamental difference in the worldviews of non-conformist leftists and fascists. Through their shifting allegiances, these renegades supposedly always maintained the same basic ideological core of anti-materialism, anti-rationalism, anti-liberalism, anti-parliamentarism, and a belief in the redemptive value of violence. As such, Sternhell argues, the fascism of erstwhile revolutionary syndicalists, for example, did not so much represent a political about-face as it did the logical expression of their idealist revision of Marxism, which from the beginning abandoned historical materialism for an ethical conception of socialism obsessed with civilization decline—hallmarks of fascist ideology, according to Sternhell. As discussed below, Sternhell extends this continuity thesis to account for Déat's embrace of fascism.

The continuity thesis relies on an internalist history-of-ideas approach which treats a given ideological discourse as the realization of the inner logic of a preceding ideological

discourse, such that the development of the former can be adequately explained mainly by reference to features internal to the latter. Because fascism and different heterodox traditions on the left shared certain ideational elements or thematic concerns, so Sternhell suggests, one easily morphed into the other. In Sternhell's strong form of the continuity thesis, there is in fact nothing to explain, since those leftists who became fascists were effectively always-already fascist in spirit if not in practice.

The continuity thesis suffers from two related methodological flaws. First, it is teleological. As Jacques Julliard has pointed out, Sternhell relies on a "regressive causality" that "postulates an identity of the individual across time" (Julliard 1984: 857). Sternhell's reasoning is of the "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc* type" and his method draws from "a sort of theory of predestination" (Julliard 1984: 857).¹⁵ Indeed, a central problem in the continuity thesis, in both its strong and weak versions, is that it tends to sample on the dependent variable, and thus lacks a comparative dimension. Looking only at those leftists who became fascists, this approach fishes for any thread of continuity with the past in such a way that reads the fascist future back into these threads. A quick historical survey, however, reveals the inadequacy of this approach. For example, it is obvious that not all anti-materialist, anti-rationalist, and anti-liberal revisions of Marxism ended in fascism. Even if we consider these to be necessary conditions for fascist conversion, a comparative point of view reveals them to be far from sufficient.¹⁶

¹⁵ Others have also criticized Sternhell's teleological method (e.g. Berstein 1984, Winock 1983).

¹⁶ Alan Wald's account of the "New York intellectuals" and their accommodation with the Cold War power structure is also critical of the continuity thesis. He writes that although "there are certain obvious continuities between [Sidney Hooks'] present neoconservative posture and some positions taken by the New York intellectuals in their previous incarnations," if one "undertands the changes in political orientation on their part just prior to, during, and especially after World War II, it becomes clear that their ultimate evolution was not the only one possible" (Wald 1987: 10). In a similar vein, George Steinmetz (2010) has criticized the view, held by György Lukács among others, that blames German neo-historicism for the rise of Nazism. Steinmetz shows that the neo-historicist tradition actually led to a variety of political outcomes, and included non- and anti-Nazi figures such as Alfred Weber, Karl Mannheim, and various exiled historical sociologists.

The second flaw is the continuity thesis's essentialist approach to ideas. What Julliard objects to in Sternhell's methodology applies to that of the continuity thesis in general: it consists in "abstractly isolating the elements common to two different, or even opposed, ideological ensembles in order to demonstrate their kinship" (Julliard 1984: 855). The meaning and political valence of those elements is held to be fixed, regardless of the broader ideological configuration of which they are a part or the political conjuncture in which they are uttered. In this view political ideologies are but aggregates of ideational elements whose essences are pre-determined and define the sense of the totality. It is a highly questionable proposition, however, to suggest that the anti-materialism of a revisionist Marxist engaged in anti-fascist struggle, for example, meant quite the same thing as the anti-materialism of Nazi collaborator committed to building a totalitarian state.¹⁷

What these three dominant themes in accounts of transformations of political identity in Third Republic France have in common is a subjectivist bias. Whether it takes an intentionalist form like in the cynical instrumentalist and "god that failed" themes, or an idealist form such as in the continuity thesis, the tendency has been to see the key sources of these transformations in the subjects themselves. Thus for cynical instrumentalism the transformation is a function of rational calculation, for the "god that failed" a crisis of conscience, and for the continuity thesis the expression of an essential feature of their political identity. Despite varying sensitivities to discursive and political context, these approaches thus presume a fundamentally autonomous and self-determined political identity.¹⁸ The focus has been on identifying the subjective *reasons*—in

¹⁷ With regard to the New York intellectuals, Wald similarly argues that "the political and cultural content of the group's anti-Stalinism meant different things at different times (Wald 1987: 10).

¹⁸ Coming from the Arthur O. Lovejoy school of the history of ideas, Sternhell is especially aloof from political context in his work.

the sense of justifications—for these transformations from the point of view of those who underwent them rather than examining the processes by which they occurred.

A notable exception to this tendency has been Laurent Kestel's recent work on Doriot and the PPF. Like other accounts of Doriot and his ex-Communist comrades, Kestel points out that the PPF's fascism represented a "brutal reversal of investment against the chosen object" (Kestel 2012: 231). Owing their public careers entirely to the PCF apparatus—Doriot for example was a steelworker before he was promoted within the PCF ranks during the push to proletarianize its leadership—the party had been the object of the quasi-totality of the erstwhile Communists' investments, such that their expulsion had profound dislocating effects. But Kestel goes further and adds a relational dimension to their process of transformation. Thus he argues that Doriot's conversion to fascism was the result of an "assignation of identity that succeeded" (Kestel 2012: 139). Taking fascism not as an analytical category but as an object of analysis, he traces the classification struggles over the legitimate definition of the PPF. So while the PPF had initially been an ambiguous formation claiming an independent position on the left, in the end it was in mobilizing the "secondary attributes" of fascism—i.e. treachery, immorality, illegitimacy, brutality, and violence—that the "entrepreneurs of classification...provided proof of the PPF's fascism" (Kestel 2012: 141). Doriot's fascistization was thus

the consequence of a struggle between several agents or groups of agents over the legitimate definition of a situation. It [was] an assignation of identity that succeeded all the more that the stigmatized finished by re-appropriating the identity that was imposed on him. In this sense, conversion is a double discursive manifestation. It *is* from the moment it affirms itself as such (Kestel 2012: 232).

Kestel's relational approach to the PPF has much to recommend it, but it only partially fits the neo-socialist case. Like Doriot and other former Communists, the neo-socialists did become the targets of a smear campaign shortly after the 1933 schism. Former comrades in the

SFIO, the PCF, and even the bourgeois press denounced what they saw as neo-socialism's fascist tendencies. Unlike the PPF, however, the neo-socialists always vigorously denied any fascist affinity—at least until the German Occupation—and in 1935 they joined the anti-fascist Popular Front. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the neo-socialists is that they always took pains to present their trajectory as essentially consistent, as if their pro-Nazi positions were a continuation of their politics in 1933. As such, and unlike the PPF and the other cases outlined above, the neo-socialists do not fit the classical image of "conversion," which, according to A.D. Nock (1933), necessitates a deliberate renunciation of past belief.

Although there was a certain degree of continuity in the vocabulary and themes invoked by the neo-socialists throughout their career, there can nonetheless be no doubt that between the socialist dissidence of 1933 and the justification of fascist totalitarianism ten years later there was a significant political shift that needs to be explained. What makes the neo-socialist case unique is precisely that it highlights how surface discursive continuities can mask objective shifts in political position. As such, the case is well suited to examining the role of social structure—and particularly that of the political field—in the transformation of political identities. Kestel's relational approach to the transformation of identity is salutary, but it hinges too much on the moment of recognition proper to conversion, such that he tends to underemphasize the objective factors that conditioned the successful assignation of a fascist identity. Déat and the neo-socialists never had such a conversion moment, yet during the Occupation they clearly came to identify with the fascist political project. How do such dramatic transformations in political identity occur even when the fact of conversion as such is disavowed?

Extant Accounts of the Neo-Socialist Case

Extant accounts of neo-socialism have almost exclusively focused on Marcel Déat's political career. Historians disagree on when Déat could be said to have become fascist. Whereas Alain Bergounioux (1978) sees in the pre-war Déat little more than a typical reformist socialist whose positions pre-figured post-war social democracy, Stanley Grossman (1975, 1985) argues that by 1934 Déat was already a national socialist with proto-fascist tendencies. Not surprisingly, Sternhell denies that a fundamental transformation even took place, portraying Déat as always-already a fascist. For Sternhell, from its beginning neo-socialism contained the essential elements of fascism: an idealist revision of Marxism, an ethical conception of socialism, the principle of class collaboration within a national framework, and the reorganization of the state along corporatist and authoritarian lines. Thus, according to Sternhell, neo-socialism forms, "not in 1942, but from 1933, an ideological ensemble whose nature is difficult to mistake," such that "the national socialism of the collaboration period is the very same as that of the heyday of neo-socialism" (Sternhell 1984: 39; Sternhell 1986 145).

Though few go as far as Sternhell in asserting an identity between neo-socialism and fascism, many accounts of Déat have drawn on some version of the continuity thesis. For example, in explaining Déat's trajectory, Grossman invokes Déat's ethical and aesthetic approach to socialism and his pragmatism, both of which he supposedly shared with Sorel and Benito Mussolini (Grossman 1985: 49). According to Grossman, Déat had by 1934 already rejected the "basic ideals of the left" (Grossman 1985: 50). In calling for an alliance of the middle classes and working classes, an abandonment of the demand for socialization in favor of corporatist economic planning, and the adoption of a national mystique, Déat "held goals common to fascist parties elsewhere" (Grossman 1985: 51). According to Grossman, "[w]hen a political leader calls

for national revolution, corporatism, national planning, and the party-state, he has clearly moved beyond democratic socialism." Therefore, "[a]s far as Déat was concerned, the Nazi victory of 1940 simply revived a national socialist stance that had first blossomed in 1934 but then lain dormant in the shadow of the Popular Front" (Grossman 1985: 52).

Whereas Sternhell and Grossman emphasize the irrationalist undercurrent connecting neo-socialism to fascism, others point to Déat's rationalism as a key explanatory factor. An example of this is the significance attributed to Déat's sociological training. Before turning to politics, Déat had been an especially promising aspiring sociologist, studying with Célestin Bouglé at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) and collaborating on the second series of *L'Année sociologique*.¹⁹ Though his influences became more eclectic, Déat initially came out of the Durkheimian tradition (Desan and Heilbron 2015). Drawing implicitly on an interpretation of Durkheimianism which sees in it certain authoritarian and fascist affinities, some have highlighted Déat's academic background in order to explain his trajectory. Thus Donald N. Baker writes that "the flaws in Déat's thought were largely those of the sociological tradition to which he belonged" (Baker 1976: 116). Just as Déat's "effort to relate sociological theory to socialist doctrine led him inexorably towards the right-wing" of the SFIO, so too did his contemplations on "sociological truth" and his emphasis on social solidarity over class struggle set him down the path to collaboration (Baker 1976: 114). Grossman sees in Déat's openly totalitarian organicism of 1942 an extension of an earlier Durkheimian corporatism stressing the morally integrative functions of intermediary institutions (Grossman 1975: 26). Another historian invokes Durkheimian sociology's resonance with Déat's "totalizing aspirations" (Burrin 2003 [1986]: 47). Owing to its Durkheimian influence, Déat's socialism supposedly privileged "the organization and moralization of society" over its "emancipation" and "attached more importance to the

¹⁹ On Déat at the ENS, see Sirinelli (1988).

organic collective than the individual" (Burrin 2003 [1986]: 47-48). Sociologist Dick Pels suggests that Déat's fascist turn was the product of a sort of radicalization and *étatization* of the knowledge-political project of an "intellectuals' socialism" inherited from Durkheim (Pels 2000, 2001).²⁰ This interpretation is not limited to academics. Georges Albertini, Déat's right-hand man in the RNP, in a retrospective account of Déat's career remarked that "if one reflects on it, one realizes that Célestin Bouglé and Léon Brunschvicq...are the spiritual fathers of the only French doctrine of an authoritarian and national socialism" (Varenes 1948: 12).²¹

Perhaps the best empirical account of Déat's transformation is by Swiss historian Philippe Burrin (2003 [1986]). In the narrative sections of his account he foregrounds the vicissitudes in Déat's political fortunes and their contingent effects on his trajectory. However, in his explicit theorization of his argument Burrin remains vague and falls back on the trope of continuity—albeit in a weaker form than Sternhell. He argues that neo-socialism's commitment to national renovation and its anti-liberalism lent itself to a fascist seduction. If Déat was conciliatory toward fascist regimes, it was because fascism constituted for him a "subterranean layer of seduction" (Burrin 2003 [1986]: 302). Even while rejecting certain aspects of fascism when he was still on the left, Déat's desire for national cohesion and collective *élan*, Burrin claims, nonetheless found inspiration in fascist regimes, which became the "guarantee of viability of his projects, as well as the assured source of its stimulation" (Burrin 2003 [1986]: 303). Indeed, Burrin suggests that Déat's transformation is chiefly explained by the fact that he was "dazzled" by what he saw to be fascism's successes and was thus drawn progressively into the "magnetic

²⁰ Pels (2000) in fact makes the case for both a rationalist and irrationalist current in Déat's thought. For example, he claims both a Durkheimian and a Sorelian lineage for Déat, the former contributing an image of the intellectual as social legislator and spokesperson for sociological laws and the latter contributing an anti-liberal valorization of voluntarist action. However, there is little evidence that Déat was influenced by Sorel or any of his disciples.

²¹ Claude Varenes was Albertini's pseudonym. For a rebuttal of the specific claim that Déat's Durkheimian background explains his fascism, and of the general claim that Durkheimianism has affinities with fascism, see Desan and Heilbron (2015).

field of fascisms." For those socialists who became fascists, their transformation was essentially the product of a mutual "interference between the search for a national socialism resolving the French crisis and certain aspects of fascism," made possible by the "proximity of certain ideological plans, and above all the subterranean effect of irrational values of dynamism and activism" (Burrin 2003 [1986]: 493).

Steve Bastow has rightly pointed out that Burrin's formulation "never really shows how the transition from one configuration of neo-socialism to the other is effected," and he chastises Burrin for "lapsing into vague suggestions of a Déat 'dazzled' and seduced by Nazism, crystallizing proto-fascist elements held to be contained in neo-socialism" (Bastow 2000: 43). Bastow accuses Burrin of reintroducing a surreptitious teleology that reads an ideal-typical fascism back into neo-socialism, thus fixing the latter's meaning. Using a discourse-analytic approach, Bastow traces the changing configuration of neo-socialist discourse throughout Déat's career. Rejecting the continuity thesis, he claims that the relation between the Déat of 1933 and that of 1941 is "not one of logical necessity, but of a process of argumentation through which a series of possible avenues was followed up, leaving other possible avenues ignored" (Bastow 2000: 47).

But Bastow's account is largely descriptive, registering the discursive mutations within neo-socialism without providing much analytical leverage for explaining why Déat chose the fascist path. In fact, Bastow also tends to privilege the ideational affinities between neo-socialism and fascism when he discusses Déat. For example, he identifies three inherent tensions—i.e. between order/democracy, nationalism/internationalism, and ends/means—within neo-socialist discourse that were ultimately resolved in such a way as to push Déat toward totalitarianism (Bastow 2000: 43-44). For Bastow and his co-authors, Déat represents a typical

case of "third way" discourse (Bastow and Martin 2003; Bastow, Martin, and Pels 2002). A product of the intellectual, social, and political dislocations of the interwar conjuncture that disrupted established political ideologies, the "third way" sought to transcend existing political divisions and was defined by a thematic concern with ethics, community, the nation, and a voluntarist elite—values typically associated with fascism, but which also found expression on the left. While Bastow et al. reject any teleological interpretation of "third way" discourse as necessarily fascist, they do highlight its political ambiguity as an essential feature, such that fascism is always a contingent possibility. And so while neo-socialism was not always-already fascist, as a fellow "third way" discourse it had a "family resemblance" to fascism, thus facilitating its mutation into the latter (Bastow and Martin 2003).

Bastow's anti-essentialist approach to neo-socialism and "third way" discourses is a step in the right direction, but it is limited by what I call an "idealist/intellectualist bias." The emphasis is still on the ideational affinities between neo-socialism and fascism. If Bastow does not consider Déat to have always been a fascist, he nonetheless treats Déat as an always-already "third way" thinker, such that Déat's engagements at different points are ultimately held to be consistent with an underlying commitment to certain values and ideas. Bastow's starting point thus remains the inherent tensions and ambiguities within neo-socialism as a "third way" discourse, and Déat's fascism is seen to flow in some way from his prior political identity, albeit as only one of several possible outcomes.

The "idealist/intellectualist bias" is a general problem with extant accounts of neo-socialism, and of Déat's career in particular. Regardless of how they categorize Déat's politics at different moments, most accounts proceed from the assumption that ideational factors determined his engagements. Thus his various political positions, including his pro-Nazi

collaborationism, are usually treated as expressions of different features of his political identity and thought. This is the case in strong versions of the continuity thesis, according to which Déat's collaborationism was the logical expression of basic fascist tendencies in his neo-socialist doctrine, his Durkheimian sociology, and his irrationalist philosophy. But this is equally true of other accounts. Thus for Burrin, Déat's fascist engagements were a consequence of the "subterranean" influence of fascist regimes, which he subsequently sought to emulate. For Bastow, it was Déat's intellectual efforts to define a political "third way" that was the common denominator throughout the turns of his career, with shifting configurations of his "third way" discourse leading to changing political orientations.

In all of these examples, the line of determination runs from identity and ideas to action. Déat is thought to have acted the way he did because of who he was and what he believed. The explanatory imperative has thus been to determine when and to what extent Déat's thought became contaminated with fascist ideas, as if to explain Déat's political engagements during the occupation one needed first to demonstrate that he had become an authentic fascist. Likewise his earlier neo-socialism is typically taken for granted as a ready-made ideological innovation expressing a prior will to doctrinal revision. Despite their differences, most extant accounts of the neo-socialists' shifting political commitments thus share an assumption that the principle of these changes can be found in some feature of their thought and identity. In privileging the ideational dimension of the neo-socialists' transformation, the implication is that ideas have causal primacy over practice, which is seen to be a straightforward expression of the former.

This approach is at best incomplete, and at worst misleading. It assumes, for example, that identities and ideas are transparent to the investigator, and that their meanings are fixed

independently of the contexts in which they operate.²² This poses a particular challenge for explaining dramatic transformations of political identity like Déat's. The assumption that practice is derivative of identity or prior ideological commitments has led investigators to seek an explanation for the neo-socialists' transformation within the terms of neo-socialist discourse itself. This one-sided focus on the ideational dimension of neo-socialism has variously resulted in a denial of its transformation, a descriptive gloss over its changing configurations, or the invocation of vague mechanisms like unconscious influence. Moreover, given the surface continuities between some elements of neo-socialist discourse and fascism—continuities that Déat and his colleagues stressed—it is unsurprising that this emphasis on ideational factors has led even critics of the continuity thesis to unwittingly fall back on a weak version of it when writing in an explanatory mode. The relevant question, however, is not so much whether a certain continuity of values or intellectual sources provided the neo-socialists with an enduring frame of reference, but whether these have any explanatory value in accounting for their transformation.

Most importantly, the notion that the fascism of the RNP can be explained by reference to ideational features of neo-socialism does not hold up empirically. The neo-socialists followed divergent paths following the 1933 neo-socialist schism. Of the 19 (out of a total of 24) members of the PSdF's founding executive bureau whose political trajectories I was able to reconstruct, eight became associated in some way with the RNP, six rallied primarily to the Vichy regime, two died before the Occupation, and five participated in the Resistance. Former neo-socialists who participated in the Resistance include Claude Bonnier, Henry Hauck, and Louis Vallon—some of Déat's closest lieutenants and, ironically, among those neo-socialist true believers whose politics were the most ambiguous in the heyday of neo-socialism. Moreover, the RNP did not

²² According to Camic and Gross (2001) this is a foundational assumption in the "old sociology of ideas."

draw exclusively on neo-socialism. Indeed, of the fifteen members of its 1943 permanent commission, seven had been neo-socialists, another five came directly from the SFIO, and three came from the right. It would thus be a mistake to conflate neo-socialism and the RNP. Although many neo-socialists advocated collaboration in some capacity during the occupation, only a minority followed Déat on his path toward fascist totalitarianism.²³ Neo-socialism as such provides little analytical leverage in explaining Déat's trajectory. As a group, the neo-socialists shared a common matrix of ideas and influences, and yet these did not entail a common fate. To explain why and how some became fascists, then, requires going beyond simply pointing out the ideational affinities between neo-socialism and fascism.

Discourse Analysis and "Order, Authority, Nation"

The superficial continuity in some of the neo-socialists' rhetoric and their efforts to present a consistent political trajectory can create the misleading impression that neo-socialism was a fixed doctrine. In fact, neo-socialist discourse was not self-identical over the years, but was re-articulated in ways that changed its political valence. As Bastow has already suggested, a discourse-analytic approach can help to avoid the trap of discursive essentialism into which many accounts of neo-socialism fall. Indeed, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe specifically mention Déat in their brief discussion of "planism," a political current pioneered by Belgian socialist Henri de Man—and to which the neo-socialists subscribed—calling for the serialized construction of a planned economy. Although de Man, like the neo-socialists, briefly became a Nazi collaborator, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the political valence of planism was not fixed

²³ The historiography of the German Occupation distinguishes between *collaborateurs*, which refers to those who supported the Vichy regime, and *collaborationnistes*, who advocated an ideological realignment with Nazi Germany and sought to remake France along totalitarian lines. Whether the Vichy regime could be characterized as fascist is debatable, but the point here is simply that the RNP conformed to the typical image of fascism in a way that Vichy never did.

by their later political choices. The "Plan," they write, was originally conceived as "the very axis for the reconstruction of a historical bloc which would make it possible to combat the decline of bourgeois society and to counter the advance of fascism' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 74). The subsequent evolution of de Man and the neo-socialists "should not make us forget the significance of planism as a real effort to regain the political initiative for socialism in the transformed social climate following the war and the Depression" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 74). Indeed, many of its themes became "the common patrimony" post-war social democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 74; see also Berman 2006).²⁴

Laclau and Mouffe's anti-essentialist approach to political discourse is particularly well-suited to making sense of how certain discursive continuities can mask profound changes in meaning. In their view, the meaning of a given discourse is not simply the aggregate product of its component elements. The identities of these elements are not fixed, but are in fact contingent upon their articulation within a discursive whole. At issue is a kind of "structural causality" by which the meaning of the elements is overdetermined by the other elements to which they are articulated and by the meaning of the structured totality. Political discourse, then, is always the product of an articulatory practice that tries to suture differentiated *elements* into *moments* of a coherent totality (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). This articulatory practice consists of two complementary logics: the logic of equivalence which attempts to subsume differentiated elements under a single sign—i.e. a discursive element elevated to the level of a "nodal point" serving a privileged representative function—so as to transform them into moments expressive of a common identity, and the logic of difference which identifies an antagonist against which a

²⁴ One could also argue that neo-socialism was a French example of what Howard Brick has called "the postcapitalist vision", which was defined by the sentiment that "something new and immanent in contemporary social development escaped the category of capitalism" (Brick 2006: 2). According to Brick, this vision coalesced after World II into a "recognizable stream of thinking tied to left-liberal visions of reform" (Brick 2006: 3).

given discursive identity is defined. Laclau and Mouffe argue, however, that no discursive totality is ever fully closed, and that political discourses are constantly being disarticulated and rearticulated to incorporate new terms and to reconfigure old ones. As the "nodal point" changes, or as the "chain of equivalence" expands to include more elements and the antagonistic frontier is redrawn, the meanings of the totality and its moments are correspondingly altered. Thus, though two political discourses may share a series of constitutive elements, the meanings of these elements are themselves contingently determined by the articulatory practices within which they are embedded (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).²⁵

A consideration of the neo-socialists' call for "order, authority, nation" demonstrates the utility of a discourse-analytic approach. An essentialist approach would take the utterance of this triptych in 1933 as evidence of fascist contagion, as they clearly formed part of the right-wing lexicon. But as Quentin Skinner argues, to "understand any serious utterance, we need to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued" (Skinner 2002: 82). Drawing on J.L. Austin's (1962) speech act theory, Skinner claims that the proper interpretation of a text requires grasping its illocutionary force, i.e. what the author is *doing* in producing the utterance in a given argumentative context. With this in mind, it is clear that in uttering "order, authority, nation" the neo-socialists were not expressing subterranean fascist tendencies, but making the case for appropriating these terms and re-

²⁵ Laclau and Mouffe draw on Louis Althusser's anti-essentialist Marxism. In his critique of the unitary treatment of Marx's career that reads his "mature" materialist theory into his idealist past, Althusser identifies three theoretical presuppositions underlying this "theory of anticipation": "The first presupposition is analytic: it holds that any theoretical system and any constituted thought is reducible to its elements: a precondition that enables one to think any element of this system on its own, and to compare it with another similar elements from another system. The second presupposition is teleological: it institutes a secret tribunal of history which judges the ideas submitted to it, or rather, permits the dissolution of (different) systems into their elements, institutes these elements as elements in order to proceed to their measurement according to its own norms as if to their truth. Finally, these two presuppositions depend on a third, which regards the history of ideas as its own element, maintains that nothing happens there which is not a product of the history of ideas itself and that the world of ideology is its own principle of intelligibility" (Althusser 1969: 17). Here in a nutshell is the critique of the continuity thesis described above.

articulating them within a socialist and anti-fascist discourse. In doing so, the hope was to evacuate these terms of their right-wing connotations and re-signify them in such a way as to forestall the appeal of fascism.

In 1933, the call for "order, authority, nation" was articulated within an explicitly anti-fascist discourse. The context for this was a debate within the SFIO over the party's attitude toward the State, specifically whether it should join bourgeois governments. The party line had traditionally been to refuse any such ministerial participation and to assume as little responsibility as possible for the management of a State apparatus it hoped to smash in an eventual proletarian revolution. The neo-socialists formed part of the party's right-wing minority that opposed what it saw as a self-defeating fatalism and affirmed a more robustly reformist orientation entailing a Socialist presence in the state apparatus. The debate intensified following Hitler's rise to power, with the party right arguing that the passivity and isolation to which the SFIO's traditional line condemned it would cede the political initiative to fascism. To block fascism's path to power, the party right contended, socialists thus had to enter into a coalition with the center-left Radicals, broaden their appeal to the middle classes, and overcome their aversion to governing within a capitalist framework. After their expulsion from the SFIO in November 1933, the neo-socialists created the PSdF to advance these political objectives.

Within this argumentative context, the call for "order" was specifically counter-posed to the economic disorder created by the Depression, which the neo-socialists saw as the root cause of fascism. By "authority" the neo-socialists were referring to their goal of building the state's capacity for economic intervention to counteract the power of plutocratic interests. As for "nation," the neo-socialists insisted that they did not mean this in a nationalistic sense, but only to indicate that the collapse of the global economy and the defeat of the Italian and German

socialist parties had contingently forced socialist action to retreat within a national framework. The appeal to the "nation" was also meant to have a propaganda value in attracting the middle classes, at a time when the latter were increasingly seduced by fascism. Indeed, transcending a narrow identification with the proletariat and rallying the majority of the nation, including the middle classes, to socialism was a central concern of neo-socialism, and in this they cited the democratic socialist legacy of Jean Jaurès.

Although the watchwords "order, authority, nation" proved provocative, they were also clearly articulated to an affirmation of democracy and a defense of republican liberties against a perceived fascist menace. In a sense, early neo-socialist discourse was a kind of Gramscian hegemonic project in which socialists were called upon to transcend their particularity and lead a broader popular-democratic movement in the name of the nation (Gramsci 1971). It was precisely to prevent fascism from playing this hegemonic role and to extend socialism's appeal to the middle classes threatened by the crisis that the neo-socialists sought the immediate construction of an intermediary regime with the authority to impose order on the nation's economic affairs. If the triptych "order, authority, nation" in 1933 was meant to articulate a "chain of equivalence" between the proletariat, peasantry, and middle classes around a positive reform program, the "people" so constituted were also defined against an imagined fascist antagonist.

By the end of 1941, the meaning of "order, authority, nation" had changed drastically. The new argumentative context was, of course, dominated by the conditions of defeat and occupation. The RNP had positioned itself as a revolutionary critic of Vichy's conservatism, and was engaged in an intense competition with other collaborationist parties for Nazi recognition. In this context, "order" referred to the "new order" represented by Nazi domination and the

necessity to collaborate faithfully within it. "Authority" was transmuted into a call for an "authoritarian" state—and, later, a "totalitarian" state—and "nation," now conceived in organicist terms, was recast as a value in itself. The regime that the RNP sought to construct was "at once national and socialist, with a strong, authoritarian state." It was to be a "regime of hierarchy and order" in which the state would "no longer only express the will or aspirations of a class, or of certain social categories...but would really be the direct translation of the national spirit" (Déat 1941: 9-14). During the German Occupation "order, authority, nation" were also articulated to an array of other themes absent from the neo-socialism of 1933, and together they gave RNP discourse a clearly fascist inflection, even when Déat and his comrades sought to deny any discontinuity with the past:

And we find in the new order all the old ideas, all the old values. Only, *liberty* is that of the person supported by the family, the profession, the nation, and finding true autonomy in a consented discipline. *Equality* is that of opportunity, which implies hierarchy, and that also of service, of sacrifice to the Community. *Fraternity* is the powerful sentiment of the community of blood, that is to say the kinship between men of the same race and the same homeland. And there are certainly *other values*, especially heroic: honor, fidelity, etc. (Déat 1943: 24).

"Family," "hierarchy," "sacrifice," "blood," and "race" now joined "order," "authority," and "nation" as elements within a discourse defined by a complete identification with the Nazi project. In 1943 as in 1933 the meaning and political valence of "order, authority, nation" were overdetermined by the things to which they were articulated and by the argumentative context in which they were deployed. Neo-socialism did not inexorably become fascist because it invoked "order, authority, nation." Rather, the triptych took on fascist connotations because it became articulated to a fascist discourse emulating Nazism.

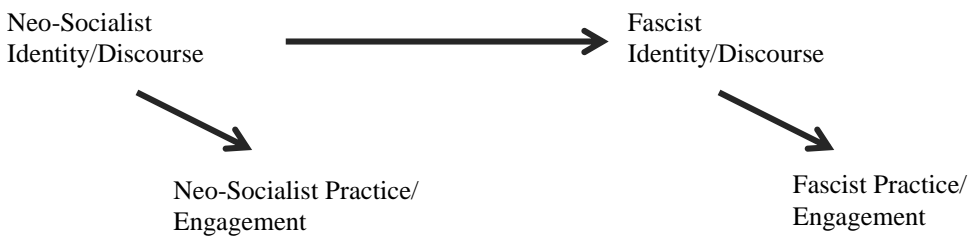
Situational Analysis: Relational Context and the Transformation of Political Identity

A discourse-analytic approach is useful in tracing the shifting configurations of political discourse in a way that is sensitive to changes in meaning, but in itself it does not provide much analytical leverage in explaining why these changes occurred in the particular way that they did. The anti-sociological bias of Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology forecloses explanatory accounts that reference the social determinants of such transformations, but it is precisely such an approach that is necessary if one wishes to avoid unwittingly imputing an exaggerated causal significance to immanent ideational factors in the trajectory of neo-socialist discourse.

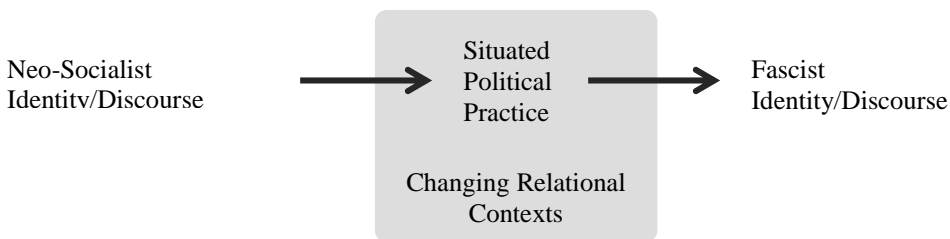
Discourse analysis can thus only be one moment in the analysis of the neo-socialists' political transformation. Explaining the different steps in this transformation requires the second step of analyzing the situated practices and processes that mediated between the neo-socialism of 1933 and the fascism of the RNP. While discourse analysis is a valuable critical tool against the "continuity thesis," a "situational" analysis (Jansen 2016) is necessary if one is to avoid the errors of the "idealist/intellectualist bias." This latter approach basically treats discourse and practice separately, with the latter merely expressing the former. Consequently, the analytical focus is almost exclusively on the ideational level, and changes in the neo-socialists' concrete political engagements are presumed to simply express a prior discursive shift in identity. In a situational analysis, on the other hand, political practice and the contexts in which it unfolds are critical mediating factors in the transformation of political identities (Figure 1). Political practice is not simply an expression of political identity. What actors actually do matters, and practices have important consequences not just in concrete political terms, but also for actors' identities. As such, it's important to look at the specific political contexts in which the neo-socialists actually acted, and to relate changes in their discourse to changes in these contexts. After all, neo-

socialism was not just an abstract set of ideas, but also a group of flesh-and-blood political actors. If the mechanisms by which neo-socialist discourse was transformed are to be understood, we must go beyond a simple discursive analysis and look also at how the neo-socialists strategically responded to the particular political contexts in which they were situated.

Figure 1. Explanatory approaches to the neo-socialists' fascist transformation



Intellectualist/Idealist approach



Situational/Relational approach

In highlighting the mediating role of situated political practices, a situational analysis draws attention to the social determinants of discursive transformation. These should not, however, be understood in an essentialist or substantialist manner. Laclau and Mouffe are right to take a relational approach to the construction of political identity. But whereas they see this as an exclusively discursive process, I argue that the logics of difference and equivalence they describe are themselves conditioned by changes in the relational context of the political field.

Like Laclau and Mouffe, French political scientist Michel Dobry has criticized an essentialist interpretation of political ideologies and has also advocated for a relational approach. However, unlike Laclau and Mouffe, he calls attention to the ways in which the dynamics of political identification are determined by the competitive structure of the political field, and the ways in which discursive strategies are enabled or constrained by conjunctural shifts in this structure. Dobry (2003, 2005) has been a fierce critic of the "immunity thesis" that has dominated the historiography of French fascism. The "immunity thesis" holds that there was no significant indigenous fascist movement in France, due in large part to France's republican political culture and the existence of native right-wing traditions (e.g. Rémond 1966).²⁶ Dobry particularly criticizes the "immunity thesis" for depending on a "classificatory logic." According to this logic, fascism has a fixed and bounded essence which distinguishes it from radical rightism, conservative authoritarianism, Bonapartism, etc., each of which has its own defining essence. Using this logic, the "immunity thesis" compares movements on the French right to the "authentic" fascisms of Italy and Germany, and concludes that their dissimilarities disqualify the French right from being considered fascist (Dobry 2003).²⁷

What this obsession with fixed essences masks is the "vagueness" that characterized not only the content of different right-wing ideologies, but also the boundaries between them (Dobry 2005: 139). To adequately capture this "vagueness," Dobry proposes a "relational perspective" that reconstructs the autonomous "space" of French right-wing politics as an internally competitive field. Rather than interpreting a given group's position-takings, programs, and tactics as so many manifestations of its essence, a relational perspective would interpret these in relation to "the space or universe of competition in which the movements act and define themselves, in

²⁶ For a recent restatement of the "immunity thesis," see Bernstein and Winock (2014).

²⁷ Teleology here rears its ugly head again. The fascisms of Italy and Germany are "authentic" because "successful" (Dobry 2003).

their relation to other movements that 'operate' there but also to the constraints and structures of competition specific to these universes or, if one prefers, 'contexts of action,' and in their relations to the variable historical conjunctures that affect these spaces of competition" (Dobry 2003: 47). What would need to be examined, then, are the always-shifting ways in which groups sought to gain advantage within this competitive space. While certain conjunctures might have been conducive to ideological convergence or mimicry, others might have called for a strategy of distinction. So even though right-wing movements drew from a common repertoire, the competitive dynamic refracted and reconfigured the elements of this repertoire in various ways. "Fascism" was less an already-constituted actor within this field than an effect of its competitive dynamic. The relational perspective thus does not take fascism *per se* as its object. Rather, Dobry calls for analysts to be attentive to historical actors' own struggles over classification in order to understand the relative position-takings of the authoritarian right vis-à-vis the *label* of fascism (Dobry 2003: 46).²⁸ The object of analysis, in other words, is the entire right-wing political field within which, depending on the particular conjuncture, fascism was a latent possibility.

Although Dobry only considers fascism's relationship to other currents on the political right, his relational perspective is also relevant to the neo-socialist case. As suggested earlier, the extant literature on the neo-socialists has tended to privilege the ideational dimension of their transformation, with the assumption that their pro-Nazi engagement can be explained by describing the fascist features of their discourse, whether these are understood as genetic to neo-socialism or as the result of a progressive fascist influence. By treating political engagement as derivative of identity and ideology, these accounts remain trapped in the "classificatory logic"

²⁸ Dobry points out a central methodological double-standard of which partisans of the "immunity thesis" are guilty: while they absolutely refuse to accept the anti-fascist left's designation of the radical right as "fascist," they are more than ready to take fascists at their word when they distinguish themselves from other factions on the right (Dobry 2003). Contra Allardyce (1979), the fluidity of the "fascist" label is precisely what makes it interesting for Dobry.

which reduces the explanatory task to the identification of an authentic fascism within neo-socialism. What Dobry's relational perspective highlights, however, is the interaction between political identity and the structure of the political field, conceived in Bourdieusian terms. Concrete political engagements are not the simple expressions of fixed and bounded political identities. Rather, these identities are themselves relationally constituted in and through the dynamics of the political field as actors compete for symbolic and material advantage and engage in classification struggles to impose a favorable definition of the situation. Thus whereas the analytical focus of previous accounts of neo-socialism has largely been limited to classifying neo-socialist discourse at different moments in time, a relational perspective would draw attention to the "contexts of action" within which neo-socialism was defined and defined itself. The story of how an anti-fascist discourse became aligned with Nazism cannot be told with reference to its ideational content alone; the story of neo-socialism's dramatic transformation is above all the story of its fluid relationship to an unstable political conjuncture.

Dobry's relational perspective and the Bourdieusian field theory on which it draws converge with recent attempts by scholars of social movements to rethink the relationship of political identities to social structure. Andrew Walder (2009a) argues that in focusing on the process of mobilization, the social movements literature has tended to treat political identities, motivations, and interests as fixed and given. To the extent that social structure has been invoked, it has been in its capacity to promote or impede a mobilization whose impulsion is usually taken for granted. In light of this, Walder calls for a return to the old puzzle of political sociology: i.e. "how to explain the political orientation of mobilized groups and the aims and contents of movements" (Walder 2009a: 398). Walder thus puts the relationship of social structure to political orientations back on the agenda, but in doing so he also suggests rethinking what is

meant by structure. Against prevailing structural explanations that looked for the sources of political identity and interest in macro-structural conditions, Walder highlights studies that point to the effects of short-term processes and local contexts in shaping political orientations (e.g. Markoff 1985, 1988, 1997; Markoff & Shapiro 1985; Shapiro & Markoff 1998; Tilly 1964; Traugott 1980, 1985).

In his own work on factional struggles during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Walder (2006, 2009b) argues that factional identities were not fixed by actors' location in relatively stable social and political structures, but were rather "emergent properties" of highly localized conflicts within rapidly shifting political contexts. These shifts rendered the straightforward expression of prior commitments and interests problematic, forcing actors to make consequential choices in ambiguous circumstances. These choices in turn generated new interests, identities, and antagonisms, thus realigning the political landscape (Walder 2006). Although an attention to local contexts in the construction of political identities is not new (e.g. Gould 1991, 1993), the central implication of Walder's analysis is "about the consequences of *shifts* within local contexts, not cross-contextual variation in their (stable) features" (Walder 2006: 740). Sudden shifts in context, Walder argues, "can rapidly alter the implications of social position for political choice that we might otherwise expect," giving greater weight to short-term and contingent interactional processes in the construction of political identity (Walder 2006: 74). This relational view of how movement identities are interactionally formed and manipulated in contentious episodes is also shared by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, who highlight the significance of what they call "category formation" to contentious action (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001). In a similar vein, Adam Sleaz and John Levi Martin (2007) have put forth a model of political action that is sensitive to temporal context. Whereas a linear model of political action "assumes that all

interests are fixed and that the corresponding actions are conditionally independent across time," they argue that the substantive meaning of certain issues is sometimes conditional on past political action in a path-dependent way, such that actors' interests can become re-aligned in time as they engage in an "iterative process of position-taking" within a structural context continually altered by the congealed effects of past action (Slez and Martin 2007: 45-46).

The neo-socialist case is a particularly illuminating one for examining how political identities and motivations are constituted in and through political contention. I have suggested that the neo-socialists' prior ideological commitments cannot explain their subsequent fascist engagement, and that this trajectory entailed a dramatic transformation in political identity. Neo-socialist discourse and the RNP's totalitarianism were not manifestations of a single self-identical essence that was constant through time, but were contingent articulations constructed within vastly different political contexts. From the emergence of the Popular Front to the German Occupation, late Third Republic France was the scene of several momentous shifts in political context. Political actors iteratively staked positions for themselves in such changing circumstances and engaged in symbolic struggles to impose a legitimate definition of the situation. In the case of the neo-socialists, this involved a continual reworking of their political identity as their political fortunes waxed and waned. The steps in the neo-socialists' trajectory did not entail one another, but were overdetermined by the shifting contexts within which they had to act and define themselves. Déat and his allies did not become Nazi sympathizers because neo-socialism had always-already been pre-disposed toward fascism; rather, these erstwhile opponents of fascism became fascists because their position in the political field became increasingly aligned with Nazi power. From anti-fascism to fascism, then, neo-socialism presents

a unique case demonstrating how political identities can be dramatically transformed as actors respond to shifting contexts of political contention.

Marcel Déat and Neo-Socialism

Before going on to further outline my argument, a few words are necessary regarding Marcel Déat. I focus heavily on his political career throughout the dissertation. This is because Déat was incontestably the primary intellectual force behind neo-socialism as well as its political leader. To a large measure the history of neo-socialism is the history of Marcel Déat, and indeed this is how most historians have approached the two. Moreover, as chief of the RNP, Déat also went further than many of his erstwhile neo-socialist comrades down the path of Nazification—further even than those who joined him in the RNP. Thus the full arc of neo-socialism's transformation from an anti-fascist dissidence within the SFIO to a totalitarian auxiliary of Nazi hegemony is best encapsulated in the figure of Déat. When historians write of the fate of neo-socialism, they are, in fact, talking about the path taken by Déat and his followers. Of course, significant divergences among neo-socialists did emerge every once in a while, and they will be discussed insofar as they matter to the story of neo-socialism's fascist transformation. But the dynamic of this transformation largely revolved around Déat, with other neo-socialists either following him or jumping off the bandwagon, so to speak, at various points in time. In this sense, Déat had more historical agency than his comrades, many of whom looked to him to lead the way both intellectually and politically. Ultimately, it makes sense to focus on Déat as the central thread running through the history of neo-socialism and the RNP.

The turns in neo-socialism's history were inextricably bound with the vicissitudes of Déat's ambitions.²⁹ One constant in Déat's career is the repeated frustration of his—and by extension the neo-socialists'—political ambitions. As Bergounioux notes, "Rarely has a political project been marked by a greater failure" (Bergounioux, "Marcel Déat"). What failed, however, was not a singular and unchanging political vision. Rather, Déat's various failures provoked a series of ideological adjustments. His political trajectory was marked by repeated attempts to stake a new, more propitious position for himself in the political field, and each time he sought to discursively justify this move. At every step, Déat was constrained by the structure of possible position-takings in the field, so that each political repositioning and each ideological reformulation was an accommodation to a particular conjuncture of the political field. But this raises the question: when faced with his repeated failures, why did Déat push forward and continually reinvent himself, rather than simply resign himself to his fate and fall into line? Why did he respond to failure by giving different intellectual form to his aspirations, when he could have either abandoned his ambitions or adopted a purely instrumental relation to politics? To answer these questions, one must take into account not only the conjunctural factors that determined Déat's position-takings, but also to the dispositional factors that led him over and over again to seek a new outlet for his ambitions and to rationalize these shifts.

Recollections by Déat's contemporaries all stress his intellectual talent and his evident ambition. The basic portrait of his disposition accords with what we might expect from someone with Déat's particular social trajectory. Born into a modest family of *petits fonctionnaires* in a small provincial town, Déat's intellectual precociousness earned him a rarefied spot at the Lycée

²⁹ The rest of this section is adapted from Desan and Heilbron (2015).

Henri-IV.³⁰ In 1914, Déat was accepted to the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS), where he excelled (Cointet 1998).³¹ Déat thus represented "the perfect profile of the Third Republic 'boursier' [scholarship student], for whom school was a natural path of social promotion" (Le Maitron 2016). Déat owed everything to his intellectual ability and to the school system that consecrated it. Given the quasi-miraculous nature of this scholarly consecration, it is little wonder that Déat would develop a supreme confidence in his abilities and a typically intellectualist faith in the power of ideas. Indeed, according to Georges Lefranc, a fellow *normalien*, what characterized Déat most were a kind of Machiavellian ambition and a belief in "the value of ideas, in their absolute value, in their efficacy" (Lefranc 1980b).

Those who knew Déat have tended to corroborate Lefranc's judgment. The Communist Marcel Prenant described him as "intelligent and active", though also "very infatuated with himself and too ambitious to stay honest for too long" (Prenant 1980: 44). Georges Cogniot, another Communist and fellow *normalien*, claimed that Déat was at that time "already marked by the stigmas of careerism" (Cogniot 1976: 68).³² Raymond Abellio, whose path crossed Déat's both within the socialist movement and later within collaborationist circles, wrote in his memoirs that Déat was "a man who was carried away by the order of reason from which he drew the effects of eloquence" (Abellio 1975: 59).³³ Abellio went on:

³⁰ Déat began his education at the primary level, but would switch to the secondary track. At the time in France, secondary education did not necessarily succeed primary education, but rather constituted a concurrent track generally reserved for the kids of more privileged families who could afford to pay for the *lycée* (primary education was free). Rarely did children in the primary track jump to the secondary track, and when this did happen it was usually with the help of a scholarship. For more on the education system in Third Republic France, see Talbot (1969).

³¹ Though accepted in 1914, Déat's matriculation was postponed to 1919 due to his service in World War I.

³² Of course, as Communists Prenant and Cogniot had an axe to grind against Déat. Déat himself denounced the "communist hatred", "violence", and "bad faith" of Cogniot at the ENS (Déat 1989: 132).

³³ Before changing his name, Abellio was known as Georges Soulès. Soulès, like Déat, started his political career in the SFIO but joined the fascist Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire (MSR), which joined Déat and the RNP in the beginning of 1941 before splitting off again later that year.

Under a deceptive exterior of a too uniformly rhythmic and ill-tempered eloquence, this Nivernais peasant with a temperament of fire...remained a methodical professor, a sociologist of prudent methods who, paradoxically, defended opportunism with vehemence, all while substituting for a world too real, too dense, constructions adroitly tied together by his rhetoric. (Abellio 1975: 92-93)

Déat's scholastic intellectualism and his ambition seem to have stayed with him throughout his life. For example, Jules Moch recalls Léon Blum saying in 1929 that Déat was "fundamentally bad and jealous" and that he had "an ambition that he hides poorly" (Moch 1970: 66).³⁴ Henry du Moulin de Labarthète, Pétain's trusted adviser in Vichy, described Déat as a "normalien of the plebs, inflated with academic pride, consumed by political ambition" for whom "transitions seemed easy" (du Moulin de Labarthète 1946: 318). Even those who were politically sympathetic to Déat have painted a similar picture. Thus Montagnon, a fellow neo-socialist, wrote that Déat was "above all a grand intellectual" and that his "marvelous intellectual mechanism monopolized his whole existence and neglected all else" (Montagnon 1969: 139). Georges Albertini, Déat's right-hand man during the Occupation, also observed the same qualities. According to Albertini, Déat's "simple modesty hid an immense pridefulness made of a prodigious esteem for himself and of a calm contempt for others" (Varenes 1948: 251). Moreover, Déat's "prestigious intelligence" was marked by an "impulsiveness that did not allow him to slow down when it got carried away with an idea" (Varenes 1948: 50). Albertini concludes his portrait of Déat by asserting that we cannot understand him if we

forget that he was a victim of French education...It taught him the manipulation of ideas and not that of men. The humanities distanced him all the more from human reality as they taught him to find more joy in the seductive and corrupting game of speculative intelligence. From the École too came this propensity to act on others only through the detours of reasoning and demonstration. (Varenes 1948: 253)

³⁴ The severity of these remarks struck Moch all the more because of Blum's usual "indulgence." In the 25 years that Moch knew Blum, he claims to have witnessed only three personal, as opposed to political, condemnations pronounced by Blum, one of these being against Déat (Moch 1970: 66, 90).

From humble origins to elite student, Déat's ambition was nourished by an intellectual arrogance consecrated by elite schools and seemingly justified by his quasi-miraculous social promotion. Owing his success to nothing but the quality of his mind, Déat demonstrated an overdeveloped self-confidence in his intellectual abilities while exhibiting the social unease typical of a provincial habitus.³⁵ Déat's ambition was thus deeply intertwined with his scholarly consecration. Indeed, it was as an intellectual that Déat related to others and saw the world.

In fact, Déat launched his political career in earnest only after his academic ambitions stalled. Though already active in the SFIO, after graduating from the ENS in 1920 Déat's priority seems to have been a university career. But in 1926 Déat took advantage of an opportune legislative by-election to become the SFIO deputy for the Marne. In retrospect this marked the end of Déat's academic career, though he seems to have genuinely hesitated on his professional future.³⁶ But if politics in the end turned out to be more propitious for Déat than academia, he did not for all that abandon his scholarly pretensions. Indeed, in reinvesting his academic capital in the political field, it was as an intellectual that Déat entered socialist politics, and it was in socialist politics that he sought to realize his intellectual ambitions. As such, Déat tended to transmute personal rivalries and political problems into questions of theory and doctrine.

Yet Déat's intellectualism should not be confused with a coherent vision of the world striving to realize itself through the various turns in his life. Déat's thinking was highly eclectic. This eclecticism suggests that there was not really a particular content to Déat's "intellectual self-concept" (Gross 2002, 2008), but rather that his self-concept was as an intellectual *tout court*,

³⁵ Déat's biographer, Jean-Paul Cointet, notes that his defining traits were already fixed during his time in school: "a social complex, an excessive self-confidence, intellectual arrogance, certainty of his unique superiority, that of reasoning intelligence" (Cointet 1998: 26).

³⁶ According to Georges Lefranc, Déat told him in 1927: "I dont know if I will continue on the parliamentary path. I could, as Bouglé is pushing me to, write my dissertation, join the senior administration of public instruction, become director in the ministry" (Lefranc 1980a: 160).

and that this self-concept did not so much determine his position-takings as it did the way in which he sought to rationalize them. One might say that Déat's was indeed a "knowledge-political project" (Pels 2000, 2001), but that the ideational content of this project was less important than the vague and self-serving affirmation of the power of knowledge itself, to which Déat maintained a privileged claim. In other words, what Déat carried into politics from his education was not a particular set of ideas but a particular relationship to ideas that, embodied in a scholarly habitus and constituting his self-concept, functioned as a kind of symbolic capital and thus his claim to political credibility. To Déat, his intellectual prowess was a marker of distinction guaranteeing his acumen and legitimating his political position-takings.

Déat's ambition and intellectualist pretensions were critical in how he responded to his many political failures. Déat was disinclined to back down in the face of setbacks and reacted instead by seeking out more propitious political terrain. Moreover, Déat's taste for intellectual novelty and scandal predisposed him to give every political vicissitude a moral and theoretical significance that committed him to a *fuite en avant*, a flight forward. At each step in his evolution, Déat's politics represented an adaptation to a particular state of the political field and an elaboration of a new position within it. Déat's eventual transformation into a fascist was not driven by an inexorable logic contained within neo-socialism such as it was articulated in 1933, nor can it be explained by vague references to fascism's gradual influence on Déat's thinking. Déat's movement toward fascism was instead propelled forward by the repeated frustration of his political and intellectual ambitions, which eventually led to a fateful accommodation with Nazi power.

Outline of the Argument

Déat's political engagements were not simply the expression of a fixed set of ideational commitments. Rather, his political identity—and neo-socialist discourse generally—was transformed through his participation in the political conflicts of his time. Any adequate explanation of Déat and his comrades' trajectories from socialist dissidence to fascism needs to take as its object not just the content of neo-socialist discourse, but also its relation to the shifting contexts of action and argumentation within which they intervened. Their fate was not pre-ordained, but was the contingent outcome of a series of consequential adjustments to these changing circumstances.

In this dissertation, I trace the transformations in neo-socialist practice and discourse from neo-socialism's emergence as a dissident current within the SFIO in the early 1930s to its eventual alignment and ideological identification with Nazism during the German Occupation. Part I examines the birth of neo-socialism as a doctrine distinct from traditional socialism and the 1933 schism of the SFIO in which the neo-socialists were expelled. The extant historiography of this schism tends to interpret it as the joint product of a doctrinal revision introduced by the neo-socialists and an analytically separate tactical challenge by the party's reformist wing pushing for a policy of socialist ministerial participation within bourgeois governments. The problem with this interpretation, I argue, is that it treats neo-socialism as a coherent and ready-made doctrinal alternative to party orthodoxy, whereas the historical record suggests that the neo-socialists themselves initially conceived of their project as a tactical, and not doctrinal, challenge to the party leadership.

What needs to be explained is how a debate over the tactic of ministerial participation was transmuted into a debate over socialist doctrine. I argue that this distinction between tactics and doctrine does not have a self-evident analytical value and was in fact a polemical stake in the factional struggles within the SFIO. The distinction functioned as a performative "axiological operator" that served to define the limits of acceptable discourse within the SFIO, and as such was itself an object of contention between the different socialist factions.

First I show that although doctrine was important as a guarantor of party unity and identity, challenges to doctrine were not in themselves enough to provoke an internal party crisis. I argue that to understand the role that the doctrine/tactics distinction played in the SFIO one needs to grasp the way in which it was embedded in, and was mobilized within, the factional conflict over ministerial participation. I then trace the evolution of this factional conflict, focusing particularly on how the shifting balance of forces between the factions affected actors' interpretations of the situation. I show that although initially both participationists and anti-participationists agreed that the factional conflict pertained to a tactical, not doctrinal, question, as the participationists grew in strength and began to materially challenge the incumbent anti-participationists for supremacy within the SFIO, the anti-participationists began to re-interpret the conflict as a doctrinal one in order to delegitimize the participationists. While the participationists first rejected such an interpretation, as their challenge faltered and the party's center faction joined the party left in its accusations, some participationists were disinclined to back down and eventually assumed the label of doctrinal heretic that had been imposed on them. It was in this context that "neo-socialism" emerged as a distinct doctrine and political identity embraced by the dissident leaders in order to differentiate themselves from the SFIO. Neo-socialism was thus not a pre-constituted doctrinal revision that found expression in the 1933

schism, but rather the contingent outcome of the schismatic dynamic itself, constituted in and through the vicissitudes of the factional conflict over ministerial participation.

In Part II I trace the trajectory of neo-socialism from the 1933 creation of an independent neo-socialist party, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF), to its association with the Popular Front in 1936. This period is often seen as one in which neo-socialism freely expressed itself unfettered by the doctrinal considerations of the SFIO. In other words, with its emergence as an autonomous political force neo-socialism could finally show its true identity. This true identity, moreover, was one that supposedly telegraphed the neo-socialists' future fascist turn, the supposition being that the ideological germ of the neo-socialists' 1943 pro-Nazi commitments was already contained in the neo-socialism of 1933 and had only to grow over time.

The conventional historiographical wisdom has thus rested on two mistaken assumptions. The first is that neo-socialist discourse had inherent fascist tendencies from the very beginning which only became more manifest during the German Occupation—i.e. what I have called the "continuity thesis" above. In support of this view, the neo-socialists' embrace of the slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" has often been cited as proof that fascism was essentially inscribed in neo-socialist discourse. A second assumption has been what I have called the "idealist/intellectualist bias"—i.e. the idea that concrete political engagements are straightforward expressions of prior ideological commitments and identities. The presumption here is that the explanatory principle behind the neo-socialists' political practice in the 1930s and beyond can be found within the ideational features of a self-identical and coherent neo-socialism. Thus if Déat and his comrades were ready and willing collaborators during the Occupation, it was because neo-socialist ideology itself had accommodated them over time to Nazism. Taken together, these assumptions posit a neo-socialist discourse that was a more or less consistent and

determinant factor in the neo-socialists' evolution toward fascism. The period between 1933 and the French defeat in 1940 has thus often been interpreted as one in which neo-socialism's inherent fascist inclinations progressively revealed themselves.

I argue that the notion of a self-identical and coherent neo-socialism impelling the neo-socialists' toward fascism fits poorly with a full consideration of the neo-socialists' history. The 1930s were a turbulent time in French politics, and the neo-socialists' trajectories were punctuated by multiple political re-positionings as they responded to shifting political conjunctures. With every shift in the conjuncture, moreover, the neo-socialists redefined their discourse to suit their new position in the political field. There was thus no straight line between the neo-socialism of 1933 and the RNP's fascism of 1943.

Drawing on discourse analysis and the "Cambridge School" of historiography, I begin with an analysis of the slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" as it was deployed in the first months of neo-socialism's existence. I argue that far from being an expression of fascist thinking, an examination of its broader discursive context and illocutionary force reveals the slogan to be a deliberate attempt to appropriate and re-articulate the problematic terms in service of a popular-democratic re-alignment of socialist and anti-fascist discourse. So much for the notion that neo-socialism was always-already fascist.

Following the February 6 1934 anti-parliamentary riots in Paris, however, neo-socialism did in fact take an equivocal turn and began flirting with the *fascisant* right. It was in this period that the notion of a proto-fascist neo-socialism has most credence. To understand why neo-socialism took this turn, I argue, one needs to complement discourse analysis with a situational analysis that pays attention to the crucial mediating role of political practice—and the situational contexts in which it unfolds—in the transformation of political identity. I draw loosely on

Bourdieuian field theory and Dobry's "relational perspective" to argue that the neo-socialists' political identities between 1933 and the Popular Front period were not reducible to a stable neo-socialist essence, but were relationally constituted in and through the shifting configurations of the French political field. The story of neo-socialism in this period was not a linear unfolding of inherent ideational tendencies, but of an iterative reworking that responded to the vicissitudes of a turbulent political field.

I thus argue that the equivocal turn in neo-socialist discourse in 1934 did not represent a logical development of neo-socialist principles, but rather represented a contingent adaptation to opportunities opened by the post-riot political context. But as this context changed, so too did neo-socialism. Indeed, the neo-socialists quickly abandoned their equivocal posture as they were pulled into the orbit of the Popular Front, a broad political coalition of the left whose *raison d'être* was to stop the rise of fascism. In joining the Popular Front, the neo-socialists once again found themselves situated unambiguously on the democratic and anti-fascist left, and this fact became reflected in their discursive output. Far from being an aberration on an otherwise inexorable path toward fascism, I argue that the neo-socialists' embrace of the Popular Front even after their flirtation with fascist themes in 1934 is further evidence of the lability of neo-socialist discourse.

I close Part II by considering the significance of the Popular Front period for the neo-socialists' transformation into fascists. The neo-socialists initially greeted the Popular Front favorably, seeing in its distinctively popular-democratic discourse an echo of their own earlier efforts to re-orient the socialist movement. The problem, I argue, was that while the neo-socialists could plausibly claim to be the standard-bearers of Popular Front discourse, they were in fact marginalized within the coalition. On the one hand the Socialists were finally willing to

govern, thus rendering moot the issue at the origin of the 1933 neo-socialist schism. On the other hand, the stunning reversal by the Communists from an intransigently revolutionary class politics to a full-throated embrace of a popular-democratic republican discourse meant that the neo-socialists' natural position in the coalition had effectively been usurped. Institutionally much weaker than the Socialists, Communists, and Radicals, the neo-socialists thus saw themselves deprived of any distinctive identity within the Popular Front, a fact confirmed by their poor showing in the 1936 legislative elections that brought the Popular Front to power. This, I argue, led to the fragmentation and decomposition of neo-socialism, such that it basically ceased to exist as a distinct force in the political field.

Neo-socialism as such thus does not provide a continuous thread to the fascism of the RNP. My argument is that the period between 1933 and 1936 is crucial in the neo-socialists' later fascist transformation not because it was characterized by a progressive elaboration of tendencies inherent to neo-socialism, but on the contrary because it witnessed the marginalization and decomposition of neo-socialism. With the Popular Front monopolizing the left political space, the failure of neo-socialism to implant itself effectively unmoored Déat and his closest collaborators from the French left and relegated them to the political wilderness, such that they became "available" for another political reclassification.

I begin Part III by revisiting the historical connection between neo-socialism and the RNP. I argue that even though the RNP itself tried to emphasize its continuity with Déat's neo-socialist past, this connection should not be overstated. In fact, leading neo-socialists were as likely to join the Resistance or engage in softer forms of collaboration as they were to join the RNP and embrace fascism. Moreover, although it did draw predominantly from the left, the leadership of the RNP was not homogeneous in its political origins. Less than half of the party's

top-level leadership had been neo-socialists, and many of the rest came from diverging factions of the SFIO. There was even more political heterogeneity at the lower levels, with the weight of neo-socialism much less there.

A more salient factor than neo-socialism in explaining participation in the RNP was one's attitude toward appeasement in the years immediately prior to World War II. Mounting international tensions led to a reclassification of the French political field as the growing rift between pacifist appeasers and bellicist resisters crosscut traditional political divisions. On the left, this resulted in a disarticulation of pacifism and anti-fascism and led pacifists to adopt an "anti-anti-fascist" stance that was indulgent toward German claims on Europe. Moreover, in making common cause with the pro-appeasement right, left-wing pacifists increasingly found themselves unmoored from the left political field. After several years of political marginality, it was as a leader of this heterogeneous peace camp that Déat returned to prominence in the late 1930s. Indeed, it was their participation in pro-appeasement circles, and not neo-socialism as such, that was the vector through which Déat and other future leaders of the RNP found themselves available, on the eve of the war, for a politics of Franco-German collaboration and an alliance with the fascist right.

Yet, I argue, Déat and his allies were still not Nazi sympathizers before France's defeat in June 1940. It was their pacifist inclination to find a *modus vivendi* with Germany, and not a prior conversion to fascism, that led them to favor collaboration when the defeat finally came. Once they set on the path of collaboration, however, the logic of the Occupation was such that their commitment to Franco-German collaboration was progressively transformed into a moral and ideological solidarity with Nazism.

Having failed to insinuate himself within Vichy's power structure, Déat moved to occupied Paris, where he founded the RNP to push for a policy of robust collaboration. After an inauspicious start during which Déat struggled to maintain control of the organization, the RNP eventually came into its own by rallying the collaborationist left. However, far from being the only collaborationist movement with political aspirations, the RNP had to compete against other movements with more established fascist credentials.

As the Occupation went on, Déat and other collaborationist leaders were caught up in the radicalizing dynamic of the field of Parisian collaborationism. The peculiarly heteronomous conditions of this field, in which all political activity was dependent on German sanction, meant that the rival collaborationist groups competed principally for German recognition, which they saw as a necessary condition for their aspirations to power. To obtain this consecration, moreover, the competing groups all sought to demonstrate their fidelity to the Nazi cause by remaking themselves in a Nazified image.

Over the course of the Occupation, then, the different collaborationist movements were driven by the logic of the field toward a convergent emulation of Nazism. I argue that the RNP's progressive Nazification—with its embrace of anti-Semitism, its explicit "totalitarianism," and its fanatical support for Nazi European hegemony—thus expressed the evolution of the collaborationist field as a whole, and not the party's specificity as a movement with socialist and neo-socialist origins. In other words, I argue that the Nazified fascism of the RNP was an emergent phenomenon. It represented a novel convergence with competing fascist movements under the particular situational pressures of the Occupation much more than it did the development of any logic internal to neo-socialist discourse.

Part I.

Tactics and Doctrine: The 1933 Socialist Schism and the Birth of Neo-Socialism

At the July 1933 Congress of the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO)—i.e. the French Socialist Party—three leaders of the party's right-wing faction mounted what came to be perceived as a frontal assault on the party's revolutionary doctrine. Alarmed by the rise of European fascism and the party's inaction in the face of a worsening economic crisis, they called for the construction of an intermediary regime between capitalism and socialism and for a revision of the party's traditional proletarian orientation. What was needed was a strong State capable of rallying the middle classes, and to that end it was proposed that the party take up "order, authority, nation" as its new watchwords. These "neo-socialists," as the challengers came to be called, were accused of flirting with fascism and were expelled from the SFIO several months later, with other members of the right-wing faction following them out. In total, the party lost 7 senators, 28 deputies, and just under 30,000 members to the schism (Lefranc 1982, Ligou 1962). "Neo-socialism" became the doctrinal foundation of a new party created after the schism, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF), some of whose founders would go on to become Nazi collaborators ten years later.

The 1933 schism has been commonly referred to as the "neo-socialist schism," and it is often presumed that the schism was provoked by the neo-socialists' doctrinal revision. The historian Daniel Ligou, for example, has claimed that the "crisis of confidence in democracy" represented by neo-socialism was "at the origin of the schism" (Ligou 1962: 390). Likewise Dan White has suggested that the core of the conflict within the party was the neo-socialists' fundamental challenge to its Marxist doctrine (White 1992: 104). In fact, the schism was precipitated by the repeated indiscipline of the party's parliamentary group, a majority of which was aligned with the right-wing faction advocating parliamentary and governmental collaboration with the center-left Parti Radical. The schism was the culmination of a long conflict within the Party between the participationists, as those who favored Socialist ministerial participation in bourgeois governments were called, and the Party majority, which categorically rejected any such participation. Indeed, the neo-socialists were not technically expelled for their doctrinal heresy, but rather for their refusal to follow the will of the party majority on questions of parliamentary strategy.

If neo-socialism as such was not the immediate cause of the 1933 schism, then what was its relation to it? Specialists on French socialism have tended to interpret the schism as the conjunction of two parallel challenges to the party establishment, related but analytically separate. On the one hand were the reformist parliamentarians like Pierre Renaudel, whose objections to the party line were largely tactical—the party's attitude towards ministerial participation foremost among these. On the other hand were the authentic neo-socialists, who "demanded a complete revamping of Socialist theory and action" (Colton 1966: 82). In the words of Stanley Grossman, the "Neo-Socialist split of 1933 combined those elements in the party favoring participation with elements favoring a more basic doctrinal revision" (Grossman 1985:

48). According to this view, the 1933 schism was thus driven by two concurrent challenges to the Party line, one tactical and the other doctrinal. The two are understood to have been essentially distinct, a fact apparently confirmed by subsequent tension between the reformists and neo-socialists within the newly created PSdF. If the expulsions were ostensibly triggered by the participationists' intransigence over tactics, the neo-socialists' doctrinal revision was a separate but no less significant factor in splitting the party.

The above interpretation is only partly correct. By the time of the schism in November 1933, neo-socialism had indeed come to represent a doctrinal challenge to the traditional socialism of the SFIO. Moreover, not all of those who left the party assumed the mantle of neo-socialism—some denied any revisionist pretensions and continued to frame their disagreement with the SFIO as an issue of tactics. The schismatics who created the PSdF were thus congenitally split between doctrinal heretics and reformist parliamentarians. The tendency, however, has been to overestimate the historical distinction between these two groups, as if the neo-socialists were an always-already constituted group, and neo-socialism a coherent doctrinal challenge emerging ready-made from the heads of its founders. Marcel Déat, in particular, has been described as the "oracle" of neo-socialism (White 1992: 89), and his 1930 book, *Perspectives socialistes*, its "Charter" and "doctrinal base" (Bergounioux 1978: 396; Lefranc 1982: 122). In this view, the dissident discourses pronounced at the 1933 Congress were only the expression of a pre-existing will to doctrinal revision.

In the prevailing accounts of the 1933 schism, its relationship to neo-socialism has thus tended to be conceptualized in such a way as to hypostasize the latter. Neo-socialism's character as a consistent and willful revision of the SFIO's traditional socialist doctrine is often assumed. Inasmuch as its emergence as a distinct political ideology is even discussed, these accounts have

been biased towards an internalist history of ideas approach privileging anterior ideational factors in the birth of neo-socialism, usually treated as an autonomous intellectual development. So whereas neo-socialism linked up with the participationist insurgency within the SFIO, their histories are seen as essentially distinct, the latter having to do with diverging tactical assessments of the political opportunity structure and the former concerning the more fundamental points of doctrine. Another feature of the prevailing accounts of neo-socialism's relation to the schism, then, has been to take this distinction between tactics and doctrine for granted.

I argue that the history of neo-socialism was inseparable from the history of the factional conflict over ministerial participation, inscribed as it was from the beginning within this conflict. The neo-socialists were not an identifiable group until 1933, before which neo-socialism as such, i.e. as a self-conscious and widely recognized doctrinal challenge to the SFIO, did not exist. Before becoming doctrinal heretics, the future neo-socialists were in fact principally focused on re-orienting the SFIO's parliamentary action. Even when it finally made its appearance, neo-socialism was not the autonomous construction of Déat or anybody else. Rather, it was collectively elaborated in and through the factional conflict over ministerial participation, its fate tied to the conflict's ebb and flow. I argue that neo-socialism only came to be recognized as a political doctrine distinct from the SFIO's traditional socialism once the factional conflict reached a point such that a schism became inevitable.

Crucial to this process was the discursive mobilization of the distinction between tactics and doctrine within the SFIO. Unlike much of the extant historiography, I do not assume that this distinction has any analytical value, such that some issues are considered inherently tactical (e.g. participation) and others doctrinal (e.g. neo-socialism). I argue instead that the distinction is

arbitrary and functioned within the party as an "axiological operator," i.e. as a polemical device defining the limits of legitimate discourse (Sapiro 2004). The SFIO considered its doctrine to be sacrosanct, yet the line dividing doctrine and tactics was fluid. Thus whether what came to be labeled as "neo-socialism" constituted a doctrinal heresy or was instead simply a tactical argument for ministerial participation was not self-evident, but was rather the object of a classification struggle within the SFIO.

The classification struggle over the meaning of neo-socialism was itself an element in the long factional conflict over ministerial participation, and its outcome depended on the factional balance of forces. Thus I show that so long as the party incumbents hostile to participation were secure in their majority, it could be agreed that the factional debate only concerned a tactical question. But as the challenge from the participationist faction grew and threatened to overturn this majority, the party left began accusing the participationists of a doctrinal heresy in order to discredit and neutralize them. At first, the future neo-socialists resisted this label and insisted on their doctrinal fidelity. It was only when a schism became a near certainty after the participationists' stubborn bid for party supremacy was decisively dashed and party leader Léon Blum entered the fray that a segment of the Party right began to explicitly recast their challenge as a fundamentally doctrinal one. Indeed, it was only in 1933, several months before the schism, that "neo-socialism" as a term became widely used and, more importantly, began to be adopted by the challengers themselves. What started as a tactical disagreement was thus transmuted into a doctrinal controversy following the ebb and flow of the factional conflict. What was initially a polemical label imposed on the challengers as a means to discredit them became for them the foundation of their new political identity, precisely at a point when a new political identity was

needed. Neo-socialism's existence as a coherent and self-conscious revision of socialist doctrine was thus less a cause of the 1933 schism than its product.

Chapter 1.

French Socialist Doctrine and the Question of Ministerial Participation

The SFIO and its Doctrine in the 1920s

In 1920, a majority of the old SFIO voted to join the Third International and become the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). A minority rejected the Bolshevik turn and chose instead to rebuild the SFIO. The fault line of this schism, however, did not divide the left and right of the old party, but cut across the left (Kriegel 1964). As Tony Judt (1976, 1986) has pointed out, the post-schism dynamic, rather than freeing the SFIO to embrace a reformist vocation, instead compelled it to anxiously prove its own revolutionary credentials. Besides being anathema to the many self-styled revolutionaries remaining within the SFIO, a move to the right would have been complicated by the presence of the powerful center-left, reformist, and republican Parti Radical. To its left, the SFIO was in danger of losing much of its proletarian base to the PCF. The SFIO's solution to this dilemma was to repeatedly reaffirm its doctrinal fidelity to the founding principles of the old SFIO, both as a bulwark against any backsliding to its right and as a demonstration of its rightful inheritance of the true revolutionary socialist tradition. Thus in a manifesto issued shortly after the 1920 schism, the SFIO insisted that the party "need not present

to the workers of France a new program or new doctrines."¹ In its first post-schism congress, the Party proclaimed its "unshakeable fidelity to the principles and traditional tactics of international socialism, such as they have been defined by the Amsterdam Resolution, the Unity Pact and the Toulouse Motion".²

What was the nature of this doctrine? The old SFIO was formed—at the prodding of the 1904 Amsterdam Congress of the Second International—with the 1905 merger of several competing socialist parties, notably the more reformist Parti Socialiste Français, led by Jean Jaurès, and the intransigently revolutionary Parti Socialiste de France led by the Marxist vulgarizer Jules Guesde (Ansell 2001, Lefranc 1963). The resulting Unity Pact declared:

The Socialist Party is a class party whose goal is to socialize the means of production and exchange, that is to say to transform capitalist society into a collectivist and communist society, and whose means are the economic and political organization of the proletariat. By its goal, by its ideal, by the means it employs, the Socialist Party, all the while pursuing the realization of immediate reforms demanded by the working class, is not a party of reform, but a party of class struggle and revolution.³

This unequivocal affirmation of the revolutionary class character of the party was accompanied by strict party control over socialist parliamentarians, enjoining them for example to vote against all bourgeois budgets. With its suspicion of socialist parliamentarians and its emphasis on class struggle, the original formulation of the doctrinal basis of the new party clearly bears the imprint of Guesdism. Yet it was Jaurès whom posterity has anointed as not only the architect, but also the incarnation, of socialist unity. A reformist parliamentarian, Jaurès

¹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. "Le Manifeste du Conseil National: Aux Travailleurs de France" *Le Populaire* February 15 1921.

² "Les Résolutions du Congrès" *Le Populaire* November 2 1921.

³ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *1e et 2e Congrès nationaux, tenus à Paris en avril 1905 et à Chalon-sur-Saône en octobre 1905: compte rendu analytique*. Paris: Conseil national du Parti socialiste S.F.I.O., pp. 13-14.

would have been classed on the right of the SFIO had he not assumed a new role as *de facto* party leader by virtue of his unparalleled ability to harmonize the party's different factions. Indeed, the so-called "Jaurèssist Synthesis" represented by the 1908 Toulouse Congress motion became for many a doctrinal statement at least as important as the 1905 Unity Pact, and was explicitly invoked as such by the 1921 congress of the reconstituted SFIO.

The 1908 motion sought to reconcile revolutionary and reformist tendencies within the Party. In line with the Unity Pact, the motion declared that the "Socialist Party, party of the working class and of social revolution, pursues the conquest of political power for the emancipation of proletarians, by the destruction of the capitalist regime and the suppression of classes." However, the motion introduced a measure of ambiguity with regard to the party's attitude toward reformism:

Precisely because [the Socialist Party] is a party of revolution...it is the party that is most essentially, most actively reformative, the only one that can give to each of its working class demands its full effect, the only one that can always make of each reform, of each conquest, the point of departure and fulcrum of broader demands and of bolder conquests; and when it signals to the working class, together with the utility, the necessity, and benefit of each reform, the limits also imposed on it by the capitalist milieu itself, it is not to deter it from the immediate effort of realization, it is to bring it to conquer new reforms and make it present and sensitive to the point of an incessant effort of amelioration, to the necessity of total reform, of the decisive transformation of property.⁴

While the 1905 Unity Pact did not categorically reject reforms, the 1908 Toulouse motion effectively acknowledged their revolutionary value.

⁴ "La résolution du Ve Congrès: Vive l'unité socialiste!" *L'Humanité* October 19 1908.

At the most basic level, the party's doctrinal inheritance was of a proletarian party committed to social revolution, i.e. the socialization of the means of production and exchange. And while socialist deputies were reminded of their duty to oppose the bourgeois regime, this did not preclude them from fulfilling an equal obligation, spelled out in 1905 and reaffirmed in 1921, to defend and extend political liberties and to support reforms that would benefit workers. Indeed, given that the revolution was not to be on the agenda until the economic conditions for it were ripe, the party's immediate task was to prepare for this revolutionary future through propaganda work and, in the meanwhile, pursue reforms within the bourgeois republican framework. The SFIO was thus defined not only by the vulgarized Marxist catechisms of Guesde, but also by a commitment to bring about "complete democracy and the veritable Republic."⁵

One might characterize the party's doctrine as incoherent because of its straddling of reform and revolution.⁶ This, however, misses the point. If, as Judt argues, the 1905 merger necessarily glossed over profound differences among the different party factions, it was nonetheless "precisely *because* the foundations of socialist unification were so shaky" that "there was a tendency to make a fetish of the principle of unity" (Judt 1986: 116). The agreement on doctrine, "however rudimentary its character was in many ways", permitted this unity (Bergounioux and Grunberg 2005: 60). It was, in other words, precisely the deceptive simplicity of its propositions and the ambiguous relation of reform to revolution within it that allowed doctrine to unite, in 1920 as in 1905, a diversity of political sensibilities and become "the cement of the organization" (Bergounioux and Grunberg 2005: 90). Doctrine became the keeper, for the

⁵ "La résolution du Ve Congrès: Vive l'unité socialiste!" *L'Humanité* October 19 1908.

⁶ Despite its functional importance for Party unity, knowledge of Marxism among Socialists was generally superficial. Indeed, even among the leading lights of the Party, the discovery of Marxist thought seems not to have been an important factor in their becoming socialists (Lévy 1932).

Socialist left, of the party's revolutionary faith, whereas for the party right it gave meaning and direction to its pursuit of reforms.

A certain vulgarized form of Marxism, codified into doctrine, thus became a factor of unity in an otherwise divided party. Its importance to the party's self-conception can be gleaned from the countless references and appeals to "doctrine" in the party press and during party congresses. Indeed the virtues of socialist doctrine were a recurring theme in the columns of Paul Faure, the SFIO's Guesdist secretary general. For example, in one of his typical panegyrics to doctrine in the party newspaper, he wrote that doctrine was "our only reason for being, our 'guardian angel' that protects us against our own errors and possible weaknesses, the pure goddess whose golden robe is never tarnished by desertions or betrayals and by which are illuminated our acts, our thoughts, are harbored our hopes and without which, for us, the present cannot be explained nor the future understood."⁷

Doctrine was at the core of Socialist identity. Léon Blum, who by the 1920s had taken over Jaurès's old role as the party's *de facto* leader, wrote that it was doctrine that "makes us what we are" and that it was the Party's duty to "pronounce it in its full clarity, both vis-à-vis the Radicals and vis-à-vis Bolshevism."⁸ According to a 1927 Party resolution, the Radicals were separated from the Socialists by a "profound conflict of doctrines," so that whereas reforms for the Radicals were "a means of social conservation," they were for the Socialists only "an episode in the march of the proletariat toward the overthrow of the regime."⁹ As for the Bolsheviks, though they shared the Socialists' goal of a revolutionary transformation of property relations,

⁷ Paul Faure "Méthode, Programme, Doctrine, Action" *Le Populaire* October 6 1923.

⁸ Léon Blum "Révolution et Dictature" *Le Populaire* February 5 1927.

⁹ "La motion adoptée par la majorité" *Le Populaire* April 21 1927.

their substitution of the political for the social revolution constituted a fatal theoretical deviation explaining their authoritarian drift.¹⁰

The SFIO's doctrine was thus basically defined by a commitment to proletarian class struggle and revolution, albeit without categorically rejecting reforms within a bourgeois democratic framework so long as the material and moral conditions for revolution were not ripe. In the post-1920 SFIO, doctrine was both a guarantor of unity and a marker of distinction for a party that could only precariously claim either. Even after the 1920 schism the reconstituted SFIO remained riven by opposing factions and unity was secured only by repeatedly invoking the party's original doctrine and thus reaffirming its covenantal function. Moreover, displaced by a vigorously proletarian PCF to its left and anxious not to be absorbed into the bourgeois democratic reformism of the Radicals, the SFIO insisted on its fidelity to the doctrine of Guesde and Jaurès in order to prove its revolutionary legitimacy and stake out an independent position for itself on the left. Without this faith in its doctrine, the party would lack an identity, and aware of this, party leaders ritualistically invoked doctrine and zealously guarded its purity.

Emerging Challenges to Doctrine

Despite the covenantal function of doctrine, the 1905 Unity Pact nonetheless recognized the right to free discussion within the SFIO on questions of doctrine and methods.¹¹ With the party focused on reconstruction, challenges to the Party's doctrinal line were few and far between in the immediate period after the 1920 schism. But by the early 1930s, some grew impatient with the party's Guesdist line. Having come of age politically after World War I and thus without direct experience of the old quarrels between Guesde and Jaurès, the fetish made of doctrinal

¹⁰ "La motion adoptée par la majorité" *Le Populaire* April 21 1927.

¹¹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *1e et 2e Congrès nationaux, tenus à Paris en avril 1905 et à Chalon-sur-Saône en octobre 1905: compte rendu analytique*. Paris: Conseil national du Parti socialiste S.F.I.O.

unity had a weaker hold on these young challengers. Moreover, they were especially sensitive to the post-war transformations in the capitalist economy. Mass production, industrial rationalization, and the growth of corporate trusts and cartels had fundamentally changed the 19th century liberal capitalism that formed the backdrop of orthodox socialist thinking.¹² These challengers by and large saw themselves as "realists", urging the SFIO to reckon with these economic transformations (Biard 1985). While these challengers all urged the party to adapt its methods, to varying degrees they also called for a doctrinal revision. In doing so they were openly calling into question the sacred core around which the party's unity and identity were constituted, and thereby risked excluding themselves from the Socialist community. And yet their attempts at doctrinal revision were not equally consequential. Indeed, whereas some of these challengers would exit the party in the 1933 neo-socialist schism, others remained faithful to the SFIO. In other words, there was no necessary relation between a doctrinal challenge in itself and exclusion, voluntary or forced, from the SFIO.

Among the future neo-socialist leaders of 1933, Barthélémy Montagnon and Marcel Déat already had a history of challenging the Guesdist foundations of the SFIO. Trained as an engineer, Montagnon tended to approach the problems of socialism from a technician's perspective. In his 1929 book, *Grandeur et servitude socialiste*, Montagnon complained of the Party's outdated doctrine that "no longer correspond[ed] to the facts" (Montagnon 1929: 10). Echoing the themes of Eduard Bernstein's revisionism in the German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) thirty years earlier, Montagnon argued that the weakness of socialism was that it was "reformist in practice and revolutionary in words." It was the worn doctrine of

¹² For an overview of these economic transformations in France, see Kuisel (1981) and Maier (1975).

Socialism that had to be updated and brought into line with practice (Montagnon 1929: 171).¹³ Indeed, the book mounted a direct assault on the basic premises of Guesdist Marxism. Rejecting the labor theory of value and economic determinism, Montagnon also asserted that many of Marx's predictions had been disproved by the facts. Montagnon claimed that the Marxist dialectic of history had been undone by the normalization, mechanization, and rationalization of capitalist production. Impressed by American mass production techniques, Montagnon argued that industrial rationalization, in increasing the standard of living of workers and in creating a new middle class of industrial technicians, increasingly blunted class antagonisms and opened a non-revolutionary road to socialism. The task at hand was to increase the managerial competency of the working class and reinforce the administrative power of the State such that when Socialists came to power peacefully they could channel the natural evolution of modern capitalism towards a kind of syndicalist socialism. To this end, however, socialism had to abandon its proletarian exclusivism and appeal instead to technicians, the middle classes, and peasants. An alliance with the Parti Radical, which represented the middle classes, was thus a necessity for Montagnon. Montagnon even denied that there was any essential doctrinal difference between the Radicals and the Socialists, if it were recognized that the SFIO was not and could not be a revolutionary party (Montagnon 1929: 165). On the other hand, there was "no worse enemy" for socialism than communism, and as such it was imperative for the Socialists to demarcate themselves doctrinally from the Bolsheviks and to force the working class to choose between an impossible revolution and a frankly reformist path (Montagnon 1929: 167).

¹³ Frédéric Bon and Michel-Antoine Burnier (1974) argue that the basic logic of the revisionist controversy in the turn-of-the-century SPD was also that of all subsequent factional conflicts within socialist parties. According to them, the origins of these conflicts were to be found in the necessary disjuncture between doctrine and practice that afflicted all revolutionary socialist parties that achieved a measure of success within bourgeois society. Whereas left-wing factions demanded that party practice conform to socialism's revolutionary doctrine, right-wing factions instead sought to bring doctrine into conformity with the party's reformist practice. Meanwhile, centrist factions benefited from the organizational autonomy granted by the ambiguous relation between doctrine and practice.

Illustration 4. Portrait of Barthélémy Montagnon, 1933



Montagnon's book, despite its explicit call for a doctrinal revision, did not provoke much reaction in the party. This was less the case for Marcel Déat's *Perspectives socialistes* (1930). Historians have traced the birth of neo-socialism specifically back to this book (Grossman 1975, Sternhell [1983] 2000), with Bergounioux calling it the "charter" of neo-socialism (Bergounioux 1978: 396).¹⁴ Déat himself, in his post-war memoirs, puts forth this interpretation (Déat 1989: 234-236). Yet to treat *Perspectives Socialistes* as a clear articulation of neo-socialism, such as it came to be understood at the time of the 1933 schism, is problematic for at least a couple reasons. First, although the term "neo-socialism" did in fact date from the book's 1930 publication, it did so as a pejorative label applied by a Guesdist critic of the book (Lebas 1931). As discussed further below, Déat initially rejected the term and the doctrinal heresy that it implied. The term only caught on several years later when the factional struggle within the party intensified, and did not refer primarily to the theses of *Perspectives Socialistes*. Second, likely owing to his

¹⁴ Sternhell ([1983] 2000) goes further and argues that Déat's later fascism was anticipated by his positions in *Perspectives Socialistes*. This also seems to have been Déat's self-understanding. In his memoirs, written immediately after World War II, Déat states that of the arguments made in *Perspectives Socialistes*, he would "today have only a few things to modify" (Déat 1989: 234-235).

leadership aspirations within the party, Déat was less willing than Montagnon to explicitly repudiate the doctrinal foundations of the Party.¹⁵

Illustration 5. Portrait of Marcel Déat, 1932



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Unlike Montagnon, Déat did not mount a frontal assault on Marxism as such, but rather recast it in idealist terms, describing it as "the psychological and sociological method of analysis corresponding to capitalist civilization and mentality" (Déat 1930: 23). Influenced by the German historicist tradition (Max Scheler, Max Weber, and Werner Sombart in particular), Déat rejected the rationalist materialism that undergirded economic determinism and instead saw capitalism as a "type of civilization" defined as much by the psychology of profit as by the

¹⁵ It could be argued that Déat was only more careful to dissimulate what was in fact a doctrinal revision every bit as deep as Montagnon's. This, however, misses the point: given the sacred function of the ritual invocation of doctrine within the SFIO, to openly call doctrine as such into question was to risk a far more serious breach than to challenge its substance beneath a veil of equivocation.

ownership of the means of production (Déat 1930: 20).¹⁶ Like Montagnon, however, he noted that the Marxist prediction of growing proletarianization had not come true. Instead, modern finance capitalism increasingly exploited the middle classes indirectly through the mechanisms of credit and the market, making them natural allies of the working class. Déat thus advocated the formation of a broad "anticapitalist" front, which he conceived as a counter-civilization capable of morally and politically isolating the bourgeoisie.¹⁷

Influenced by Jaurès, Déat also questioned the old Marxist understanding of the State as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie, seeing it instead as a representation of the balance of class forces within society. As such, the Socialist Party's task was to penetrate the State with the "anticapitalist" spirit, and undertake a series of structural reforms to direct capitalist development in a socialist direction. Observing the growing separation of managerial authority from ownership in the modern corporation, Déat argued that ownership of the means of production was a less urgent concern for socialists than the ability to exercise control over the economy. Déat thus proposed as a first step the "socialization of power", i.e. the imposition of partial State and worker supervision over the management of major industrial firms that would nonetheless leave ownership structures intact. This was to be followed by the "socialization of profit", with the State redistributing profits to discourage speculation. Déat envisioned that these measures would meet little resistance from capitalists, who would ultimately benefit from a rationally organized economy.¹⁸ Finally, only after power and profit had been socialized and the political

¹⁶ Déat claimed that his account was more sociological in that, like Durkheim, he saw social facts as simultaneously material and spiritual, neither aspect having an *a priori* causal primacy (Déat 1930).

¹⁷ Déat's conceptions recall Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, a fact that should undermine Sternhell's ([1983] 2000) contention that the class collaborationism advocated by Déat was essentially fascist.

¹⁸ Indeed, according to Déat the State would only be building on and regulating the process of cartellization that firms were themselves organizing to defend against the vicissitudes of the market.

influence of the bourgeoisie thereby neutralized would property be socialized along syndicalist and cooperative lines.

Several commentators have pointed out that Déat's thinking was in line with the reformist tradition within European socialism, and anticipated the basic principles of post-World War II social democracy (Bergounioux 1978, Berman 2006, Biard 1985, Cointet 1998).¹⁹ As such it would be a mistake to see in Déat's calls for a broad "anticapitalist" front and an intermediary regime of state-controlled capitalism the birth of a distinctly proto-fascist doctrine. As will be discussed later, the book was written with an eye towards the 1932 parliamentary elections, as a theoretical justification for the SFIO to finally assume the responsibilities of shared political power. Yet the fact remains that *Perspectives socialistes* was a comprehensive critique of the party's faith in a proletarian revolution whose distance from reality, in Déat's eyes, only engendered a fatal passivity. And although, as noted earlier, Déat was careful not to explicitly repudiate the party's doctrine as such, the appeal to the middle classes and the acceptance of a serialized, gradual construction of socialism were bound provoke the ire of the party's Guesdist establishment.

But if the future dissidents Montagnon and Déat clearly emerged as critics of party orthodoxy, so too did others who did not ultimately share their fate. The future neo-socialists did not have a monopoly on criticism, and in some cases those who would nevertheless remain faithful to the SFIO went even further than Montagnon and Déat in questioning the party's established doctrine. For example, Jules Moch's *Socialisme et Rationalisation* (1927) also noted Marxism's mistaken prediction of pauperization and increased class antagonism. Moch, an engineer trained at the elite *École Polytechnique*, was impressed with American Fordism and Walther Rathenau's rationalization schemes in Germany, and argued that rationalization

¹⁹ Burrin ([1986] 2003) argues that Déat's theses in *Perspectives Socialistes* resembled those of Rudolf Hilferding.

ultimately benefitted socialism by concentrating industry, regulating it according to societal needs, and effecting a convergence of interests between capitalists and workers around high wages, technical collaboration, and the ordered development of the productive forces.²⁰ Moch urged socialist parties to "confront, complete, or modify their doctrines while taking into account the new forms that the capitalism of tomorrow will necessarily take" (Moch 1927: 140-141). What Moch proposed, then, was for socialists to take an active and constructive role in developing the forces of production rather than taking refuge in the dialectical promises of their doctrine. Yet for all that, Moch would remain a disciplined and loyal member of the SFIO, joining both Popular Front governments and becoming an important figure in the Resistance.²¹ Like his friend and mentor Blum, Moch stood largely above the factional struggles of the party and benefitted from the prestige accorded to him for his technical competency. As such, his calls for doctrinal renewal provoked little reaction.

Another example of a heterodox Socialist who nonetheless went on to have a distinguished career in the SFIO is André Philip. A law professor and devout Protestant, Philip eventually became active in the Resistance and, like Moch, was a prominent leader of the post-Liberation SFIO.²² In the 1920s, however, Philip was a vocal critic of party orthodoxy. Some have argued that the heterodox ideas of Belgian Socialist Henri de Man, who himself became a collaborator during World War II, were a critical influence on the neo-socialists, particularly Déat (Biard 1985, Burrin [1986] 2003, Cointet 1998).²³ Yet it was Philip who had done the most in the 1920s to popularize de Man's ideas to a French audience.

²⁰ With the advent of the Great Depression, Moch would be proven embarrassingly wrong about what he saw as the impossibility of overproduction in a rationalized economy (Moch 1927: 112).

²¹ For an autobiographical account of Moch's political career, see Moch (1968, 1970, 1971).

²² On Philip, see the volume edited by Christian Chevandier and Gilles Morin (2005).

²³ While there is no doubt that the neo-socialists were profoundly influenced by de Man after the latter drafted the Plan du Travail for the Parti Ouvrier Belge/Belgische Werkliedenpartij [Belgian Workers Party] (POB/BWP) in 1933, the direct influence of de Man's *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* (1927) is overstated.

In his widely translated book, *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* (1927), de Man argued that the materialist and determinist framework of Marxism failed to grasp the psychological foundations of the socialist movement. Rather than emerging mechanistically from the economic contradictions of capitalism, de Man argued that workers' resistance was motivated by the Christian values of equality, dignity, and justice. As such, de Man warned against the creeping *embourgeoisement* of the working class and its assimilation to the materialistic values of capitalism, a process which, encouraged by socialists' emphasis on class self-interest, would lead to the degeneration of the socialist movement. To regain its lost revolutionary fervor, de Man proposed that the workers' movement shed itself of bourgeois contamination and adopt an ethical socialism recast as a spiritual faith rather than a science (de Man 1927).²⁴

Translated into French in 1928 as *Au-delà du Marxisme* [Beyond Marxism], de Man's magnum opus was also given a book-length résumé by Philip, read and approved by de Man himself. Titled *Henri de Man et la Crise Doctrinale du Socialisme* (1928), the book is a detailed summary of de Man's work, in which Philip fully endorses de Man's attempt to "go beyond Marxism and work towards the constitution of a new doctrine" (Philip 1928: 157-158).

In an introductory essay on socialism and rationalization, Philip diagnoses the party's malaise as the result of a staid Marxist orthodoxy rendered moot by a rationalized capitalism. Yet Philip was much more wary of the socialist value of rationalization than Montagnon or Moch. While recognizing some of its material benefits, precisely for this reason he worried about a new solidarity between the working class and "neo-capitalism". The Marxist notion of the struggle

²⁴ De Man's revisionism was very different from Bernstein's. Whereas Bernstein famously said that the goal was nothing and the movement everything, de Man argued that "the movement is everything, provided that the goal is its motivation." Indeed, de Man saw his critique as a left-wing critique of Marxism, claiming that while the immediate tasks of socialism were necessarily reformist, the motivation had to remain revolutionary. Henri de Man, "La Crise Doctrinale du Socialisme" *Monde* November 16 1929. De Man's revisionism thus fits poorly with Bon and Burnier's (1974) model of socialist factional struggle outlined earlier. Rather than bringing doctrine and practice into line, his revisionism was predicated on a productive tension between practice and doctrine-as-faith.

between classes (*lutte des classes*) was thus outdated, and had to be replaced with a notion of class struggle (*lutte de classe*) understood as the "revolt of the entire collectivity against capitalism in the name of the democratic ideal of the equality of rights" (Philip 1928: 42). Socialism had to revise its doctrine and transmute the economic struggle into an ethical struggle, which alone could bring the process of rationalization under the control of the collectivity and breathe life into a socialist movement that had gotten too comfortable.

Several years before the publication of Déat's *Perspectives socialistes*, Philip approvingly characterized de Man's ideas as a "neo-socialism" (Philip 1928: 52). But Philip was never considered a heretic like Déat, and indeed remained loyal to the SFIO. Unlike Déat, Philip was an opponent of ministerial participation and, like Moch, generally stood outside the party's organized factions. For this reason, the orthodox party majority could safely ignore his revisionism as a harmless idiosyncrasy.

Also influenced by de Man was a small group within the SFIO that came to be known by the title of their collective book, *Révolution constructive* (Boivin et al. 1932).²⁵ The group was initially composed of eleven young intellectuals—including future luminaries like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Robert Marjolin, and Georges Lefranc—who came out of the student socialist milieu.²⁶ They attributed a redemptive value to socialism as a representation of the "ideal and nebulous world that lived deep within [them]." And yet socialist doctrine had ceased to satisfy them fully (Boivin et al. 1932: 12). The problem was that Socialism had become absorbed into the

²⁵ *Révolution Constructive*, *Grandeur et Servitude Socialiste*, and *Perspectives Socialistes* were all published by the Librairie Valois, which was then known for publishing heterodox economic works, by authors like Bertrand de Jouvenel, Jean Luchaire, and Pierre Mendès-France (Olivera 1989). Georges Valois, the director of the press, was a former anarchist-turned-royalist-turned-fascist, who by the late 1920s had become a leftist republican syndicalist (Douglas 1992, Guchet 1975 [2001]).

²⁶ The eleven founding members of *Révolution Constructive* were: Emilie Lamare, Robert Marjolin, Maurice Deixonne, Ignace Kohen, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Itard, Max Grignon, Jacques Godard, Suzanne Bouilly, Georges Lefranc, and Pierre Boivin. For the history and background of *Révolution Constructive*, see Lefranc (1970) and Clouet (1991).

parliamentary routine and cut off from its vital centers within the syndicalist and cooperative movements. At the heart of socialism's crisis was that it no longer presented itself as a "total doctrine that must light up [each militant's] soul and guide all his acts and all his thoughts" (Boivin et al. 1932: 18).

Like Déat and the others cited above, Révolution Constructive rejected a millenarian conception of revolution and argued that the evolution of capitalism, with its socialization of authority, profit, and property, had rendered possible the progressive construction of socialism.²⁷ Unlike Déat, however, the group was deeply suspicious of the State. So whereas Déat had sought the "separation of capitalism from the State," Révolution Constructive affirmed the "necessity to separate Socialism from the State" (Boivin et al. 1932: 174).²⁸ The group instead placed its hopes for the constructive realization of socialism in syndicalist, cooperative, and municipal control over the economy, which would substitute the socialist "administration of things" for the State's "government of men" (Boivin et al. 1932: 185). Nonetheless, echoing de Man, the group insisted that its gradualism should not be mistaken for reformism. If the construction of socialism were only possible through a series of reforms ordered in time, the success of this process in turn required a revolutionary *élan* that only the party, through its elaboration of socialist culture and values, could provide. The party's task was not to prepare for a distant catastrophe but to effect a "permanent revolution" tending towards the material and spiritual construction of a new human civilization (Boivin et al. 1932: 231).²⁹

²⁷ Déat's elite intellectual background as well as his position at the École Normale Supérieure's Centre de Documentation Sociale made him an especially influential figure among the Party's young intellectuals (Marcel 2001, Sirinelli 1988). On Déat's influence on Lefranc, see Lefranc (1981a, 1981b). On his political influence on Lévi-Strauss, see Chambarlhac (2007) and Pajon (2007).

²⁸ According to Lefranc, the Révolution Constructive group was disappointed in the narrowly political focus of Déat's *Perspectives Socialistes* (1930), which they thought amounted to a doctrinal justification of "neo-reformism" (Lefranc 1970: 172n.4).

²⁹ In a 1929 article, Lévi-Strauss argued that rather than combatting religion in the name secularism, the SFIO ought instead to recast socialism as a competing faith and mystique oriented towards the metaphysical and existential

In its broad strokes, then, *Révolution constructive* was very much in line with de Man and Philip's idealist reinterpretation of the revolutionary task of socialism. And although the group was critical of Déat's indulgence towards the bourgeois State and its parliamentary apparatus, it nonetheless shared his assessment of the need to rethink socialist strategy on a constructive basis in light of changes to the capitalist economy. As such, *Révolution constructive* was clearly a direct challenge to party orthodoxy. And yet the group did not share the fate of the neo-socialists. The book not only did not provoke much controversy, but was in fact sympathetically reviewed, albeit with clear reservations, by representatives of the right, center, and left wings of the party.³⁰ Indeed, the group had always held itself above the factional divisions within the party and counted friends on both the party left and right (Lefranc 1970).

Despite differences in nuance, the above works shared several common themes. As Daniel Ligou (1962) and Biard (1985) point out, these were pre-crisis works in that they were conceived and written in the context of an ascendant capitalism.³¹ Growing capitalist prosperity called into question the adequacy of socialism's proletarian and revolutionary self-conception. New economic realities, however, opened the door to a progressive construction of socialism, provided that the party broaden its base. Thus the *attentisme* that characterized the Guesdist conception of the party, which prioritized the preparation of the proletariat for an eventual revolution through education and propaganda, was decisively rejected. The party was urged to embark immediately upon the road of socialist construction by using the means at its disposal. Yet this was not a call to insurrection, nor was it a justification for an opportunistic reformism;

needs of its members. Thus Socialists were "situated at once further and closer to the religions" than secular democrats. "Closer, because we are ourselves religious. Further, because we represent, more than just its adversaries, its successors." Claude Lévi-Strauss "La foi socialiste" *La Vie Socialiste* March 30 1929.

³⁰ François Gaucher "La Révolution Constructive" *La Vie Socialiste* July 23 1932; J.-B. Séverac "Révolution Constructive" *Le Populaire* August 17 1932; Raymonde Vaysset "Révolution Constructive" *La Bataille Socialiste* August-September 1932.

³¹ Due to the delayed effects of the Great Depression in France, even those works written during it had as their point of reference a prosperous and growing capitalism.

rather, it expressed the hope that socialism could master the awesome power of capitalism and consciously direct it toward its own ends. In that sense the above works resemble far less the Marxist conception of socialism, especially in its vulgarized form, than that of Durkheim, who defined socialism as that "doctrine which demands the connection of all economic functions, or of certain among them, which are at the present time diffuse, to the directing and conscious centers of society" (Durkheim [1928] 2009: 13). In the socialism of these challengers to party orthodoxy, the proletarian class struggle gave way to a notion of the social interest, the socialization of the means of production was displaced in importance by the societal regulation of economic development, and to the extent that socialism remained revolutionary, it was so only in a spiritual sense.

Explaining the 1933 Schism: Doctrinal Heresy of Factional Conflict?

Not all challenges to the Guesdist orthodoxy were followed by a schism. Nor were they all equally threatening to the SIFO leadership. So, for example, while Montagnon and Déat came to be regarded as the intellectual architects of the neo-socialist heresy, Moch, Philip, and the Révolution Constructive group, despite their many substantive agreements with the neo-socialists, were largely spared condemnation and remained within the party fold. The 1933 neo-socialist schism thus cannot be satisfactorily explained by reference to ideological heterodoxy alone. It is clear that a challenge to orthodoxy did not lead inexorably to schism. It would be a mistake, however, to simply qualify this notion by adding various conditioning factors. Few have gone as far as Sternhell ([1983] 2000) in arguing for the absolute primacy of ideas in determining the course of the neo-socialists' trajectories, but most other accounts of the schism nonetheless privilege its ideational dimension even while recognizing the contextual factors that mediated its

development. In this view, the schism was at least in part the logical expression of a doctrinal divergence between neo-socialism and the traditional socialism of the SFIO, and to the extent that other factors came into play it was either to hinder or facilitate this expression of what is implicitly still taken to be a prior and independent explanatory principle. The problem with this is that it presumes a self-identical and coherent neo-socialism, faced with an equally self-identical and coherent socialism. In essentializing both, moreover, this view also assumes that neo-socialism and the SFIO's socialism were always-already distinct and incompatible doctrines. This, however, is to take as given that which was in fact a stake of a classification struggle within the SFIO. Indeed, neo-socialism did not emerge ready-made as an unequivocal revision of SFIO doctrine. Rather, it was elaborated and labeled as such over the course of a factional conflict within the Party in which the meaning of neo-socialism was itself an object of contention. Neo-socialism, then, as a political doctrine distinct from the socialism of the SFIO, was less the cause of the 1933 schism than its product.

The most significant factor that separated Déat and Montagnon from Moch, Philip, and Révolution Constructive is that the former were active in the party minority faction advocating Socialist ministerial participation in a coalition government, whereas the latter were largely opposed to this. The question of what attitude to take vis-à-vis bourgeois governments had long been a contentious one within European socialism (Sassoon 1996). But while the question had largely been settled in most countries in favor of accepting some kind of socialist governmental presence, it continued to divide the SFIO through the 1920s and early 1930s. Indeed, in the period between the 1920 and 1933 schisms, the single most divisive issue in the party, and the one around which the party's various organized factions were defined, was whether or not the SFIO should accept an offer to participate as a junior coalition partner in a cabinet headed by the

Radicals. The birth of neo-socialism cannot be understood apart from this conflict over the party's attitude toward bourgeois governments. It was the anti-participationist majority that first raised the specter of heresy, I argue, as a way to delegitimize the participationist minority, and the latter self-consciously assumed the mantle of neo-socialism only when it became clear that their efforts to win over the party had failed. Neo-socialism, then, was both a weapon and a stake in the conflict over participation; what had begun as a tactical debate was transmuted into a doctrinal controversy.

The Ambiguous Doctrinal Status of Ministerial Participation

The doctrinal status of ministerial participation was sufficiently ambiguous that both participationists and anti-participationists could claim to have doctrine on their side. The Party's position on participation was supposedly defined by its "Charter", which consisted of the 1905 Unity Pact (and the preceding resolutions of the Second International on which it was based) and the declarations immediately following the SFIO's reconstitution following the 1920 schism. In affirming the party's revolutionary vocation, the 1905 Unity Pact also enjoined the SFIO's parliamentary deputies to

refuse the Government all means that assure the domination of the bourgeoisie and its maintenance of power; to refuse, by consequence, military credits, credits for colonial conquest, secret funds, and the ensemble of the budget.³²

The Pact added, however, that,

Even in the case of exceptional circumstances, elected representatives cannot engage the Party without its consent.³³

³² Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *1e et 2e Congrès nationaux, tenus à Paris en avril 1905 et à Chalon-sur-Saône en octobre 1905: compte rendu analytique*. Paris: Conseil national du Parti socialiste S.F.I.O., p. 14.

³³ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *1e et 2e Congrès nationaux, tenus à Paris en avril 1905 et à Chalon-sur-Saône en octobre 1905: compte rendu analytique*. Paris: Conseil national du Parti socialiste S.F.I.O., p. 14.

Thus "exceptional circumstances" were admitted under which the Party's injunction could legitimately be violated. The 1905 Unity Pact explicitly referenced the 1904 Amsterdam Congress of the Second International, whose resolution defined the principles on which the unification of the SFIO was to be based. With the recent controversy surrounding Bernstein in the German SPD in mind, the 1904 Amsterdam resolution condemned revisionism and reaffirmed socialism's revolutionary tradition. To this end, it declared

1) That the Party declines all responsibility, of any sort, under the political and economic conditions based on capitalist production and consequently cannot approve any means likely to maintain in power the dominant class.

2) That socialist democracy cannot seek any participation in a government under bourgeois society, in conformity with the Kautsky resolution, voted at the international Congress of Paris in 1900.³⁴

The resolution went on to reject "every attempt to mask the ever-growing class antagonisms for the purpose of facilitating a rapprochement with the bourgeois parties."³⁵

The 1900 motion, sponsored by Karl Kautsky, and cited by both the 1905 Unity Pact and the 1904 Amsterdam resolution, stated that the conquest of political power by the proletariat required a long effort of economic and political organization. However, it also warned that

in the countries where governmental power is centralized, it cannot be conquered fragmentarily. The entry of an isolated socialist in a bourgeois government cannot be considered as the normal commencement of the conquest of political power, but only as a forced expedient, transitory and exceptional.³⁶

But the motion added:

³⁴ Cited in Léon Blum "Le problème de la participation. Les textes socialistes: avant la guerre" *Le Populaire* November 28 1929.

³⁵ Cited in Léon Blum "Le problème de la participation. Les textes socialistes: avant la guerre" *Le Populaire* November 28 1929.

³⁶ Cited in Léon Blum "Le problème de la participation. Les textes socialistes: avant la guerre" *Le Populaire* November 28 1929.

If, in a particular case, the political situation necessitates this dangerous experience, this is a question of tactics and not of principle, the international Congress does not pronounce itself on this point, but, in any case, the entry of a socialist in a bourgeois government can be hoped to produce good results for the militant proletariat only if the socialist party, in its great majority, approves such an act, and if the socialist minister remains an agent of his party.³⁷

In demonstrating its fidelity to its founding principles, the party refused to change its attitude vis-à-vis bourgeois governments even after the 1920 schism. Thus, in its 1921 manifesto, the SFIO reminded everyone that

Neither the *bloc des gauches*, nor ministerialism, condemned both by our doctrinal conceptions and by experience, will not find in our ranks the least success. The Socialist Party (SFIO) remains a Party of relentless struggle against any economic and political system that will not have recognized and proclaimed the total emancipation of the world of labor.³⁸

Together these documents constituted the "Charter" of the SFIO and formed the basis of the party's doctrine. But this was not without ambiguity. On the one hand, the documents clearly establish that the SFIO was not a party like any other, and that it was fundamentally opposed to the political system of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, participating in a bourgeois government, in addition to other measures such as voting the budget, were expressly forbidden. The role of Socialist deputies was to carry on the class struggle in parliament and vote for specific reforms, all the while refusing to legitimate the bourgeois State as such.

On the other hand, the documents left considerable room for interpretation. For example, though the 1920 manifesto condemned ministerialism, the reference to the *bloc des gauches* referred specifically to Alexandre Millerand's controversial 1899 decision to join the Pierre

³⁷ Cited in Léon Blum "Le problème de la participation. Les textes socialistes: avant la guerre" *Le Populaire* November 28 1929.

³⁸ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. "Le Manifeste du Conseil National: Aux Travailleurs de France" *Le Populaire* February 15 1921.

Waldeck-Rousseau government.³⁹ This experience, which had wrecked a preliminary attempt at socialist unity and came to be condemned even by Millerand's erstwhile supporters like Jaurès, provided the backdrop for the early discussions on ministerial participation. The 1900 Kautsky motion thus specifically condemned the entry of "an isolated socialist" in a bourgeois cabinet. But it was an open question whether this proscription covered all forms of participation. Were participation and ministerialism synonymous, or was the latter only a specific case of the former?

The documents of the "Charter" also recognized the existence of "exceptional circumstances" under which a Socialist presence in a bourgeois government could be legitimate. This came with certain conditions. The "Charter" is clear that even under "exceptional circumstances" Socialist deputies had to remain under the control of the party, and that by implication the decision to participate rested with the party and not with individual parliamentarians. Moreover, the Kautsky motion stated that this decision had to be approved by a "great majority", and that participation, being only a "forced expedient, transitory and exceptional", should not be normalized or conflated with the conquest of power. What specifically counted as "exceptional circumstances", however, was not spelled out. Nor was it clear what constituted a "great majority", nor which party bodies had the authority to judge the circumstances and decide whether or not to join a bourgeois cabinet. Indeed, these would all become objects of contention in the later debate over participation.

Finally, the Kautsky motion explicitly qualified the question of participation as one of "tactics and not of principle." A salient distinction was thus introduced between principle, or doctrine, and tactics. But this distinction was also bound to be ambiguous. The "Charter" enshrined into doctrine a general hostility towards the bourgeois State. Participation was allowed,

³⁹ Millerand would eventually drift rightward, which only seemed to confirm the suspicions of the anti-participationists.

but only exceptionally, and even then, given that it could only be a "dangerous experience", with considerable suspicion. Indeed, the various documents constituting the "Charter" repeatedly condemned participation, not just for circumstantial reasons, but as an expression of the party's revolutionary identity. The 1904 Amsterdam resolution, the 1905 Unity Pact, and the 1920 manifesto all seem to suggest that participation should be rejected as a matter of principle. Yet the 1900 Kautsky motion to which they all refer recognizes participation as a tactical problem. Depending on which passages from which document one cited, then, a plausible argument could be made either way about the doctrinal status of participation. Indeed, whether or not a decision to enter a coalition government with the Radicals, under this or that circumstance, constituted a violation of the "Charter" and thus of party doctrine, would become a central question around which turned the battle over participation that would consume the SFIO in the years leading up to the 1933 schism.

Chapter 2.

Factional Conflict and the Emergence of a New Political Identity

Doctrine/Tactics as an Axiological Operator in the Factional Conflict

If the doctrinal status of participation was ambiguous, this had less to do with anything inherent to the question than with the arbitrary nature of the doctrine/tactics distinction itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, the party's doctrine was left purposefully vague, such that it is impossible to draw a clear boundary between what counts as doctrinal and what counts as tactical. This distinction did not objectively demarcate two essentially different orders of party discourse, but rather served a polemical function defining the boundaries of acceptable debate and discursively performing party identity. The line separating doctrine and tactics was never fixed, and was liable to shift according to circumstances. The basic structuralist insight—that meaning does not inhere in things but is constituted through relations of difference—thus applies to the doctrine/tactics distinction (De Saussure [1916] 1998, Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963). Doctrine and tactics were only meaningful terms in relation to one another. So while doctrine was supposedly the inviolable sacred core of socialist identity and tactics all that was profane and thus open to debate, what these terms signified was the relation of the sacred to the profane itself, not any intrinsic or stable quality of things falling into either category (Durkheim [1912] 1995).

In other words, from an analytical perspective the doctrine/tactics distinction did not point to two separate and positively defined domains of political discourse, each understood in an essentialist way. Taken as a conceptual pair, the doctrine/tactics distinction fundamentally denoted a relation of difference, such that the meanings of the terms "doctrine" and "tactics" in any given conjuncture were not the expression of any essential content but the product of a process of mutual co-constitution. What they denoted at any given moment within the SFIO was not so much two independent sets of questions so much as the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate discourse as such.

The doctrine/tactics distinction functioned much like what Gisèle Sapiro has called an "axiological operator" (Sapiro 2004, 2015). In her discussion of the "disinterestedness"/"utilitarianism" conceptual opposition mobilized in the clashes between scientific and humanist paradigms in the early twentieth century French intellectual field, Sapiro defines axiological operators as those "ethical categories of scholastic understanding that confer on systems of cultural oppositions their 'sense', in the double acceptance of meaning and of orientation in space, in this case, the high and the low, that is to say the honorable and the dishonorable" (Sapiro 2004: 21). The social efficacy of axiological operators, moreover, lies "in their capacity to realize the symbolic unification of systems of classification or of heterogeneous types of hierarchies, in the order of values and in the institutional order" (Sapiro 2004: 21). As such, the distinctions designated by axiological operators are major stakes of symbolic struggles, as each side seeks to impose a definition of the situation in which their position aligns with the honorable term of the discursive opposition and their opponents are relegated to the dishonorable term.

The doctrine/tactics distinction within the SFIO functioned as an axiological operator in several ways. First, it ordered party debates by distinguishing honorable and dishonorable challenges to party policy. Challenging the party's tactics was fair play, but to explicitly challenge its doctrine was to risk placing one's self outside the socialist family. Second, the doctrine/tactics distinction organized and gave meaning to a host of other discursive oppositions mobilized within party debates, including those between autonomy/collaboration, reform/revolution, activity/passivity, democracy/dictatorship, and realism/utopianism. In moments of unity, these secondary oppositions largely remained disarticulated from the doctrine/tactics opposition. When factional tensions over ministerial participation flared, however, factional actors sought to discursively align these oppositions in advantageous ways. Thus the meaning of the doctrine/tactics distinction and its appropriate application was not agreed upon by everyone, but was an object of a symbolic classification struggle. As discussed further below, at least initially both proponents and opponents of ministerial participation agreed that the question was tactical in nature. As the conflict escalated, the anti-participationists accused the participationists of embarking on a reformist deviation from socialist doctrine. The participationists for their part refused the terms of this debate, affirming their doctrinal fidelity and turning the accusation of deviation back on the anti-participationists, arguing that they were in fact the true revolutionaries and that the anti-participationists were passive utopians turning their backs on the party's democratic mission.

Eventually, the anti-participationists succeeded in imposing a definition of the situation according to which their factional adversaries were seen to be engaged in a doctrinal revision. That the neo-socialists themselves came to internalize this frame is an example of what Laurent Kestel has called the "successful assignation of identity" by "entrepreneurs of classification"

(Kestel 2012: 139, 141).⁴⁰ Key here is the performative dimension of the doctrine/tactics distinction functioning as an axiological operator. As the following analysis of the shifting classification of the participation debate suggests, issues did not fall outside the bounds of legitimate debate because they naturally pertained to doctrine as opposed to tactics. Rather, issues only came to be labeled as doctrinal as a consequence of efforts by actors to delegitimize certain positions following the logic of factional conflict. It would be a mistake to take the categories of doctrine and tactics at face value analytically. As stakes and weapons in a classification struggle, their value was polemical. Dishonor was not a function of a preceding doctrinal heresy; to be designated a doctrinal heretic was in itself a public imputation of dishonor.

To claim that a controversy was doctrinal and not tactical was thus a kind of performative speech act whose illocutionary force and intention was to draw a line between legitimate and illegitimate speech and define the boundaries of acceptable socialist identity (Austin 1962). The stigmatization implied by the accusation of doctrinal heresy was an act of "institution and destitution" through which an individual or group "indicates to someone that he possesses such and such property, and indicates to him at the same time that he must conduct himself in accordance with the social essence which is thereby assigned to him" (Bourdieu 1991: 106). However, as Bourdieu points out in his critique of Austin's speech act theory, the performative efficacy of this act of naming does not lie in any inherent properties of the word itself, but in the social conditions of its utterance. The ability to successfully impose a legitimate vision of the social world is dependent on the accumulated symbolic capital of the speaker, i.e. the degree to

⁴⁰ Kestel is concerned with another famous case of political transformation, that of Jacques Doriot from French Communist leader to fascist and Nazi collaborator. On Doriot's transformation, Kestel writes that it was "the consequence of a struggle between several agents or groups of agents over the legitimate interpretation of the situation. It [was]...an assignation of identity that succeeded all the more because the stigmatized finished by reappropriating for himself the identity that was imposed on him. In this sense, conversion is a double discursive manifestation: It *is* from the moment it affirms itself" (Kestel 2012: 232).

which the speaker is recognized to speak in the name of the group for which he is the authorized spokesperson. Behind every successful performative utterance, then, is the power and authority of the group of which the speaker is the recognized spokesperson (Bourdieu 1991).

The label of doctrinal revisionist functioned as "a kind of curse...which attempts to imprison its victim in an accusation which also depicts his destiny" (Bourdieu 1991: 121). Yet as I argue below, the efficacy of this label depended on the balance of factional forces within the party and, critically, the intervention of Léon Blum, the undisputed leader of the SFIO and the embodiment of party unity. The classification struggle over the doctrine/tactics distinction cannot be understood purely at the level of discourse, but must be seen in relation to the ebb and flow of the factional conflict over ministerial participation and the properties of its principal actors. The mobilization of the doctrine/tactics distinction as an axiological operator was embedded in the factional conflict and obeyed its logic. Indeed, a central contention of this chapter is that the identification and elaboration of neo-socialism as a doctrinal challenge to the SFIO was not a parallel development to this conflict, but emerged from it.

In his critique of political sociology and the social movements literature, Andrew Walder (2009a) decries the turn away from social structural explanations of political orientations in favor of an excessive concern with the conditions of successful mobilization. Part of the problem with this focus on mobilization is that movement motivations and identities are often assumed to be fixed, with the only question being their realization. To a certain extent this has also been a feature of the sociological literature on schisms and social movements. The focus there has tended to be on the factors that make schism more or less likely, with variation in the identities and motivations largely taken for granted as a pre-existing condition (e.g. Ansell 2001, Balser 1997, Gamson 1990). In his call to re-orient political sociology back toward explanations of the

formation of political orientations, Walder has particularly highlighted studies that point toward short-term contingent processes that were critical in altering political orientations and forming political identities (Walder 2009a: 401-402).⁴¹ In his work on factional struggle during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Walder argues that factional identities were not fixed by social position or prior ideological commitments, but were emergent properties forged in the crucible of highly localized conflicts within rapidly shifting political contexts. These shifts forced actors to make consequential choices in uncertain circumstances, in the process creating new interests, identities, and antagonisms (Walder 2009). This relational view of how movement identities are interactionally formed in and through contentious episodes is shared by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, who highlight the significance of what they call "category formation" to contentious action (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001).

My argument in this chapter is broadly in line with the above perspectives on the contingent formation of political identities and motivations. I argue that neo-socialism as a political ideology distinct from traditional socialism was not the expression of a prior will to doctrinal revision, but was constituted in and through the factional struggle over ministerial participation. The neo-socialists did not act on the basis of a coherent pre-constituted identity. Rather, this identity was a contingent adaptation to the course of the factional conflict. Moreover, this was a relational phenomenon in that this identity was imposed by the neo-socialists' factional adversaries—successfully mobilizing the doctrine/tactics distinction for their own factional purposes—before the neo-socialists assumed it themselves. The identification and self-identification of the neo-socialists as doctrinal heretics was an emergent outcome of a classification struggle that was itself a stake in the evolving factional conflict. It was through the

⁴¹ The studies identified by Walder are: Markoff (1985, 1988, 1997), Markoff & Shapiro (1985), Shapiro & Markoff (1998), Tilly (1964), Traugott (1980, 1985), and Walder (2006, 2009b).

relational dynamics of this specific localized conflict, and not prior to it, that neo-socialism was instituted—and thereby destituted—as a doctrinal, not tactical, deviation from traditional socialism.

The SFIO's Post-War Compromises

Despite its hostility towards the bourgeois state the SFIO did not in practice remain in the splendid isolation it had set out for itself. With the outbreak of World War I, for example, the SFIO rallied to the war effort and authorized the entry of several Socialists in successive wartime cabinets. This was justified, however, by invoking the "exceptional circumstances" of national defense, and the party stressed the momentary nature of this participation.⁴²

Following the war and the 1920 schism, the party reaffirmed its revolutionary doctrine and reiterated its pre-war opposition to ministerial participation. So when faced with Édouard Herriot's offer to form a coalition government with the Radicals after the 1924 elections that brought a left-wing majority to the Chamber of Deputies, the SFIO voted unanimously to refuse. Yet this did not mean that the party was unwilling to compromise. Indeed, the left-wing majority was only possible because the SFIO entered into an electoral alliance with the Radicals and presented a unified list of candidates in many departments.⁴³ The *Cartel des gauches*, as the electoral combination was called, did not commit the SFIO to a lasting alliance with the Radicals, but was rather a "one minute cartel" limited to the election, after which the Party would reclaim its autonomy.⁴⁴ Still, with the SFIO winning 104 seats to the Radicals' 139, the election results

⁴² "Au Congrès Socialiste: Les résolutions" *L'Humanité* December 30 1916.

⁴³ The SFIO authorized unified lists with the Radicals, in the hopes of avoiding a repeat of its disastrous showing in 1919 when it decided to go it alone despite a change to the electoral system—also in effect for 1924 before being abandoned for the old two-round uninominal system—that put the SFIO at a marked disadvantage. In doing so the Party noted the "exceptional circumstances" in which the electoral law had put it, as well as the momentary nature of this derogation of its "traditional tactics." "La motion de la Commission des résolutions sur la tactique électorale a été votée à l'unanimité" *Le Populaire* February 4 1924.

⁴⁴ Émile Goude "Un cartel d'une minute" *Le Populaire* December 29 1923.

were such that a left-leaning Radical government required Socialist backing to survive. At the same congress where it rejected Herriot's participation offer, the party therefore mandated the Socialist parliamentary group, or Groupe Parlementaire (GP), to pursue a politics of "support" and temporarily relieved it of the obligation to vote against the budget.⁴⁵

The party continued the policy of "support without participation" on and off until the collapse of the *Cartel des gauches* in 1926, when the SFIO passed back into the opposition. By then the unanimity within the Party had begun to fray. For example, at the August 1925 Extraordinary Congress, the party was, for the first since the war, presented with a minority motion accepting the idea of ministerial participation (OURS 1974: 21). Although the motion lost by 559 votes to 2,110, the question was not settled.⁴⁶

The GP refused another participation offer from Herriot during a November 1925 ministerial crisis, but there was enough pressure from the participationists to revisit the question that another party congress was called for January 1926. The minority motion empowering the GP to accept future participation offers only mustered 1,331 votes to the 1,766 gathered by a Faure motion categorically refusing any presence in a non-Socialist cabinet. However, the majority resolution stated that the party did not intend "in the present exceptional circumstances to evade the direct responsibilities of power."⁴⁷ Indeed, for the first time the Party declared its willingness to form a government, even within the framework of bourgeois society, either by itself or in coalition with others so long as it directed the cabinet and maintained a majority within it.

⁴⁵ "Le Congrès socialiste a cloturé ses travaux: À l'unanimité, le Parti se prononce contre la participation ministérielle" *Le Populaire* June 3 1924.

⁴⁶ "Congrès National extraordinaire du 15 au 18 Août" *Le Populaire* August 31 1925.

⁴⁷ "Motion de politique générale" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

In so doing, the SFIO officially endorsed Blum's distinction between the "conquest of power" and the "exercise of power". Emerging after the 1920 schism as the de facto leader of the reconstituted SFIO, Blum was most concerned in this period to maintain party unity and prevent another schism.⁴⁸ As such, he often played a mediating centrist role in party debates, helped in this task by his considerable intellectual and moral authority. Though his Jaurèssist background might have inclined him personally towards the party's parliamentary wing, he was nonetheless firmly against participation, worried that the party's Guesdist majority and particularly the powerful Nord Federation would never accept it (Berstein 2006: 279; Judt 1986: 148-150). Blum struck a middle course between those on the party left who systematically opposed any accommodation to the bourgeois political regime and those on the party right who sought full integration into the republican political system. The policy of "support without participation" was one expression of this centrist compromise, but the distinction between the "conquest" and "exercise" of power would become Blum's most significant contribution to party policy.⁴⁹

Illustration 6. Léon Blum at the 1925 SFIO Congress



⁴⁸ On Blum, see Audry (1955), Berstein (2006), Colton (1966), Ziebura ([1963] 1967).

⁴⁹ Léon Blum "Le Parti socialiste et la Participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* February 15 1926.

According to Blum, the party's ultimate goal remained, as always, the revolutionary conquest of power, which he saw as a necessary condition for socialist transformation. Representing a fundamental rupture with the regime of property, the conquest of power was not to be bound by bourgeois legalism, and Blum did not rule out the use of violence. Nevertheless, like the Guesdists, Blum only envisaged this possibility once the economic and political conditions for it were ripe. In the meantime, the SFIO could one day be called upon to "exercise" power, i.e. constitute a Socialist cabinet within the political framework of bourgeois society. When it came to the "exercise of power", Blum categorically declared that he was committed to bourgeois legality, and that any effort to prematurely transform the "exercise of power" into the "conquest of power" would not only be undemocratic but impossible. The "exercise of power" was thus distinctly non-revolutionary, and the best it could hope for was to pass some reforms and be a progressive steward of the bourgeois State. Blum worried that the "exercise of power" would be confused with the "conquest of power", leading to widespread disappointment among Socialist supporters expecting a revolutionary transformation. Yet despite the risks that this experience would entail, Blum saw it as an inevitable consequence of the party's involvement in the parliamentary game. Before attaining an absolute majority and before there could develop a revolutionary situation, the SFIO was certain to be called upon to constitute a government, and Blum believed that it should do so faithfully.

If Blum accepted the "exercise of power", it was all the more to reject participation. For Blum, participation entailed all the risks of the "exercise of power" without any of its compensatory advantages. The central danger for Blum remained that of confusion. He saw the same risk of disappointing an impatient working class in participation as he did in the "exercise of power". This danger was much less serious in the case of a "negative participation" the goal of

which was to defend against a specific threat—such as was the case during the war, and could again be the case in the event of a fascist coup. Moreover, Blum added that a governmental coalition was paradoxically also less objectionable with politically dissimilar parties, citing recent experiences by the German SPD and the Belgian Parti Ouvrier Belge/ Belgische Werkliedenpartij (POB/BWP), since the temporary and limited nature of the alliance would in that case be clear.⁵⁰ The risk of confusion thus lay in a positively oriented coalition under normal (i.e. non-exceptional) circumstances with a politically proximate party. And since that was precisely the kind of coalition that was being proposed by the Radicals, for the sake of maintaining the Party's independence of action and identity, and for the sake of not deceiving its proletarian base, Blum came down firmly against participation.

Since the war, the SFIO consistently rejected participation, but it also abandoned something of its revolutionary intransigence. Thus it declined to enter a coalition government in 1924, only to "support" a bourgeois democratic government and lift its proscription against voting a bourgeois budget. Moreover, in endorsing Blum's compromise position of the "exercise of power", the Party only ruled out participation at the price of admitting a possible stewardship of the bourgeois State. In assuming its share of responsibility in the bourgeois regime, it could be argued that the party had thus already violated the spirit, if not the letter, of its "Charter".⁵¹

A Question of Tactics, Not Doctrine

Given the compromising experience of the *Cartel* and the wide acceptance of Blum's notion of the "exercise of power", it is perhaps unsurprising that few at this point wanted to make

⁵⁰ Léon Blum "Le Parti socialiste et la Participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* February 15 1926.

⁵¹ Of course, the Party's attitude could be justified under the mysterious "exceptional circumstances", as the *Cartel* had initially been. But even then, it is highly questionable whether the conditions of the *Cartel* or a hypothetical "exercise of power" truly constituted "exceptional circumstances" as envisioned by the "Charter".

a doctrinal issue out of participation. Indeed, what is striking is the extent to which both opponents and proponents of ministerial participation initially agreed that this was a question of tactics and not of doctrine. Thus at the 1925 Extraordinary Congress, Pierre Renaudel, an old friend of Jaurès who had emerged as the leader of the participationists, insisted that participation was not a theoretical problem but a tactical one.⁵² Even the majority resolution at the Congress ruling against participation emphasized the circumstantial character of this rejection:

Independently of the difficulties that follow from the very character of socialist action, participation, in the current state of the Party and within the ensemble of political circumstances, cannot but harm the interests of workers and of socialism itself, without facilitating, moreover, in any case and in any measure, the task of a democratic government.⁵³

This agreement on the nature of the debate continued through the 1926 Extraordinary Congress. Partisans of participation repeatedly maintained that they wished to reorient the Party's tactics, not its doctrine.⁵⁴ That those seeking to legitimize participation would make this distinction is perhaps unsurprising, but what is significant is that most opponents of participation also made the distinction. Blum, as we saw, opposed participation not on *a priori* grounds, but only after weighing the relative advantages and disadvantages of the "exercise of power" and participation.⁵⁵ But even the more dogged anti-participationists bought into this frame as well. Thus, for example, in a preparatory statement before the Congress, Jean Lebas, the Guesdist head of the powerful Nord Federation, wrote that his and others' attitude was "not explained by doctrinal theoretical considerations," but was justified instead by "a clear and true view of the current political situation."⁵⁶ At the Congress, Lebas held himself to "arguments of fact", pointing

⁵² "Congrès National extraordinaire du 15 au 18 Août" *Le Populaire* August 31 1925.

⁵³ "La politique générale" *Le Populaire* August 31 1925.

⁵⁴ "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁵⁵ Léon Blum "Le Parti socialiste et la Participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* February 15 1926.

⁵⁶ Jean Lebas "Enquêtes sur le Socialisme et la participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* January 5 1926.

out that the political situation was even less propitious for participation than it was in 1924.⁵⁷ Indeed, even leading Guesdist theoreticians like Compère-Morel and Bracke largely made the case against participation on circumstantial grounds, with Bracke explicitly admitting that participation was not a question of doctrine.⁵⁸

The party left largely echoed this near-consensus.⁵⁹ For example, Jean Zyromski, a leading figure of the left, noted that "ministerial participation is not a question of doctrine." Far from being a series of proscriptions or rules, Zyromski claimed that "socialist doctrine consists in an analysis and explication of economic evolution", and that it was on the basis of this analysis that participation had to be rejected.⁶⁰ Participation was a question of opportunity, though one that had to be answered in the negative "in light of recent events."⁶¹

There was thus a general understanding at this time that stretched across the party right, center, and left. Étienne Weill-Raynal, himself a participationist, put it thusly:

The question of the entry of socialists into the government is not posed to the national Congress of January 10, such as in other times, as a problem of a doctrinal order. Very rare must be those at this moment in the Party who refuse an entry of socialists into the government under any form. Almost all members of the Party are in agreement in recognizing that the circumstances are grave and truly exceptional. The principal debate opposes those who accept only a ministry that is entirely or in majority socialist and those who are favorable, under certain conditions, to the entry of socialist party delegates within a government whose majority would be formed by representatives of other parties.⁶²

⁵⁷ "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁵⁸ "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁵⁹ The marginal far-left of the Party, which advocated a United Front with the Communists, did however oppose participation for doctrinal reasons. "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁶⁰ Jean Zyromski "Enquêtes sur le Socialisme et la participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* January 5 1926.

⁶¹ "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁶² Étienne Weill-Raynal "Enquêtes sur le Socialisme et la participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* January 5 1926.

Factionalization

Despite this agreement on the nature of the debate, these initial confrontations inaugurated a period of intense factionalism that would last until the 1933 schism. There emerged two main factions, each with its own organization and press, and each vying for supremacy at various levels of the party. *La Vie Socialiste* [The Socialist Life] (LVS), as the participationist faction came to be called, was named after Renaudel's weekly paper that was revived after the 1926 Extraordinary Congress. Situated on the party right, LVS was more reform-oriented and generally looked positively on the *Cartel* experience. Tending to privilege parliamentary action, the faction was especially influential within the Socialist parliamentary group (Morin 1994). Though the faction was somewhat heterogeneous, several common rhetorical strategies immediately emerged in its efforts to win the party over to participation.

Illustration 7. The participationists at the 1930 SFIO Congress



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

From Left to Right: Marcel Déat, Joseph Paul-Boncour, Paul Ramadier, Pierre Renaudel

First, the participationists distinguished a participation authorized and delegated by the party from the individual opportunist "ministerialism" condemned by the "Charter". Renaudel insisted that the party-to-party accord he envisaged with the Radicals had "no relation with the participation of those who went to the government by personal ambition".⁶³ Likewise, Déat proposed making participation conditional on a defined reform program, which would establish clear parameters for any Socialist participation.⁶⁴ Thus whereas opponents of ministerial participation tended to conflate "ministerialism" and "participation", the partisans of LVS sought to disassociate the two such that the latter would not be marked by the discredit of the former.

Second, a pragmatic appeal to political and economic reality was a favorite theme within LVS.⁶⁵ A common argument by the participationists was that Socialist isolation in the current parliamentary conjuncture would push even progressive Radicals into the arms of a reactionary majority. But their "realism" went beyond parliament. In the inaugural issue of the re-launched *La Vie Socialiste*, Renaudel wrote that although doctrine, in the main, was "confirmed by events," "new facts"—such as the growing power of finance capital—had nonetheless changed the nature of capitalism and the struggle against it. As such, if it "did not bend itself to the facts, if it turned into immutable and rigid formulas, doctrine would risk becoming a dry and sterile dogma."⁶⁶ In drawing this distinction between doctrine and dogma, the partisans of LVS were able to make the case for participation on circumstantial grounds without thereby calling doctrine into question. The divide was not, in the eyes of LVS, between doctrine and participation, but rather between two different interpretations of doctrine: one based on a ritualistic, dogmatic, and

⁶³ "Congrès National extraordinaire du 15 au 18 Août" *Le Populaire* August 31 1925.

⁶⁴ "Le Congrès national extraordinaire. Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926.

⁶⁵ The epigraph on the cover of each issue of *La Vie Socialiste*, for example, was a famous quote from Jaurès: "Go toward the ideal and understand the real."

⁶⁶ Pierre Renaudel "A nos amis" *La Vie Socialiste* March 4 1926.

formulaic reading of it, and another according to which it was the guiding ideal giving sense and meaning to a necessary reckoning with the facts of a changing reality. To be a "realist", then, was not to abandon doctrine, but only dogma.

The party left was composed of two different currents: an "old left" embodied by the secretary general, Paul Faure, and his deputy, Jean-Baptiste Séverac, and a "new left" led by Jean Zyromski and his mentor Bracke, who together would found the La Bataille Socialiste [The Socialist Battle] (LBS) faction in 1927 around the eponymous monthly newspaper (Baker 1971). The Faurists dominated the Party apparatus through their control of the secretariat. Moreover, as the Party's most prolific propagandist, Faure was a favorite among the rank-and-file and represented the heart of the party. The Faurists used their administrative and moral influence to jealously guard the party's Guesdist orthodoxy and maintain its traditions. Zyromski and the insurgent LBS, on the other hand, were more hostile to the politics of the *Cartel*, more open to other influences (e.g. revolutionary syndicalism, Jaurès, Rosa Luxemburg, etc.), more indulgent towards the Communists, and more voluntaristic in their orientation than the cautious Faurists (Hohl 2004, Nadaud 1989). Nonetheless, LBS and the Faurists shared an aversion to ministerial participation stemming from their common Guesdist heritage and would periodically combine forces to defend the party's anti-participationist line.

Illustration 8. La Bataille Socialiste at the 1932 SFIO Congress



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Center: Jean Zyromski and Sansimon Graziani

A shared concern of the party left was to prevent any dilution of the SFIO's proletarian identity. A common rhetorical trope in their arguments against participation was thus to defend the party's "independence" against its potential "absorption" in a broader democratic majority.⁶⁷ But LBS and the Faurists differed in accent. We've already seen that Zyromski and Bracke at this stage opposed participation on tactical and not doctrinal grounds. Indeed, Zyromski appealed not to a "religious respect" for tradition, but to the "fact of class struggle," arguing that it was precisely an appreciation of the general direction of capitalist evolution and the concomitant growth of class antagonism that made any accord between the Socialists and Radicals

⁶⁷ For an example of this language, see the majority resolution at the 1925 extraordinary congress: "La politique générale" *Le Populaire* August 31 1925.

increasingly impossible.⁶⁸ According to LBS, the Party should reject joining a coalition government, "not by virtue of a theoretical formulation, but because of the very conditions of economic and social life."⁶⁹ This affirmation of the class nature of the party and its fundamental incompatibility with bourgeois democracy was in itself only a re-statement of the classical Guesdist position, and it hardly left any room for any future participation. However, what is significant is that Zyromski and his allies felt the need to hold themselves to the terrain of facts, differing with the participationists mainly in their assessment of these facts.⁷⁰ LBS thus largely accepted the participationists' terms of the debate, though for them it was the politics of collaboration that was "utopian" as opposed to the "true revolutionary realism" of LBS.⁷¹

Illustration 9. Paul Faure at the 1932 SFIO Congress



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

⁶⁸Jean Zyromski "Enquêtes ser le Socialiste et la participation ministérielle" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* January 5 1926.

⁶⁹ La Bataille Socialiste "Pour les élections" *La Bataille Socialiste* October 10 1927.

⁷⁰ Indeed, this was recognized and appreciated by both Renaudel and Auriol. See "Le Congrès national extraordinaire Paris, 10-11 Janvier 1926: Les débats" *Le Populaire* January 15 1926, p. 3, and Pierre Renaudel "La Commission Élargie du 18 Juillet 1926" *La Vie Socialiste* July 31 1926.

⁷¹ The "realism" of LVS was also redubbed "empiricism." La Bataille Socialiste "Déclaration" *La Bataille Socialiste* June 10 1927.

The Faurists, on the other hand, were more willing to question the doctrinal propriety of participation. Already in 1926 Faure wondered aloud if the true problem were not a concealed "neo-revisionism" within the party.⁷² Faure occasionally invoked the "Charter" and frequently lamented that the party was still debating what for him was a settled matter. Indeed, this appeal to doctrinal fidelity and tradition was a recurrent feature of Faurist argumentation. So, for example, if the SFIO, as the political expression of the working class, could have no truck with bourgeois parties, this had to do with the very "*raison d'être*" of the party.⁷³ Still, Faure and Séverac were for now largely isolated in their view, which was not even shared by their Guesdist ally Lebas. Neither Blum and the party center, nor Zyromski and the left, shared such an interpretation of the debate. Thus in the wake of the first major debate on ministerial participation after the 1920 schism, a general effort was made to place the controversy on the level of tactics and facts in the interest of party unity. This would change when the controversy was revived again in 1929.

Accusations of Heresy

The end of the *Cartel* and the return of the SFIO to the opposition temporarily muted the debate over participation. The prospects for participation further diminished after the 1928 elections brought a slim right-wing majority to the Chamber, leading the 1928 SFIO Congress to overwhelmingly approve a politics of rigorous opposition in the current legislature.⁷⁴ However, simmering factional tensions boiled over in October 1929 when Édouard Daladier, the head of the Parti Radical, was tapped to form a new government and invited the Socialists to join it.

⁷² Paul Faure "La Participation Ministérielle, le Cartel des Gauches et l'Avenir du Parti Socialiste" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* March 15 1926.

⁷³ Jean-Baptiste Séverac "Le Socialisme Seul" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* May 15 1926.

⁷⁴ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXVe Congrès national tenu à Toulouse les 26, 27, 28 et 29 Mai 1928. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Au siège du Parti socialiste.

After meeting with Daladier, the Socialist GP voted 36 to 12 in favor of accepting the participation offer and urged the party bureau to convene a National Council to make a final decision. However, the party's highest executive body—the Commission Administrative Permanente (CAP)—consisting at the time almost entirely of anti-participationists, declared quasi-unanimously that the GP's resolution was not in conformity with past congress decisions and asked the National Council to repudiate it.⁷⁵ Thereafter the conflict took on a new dimension, with an open breach developing between the GP and CAP over their relative authority to interpret party policy.

The emergency session of the National Council more or less began in the same vein that the debate over participation had previously taken. The main talking point in favor of participation remained the Socialists' supposed responsibility to prevent the formation of a reactionary government by seeking a democratic parliamentary majority and cementing it with their presence in a coalition government. Those opposing participation largely continued to do so on tactical grounds, a stance made all the easier with a right-wing majority in parliament. Thus, they claimed, it was the circumstances themselves—so often invoked by the participationists—that in advance condemned any potential left-wing coalition government.⁷⁶

However, the debate took on a different character as it considered whether the GP had violated its mandate in publicly expressing an opinion favorable to Daladier's offer. At issue was the GP's authority to interpret party decisions, and particularly its competence to judge for itself what constituted "exceptional circumstances." In the interest of unity, Blum proposed a compromise resolution which, while rejecting Daladier's offer, nonetheless explicitly refused to

⁷⁵ "Un grand débat s'est ouvert hier soir devant le Conseil national sur l'avis favorables des parlementaires" *Le Populaire* October 29 1929.

⁷⁶ "Un grand débat s'est ouvert hier soir devant le Conseil national sur l'avis favorables des parlementaires" *Le Populaire* October 29 1929; "Le Conseil National, par 1590 mandats contre 1451, se déclare solidaire des décisions des Congrès nationaux" *Le Populaire* October 30 1929.

repudiate the GP. Both sides, however, rejected the compromise and pushed the Council to take a clear position either validating the CAP against the GP or vice versa. Thus the final vote was between a Faure resolution recalling "the sovereign decisions of the national congresses that have settled the question [of participation] in the negative," and a Renaudel resolution authorizing the GP to pursue negotiations with Daladier.⁷⁷

The Faure resolution only won a slim 1590 to 1451 majority. With the balance of forces nearly equal, questions were immediately raised regarding the legitimacy of the vote. The participationists accused the Nord Federation in particular of underestimating participationist support in the distribution of its mandates, and the anti-participationists in turn retorted that had the Council delegates honored the distribution of mandates from 1926—the last time the departmental federations had been consulted specifically on the question of participation—the Daladier offer would have been rejected by a wider margin.⁷⁸ With the National Council ending acrimoniously and the final result contested, the GP and the CAP agreed to convene an extraordinary congress for January 1930 in order to give the party time to deliberate and settle the question decisively. However, while the GP suggested "Socialist action in parliament and the problem of government" for the Congress's agenda, under the impulsion of the Faurists the CAP instead went with "Socialist action in parliament, the problem of government, and the Party Charter."⁷⁹ And with that, by forcing the party to make an explicit choice between participation and fidelity to the "Charter", the CAP tried to transmute what had before largely been a tactical controversy into a doctrinal one.

⁷⁷ "Le Conseil National, par 1590 mandats contre 1451, se déclare solidaire des décisions des Congrès nationaux" *Le Populaire* October 30 1929.

⁷⁸ "Le Conseil National, par 1590 mandats contre 1451, se déclare solidaire des décisions des Congrès nationaux" *Le Populaire* October 30 1929. For Faure's retort, see Paul Faure "Qui nous fait la leçon?" *Le Populaire* October 31 1929. Normally, the distribution of votes at Party congresses was fixed by the federal congresses meeting before the national congress. For the Council, however, which was often convened on short notice, the federal delegates were free to distribute their mandates as they saw fit, and in this were ultimately accountable only to their federations.

⁷⁹ *La Vie du Parti* November 15 1929.

This maneuver by the Party majority coincided with an escalation in the participationist challenge. The Council vote did not just register a spontaneous upsurge in support for the participationist position, but was in part the fruit of a determined campaign to overturn the party majority. Central to this effort was Déat, who increasingly became a spokesman for the minority. An ambitious and brilliant young intellectual, Déat was seen by many within the SFIO as Blum's successor and even as a "future Jaurès" (Lefranc 1980a: 157).⁸⁰ By his own account, Déat at this time sought to "conquer the party from the inside" (Déat 1989: 196).⁸¹ Aligned with LVS since 1926, when he was censured by the party for having been elected deputy on an unauthorized coalition list, Déat became the administrative secretary of the GP with Blum's support after losing his seat in the 1928 elections. From his new position, Déat engaged in a "veritable frenzy" of activity, turning the GP secretariat into a propaganda hub rivaling Faure's secretariat in influence (Déat 1989: 218). Indeed, in the 1927-1929 period Déat beat out Faure to become the party's most prolific non-permanent propagandist, speaking at 142 meetings outside his home department compared to 108 for Faure.⁸² The rivalry thus began to take on a personal note, and rumors started circulating that Déat sought to replace Faure as secretary general (Lefranc 1963: 290).⁸³ For the Faurist incumbents in the party apparatus, then, it was not just the party line that was at stake, but their very leadership of the party.

⁸⁰ On the intellectualist mold Déat's ambition took, see Desan and Heilbron (2015). For first-hand testimonies of Déat's ambition, see Cogniot (1976: 68), Moch (1970: 66), du Moulin de Labarthète (1946: 318), Prenant (1980: 44), Varennes (1948: 251).

⁸¹ Déat already had a considerable influence among the Party's intellectual youth, and his esteem was such that he was elected president of the student Socialist federation in 1928, with Zyromski as his vice-president

⁸² Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXVe Congrès national 26-27-28-29-30 mai 1928 Toulouse. Rapports*. Paris: Librairie Populaire. Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXVIe Congrès national 9-12 juin 1929 Nancy. Rapports*. Paris: Librairie Populaire. Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXVIIe Congrès national 8-9-10-11 juin 1930 Bordeaux. Rapports*. Paris: Librairie Populaire.

⁸³ Déat, for his part, denied this and condemned it as calumnious. Marcel Déat "Jouons franc jeu, s'il vous plaît" *La Vie Socialiste* November 16 1929.

A grand debate took place in the party press before the January 1930 Extraordinary Congress. Blum continued to oppose participation by weighing its relative disadvantages compared to the "exercise of power" and "support", citing again the inevitable risk of confusion in the absence of "exceptional circumstances"—which a normal ministerial crisis did not amount to.⁸⁴ But with the gathering strength and dynamism of the participationists, a worried party left underwent a realignment to better push back against the insurgent party right. Thus after several years at odds, the Faurists and LBS once again combined forces, with the former formally joining LBS in 1929 (Nadaud 1989). Now the entire party left was united in calling into question the doctrinal fidelity of the participationists.

In justifying the CAP's addition of the "Charter" to the congress agenda, Séverac claimed that it did so because it wanted to look toward the future and avoid putting party members in a position of having to choose between the GP and the CAP over a question of the past. Yet in invoking the ensemble of the "Charter" and suggesting that the "normal practice of ministerial participation" went against the "most fundamental principles of socialism", Séverac effectively sought to discredit the socialist credentials of the GP. The debate over participation was thus construed as a debate for or against the "Charter", i.e. "for or against the *raison d'être* of the Party itself, such as it was conceived in 1904, created in 1905, and recreated in 1921."⁸⁵ Séverac even suspected that the heart of the divergence was not the definition of "exceptional circumstances", as Blum claimed, but rather two incompatible conceptions of socialism: one that saw it as the "avant-garde" of the bourgeois democratic parties, and another according to which it

⁸⁴ Léon Blum "Aux camarades du Parti: La leçon des textes" *Le Populaire* December 6 1929. Léon Blum "Exercice et partage du pouvoir" *Le Populaire* December 14 1929. Léon Blum "La double confusion" *Le Populaire* December 17 1929. Léon Blum "La risque de confusion" *Le Populaire* December 21 1929. Léon Blum "Les dangers de la confusion" *Le Populaire* December 23 1929. Léon Blum "Les circonstances exceptionnelles" *Le Populaire* December 25 1929.

⁸⁵ Jean-Baptiste Séverac *La Vie du Parti* November 15 1929.

was the revolutionary political expression of the proletariat. Only the latter was "consistent with the constitutive principles" of the SFIO, and the "triumph of participationism...would signify...the acceptance of an altogether different conception of its role, mission, and action."⁸⁶

The rest of the party left also invoked doctrine over the course of the debate. Thus Lebas, changing his tune from 1926, accused the participationists of pursuing a "Millerandist" and "ministerialist" politics and thereby negating the 1905 Unity Pact.⁸⁷ The old core of LBS, too, fell into line with their new Faurist collaborators. Though continuing to base their rejection of a Socialist-Radical coalition on their analysis of capitalist evolution, gone now were the assurances that this was a tactical and not a doctrinal matter.⁸⁸ Indeed, there were now frequent references to the "Charter", and they raised the specter of "revisionism" as they goaded the participationists to own up to their alleged desire to revise the "Charter".⁸⁹ According to Zyromski, "revisionism" was now the "authentic expression" of the participationist thesis, and he lauded the CAP for having "underlined that such a revision of the constitutive and fundamental principles of the Party signified a repudiation of the 'Charter'".⁹⁰

The Participationist Defense

The participationists protested vigorously against this anti-participationist maneuver. The GP continued to insist that participation had nothing to do with ministerialism and that it was a

⁸⁶ Jean-Baptiste Séverac "Le vrai sens du choix qu'on va faire" *Le Populaire* November 29 1929.

⁸⁷ Jean Lebas "La politique ministérielle et la combinaison Daladier" *Le Populaire* December 9 1929. Jean Lebas "Les fonctions électives et la participation" *Le Populaire* December 23 1929.

⁸⁸ There was a pivot here in Zyromski's rhetorical strategy: Where earlier he had subsumed his analysis of capitalism under the dogma/facts distinction made by the participationists, he now counterposed his analysis of capitalism to the mere "circumstances" cited by the participationists. Jean Zyromski "Nos arguments: et nos réponses" *La Vie du Parti* December 6 1929.

⁸⁹ e.g. Bracke "Groupe? C.A.P.? Allons donc! Le Parti" *Le Populaire* December 7 1929; Jean Zyromski "A dix ans d'intervalle" *Le Populaire* November 8 1929; Louis Lévy "Les choses par leur noms" *Le Populaire* November 29 1919; Jean Zyromski "Notre projet de résolution" *Le Populaire* December 27 1929.

⁹⁰ Jean Zyromski "Il faut choisir entre deux conceptions de l'action socialiste" *Le Populaire* December 11 1929.

tactical question in which Party doctrine was not implicated.⁹¹ Déat took umbrage at the "doctrinal opportunism" of the anti-participationists and complained that it was a "grandiose farce to make of participation a problem of doctrine."⁹² Moreover, by linking the question of participation to the "Charter", he accused the CAP of blackmailing the party:

Up to now, we believed that the rule of the Party was that of democracy and that the minority had to yield before the majority, whatever the bitterness and resentment. It seems that this rule is unilateral and only works in one direction. Those who were until now in the minority are tolerated in the party provided that they stay a minority. The day they become a majority, the current leaders of the party announce that the charter will have been torn up, that unity will have been broken, that the party will have been destroyed.⁹³

To these maneuvers, the participationists opposed their own oriented toward neutralizing the accusation of doctrinal heresy. For example, they pointed out that most major European socialist parties had already joined coalition governments, and that to accuse the participationists of doctrinal infidelity was thus also to accuse the fraternal parties of the International.⁹⁴ Even Kautsky, the embodiment of orthodox Marxism, supported participation in the French case—a fact that LVS frequently noted.⁹⁵

To the anti-participationist appeals to the "Charter", the participationists countered by citing more recent party tradition that supposedly supported their view of the problem. So, for example, Déat claimed that a 1928 joint resolution of the CAP and GP—approved unanimously at the 1929 National Congress—unequivocally expressed that participation was a matter of

⁹¹ "Le Groupe Parlementaire et la crise ministérielle" *La Vie du Parti* December 6 1929.

⁹² Marcel Déat "Réflexions sans joie" *Le Populaire* November 17 1929. Marcel Déat "Jouons franc jeu, s'il vous plaît" *La Vie Socialiste* November 16 1929.

⁹³ Marcel Déat "Jouons franc jeu, s'il vous plaît" *La Vie Socialiste* November 16 1929, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Salomon Grumbach "Le problème de la participation du point de vue de internationale" *Le Populaire* December 1 1929.

⁹⁵ Karl Kautsky "Le problème de la coalition en France (1)" *La Vie Socialiste* January 11 1930. Karl Kautsky "Le problème de la coalition en France (2)" *La Vie Socialiste* January 25 1930. Pierre Renaudel "Lutte de classe et coalition" *Le Populaire* January 1 1930. Émile Kahn "Questions" *Le Populaire* January 11 1930. Ironically, the anti-participationists responded by citing circumstantial reasons for refusing to compare the SFIO to its fraternal parties: i.e. the SFIO was not strong or unified enough to enter a coalition. See Jean Lebas "L'Opinion de Kautsky" *Le Populaire* January 19 1930.

opportunity and circumstance.⁹⁶ The issue, as always, was how to identify the "exceptional circumstances". To this end most participationists invoked the need to defend republican institutions in the face of reaction. The refusal to participate, according to them, was responsible for the formation of a reactionary government led by André Tardieu, whom many in the party considered a proto-fascist.⁹⁷ Déat and his allies argued that Tardieu was the expression of a paternalistic neo-capitalism that threatened to permanently mollify the working class.⁹⁸ But for Déat at this time, this threat had a tactical—not doctrinal—significance, demonstrating the urgent necessity of allying with the Radicals, lest the SFIO allow a reactionary government to win over the masses through superficial palliative reforms. The threat of neo-capitalism, then, was considered one of those "exceptional circumstances" mentioned in the "Charter" justifying participation. But for Déat the analysis of neo-capitalism did not constitute a call to revision, as it did for de Man and Philip. Rather, it was precisely what allowed him to stay, at least in his view, within the framework of the party's established doctrine.

Another strategy pursued by the participationists was to question the doctrinal integrity of the anti-participationists themselves. Thus, for example, in an effort to drive a wedge within the anti-participationist camp between Blum and LBS, Déat threw back the epithet of "revisionism", arguing that in accepting the "exercise of power" as a normal consequence of the parliamentary

⁹⁶ Marcel Déat "Jouons franc jeu, s'il vous plait" *La Vie Socialiste* November 16 1929; The relevant portion of the resolution declared that the Party was "always ready to assume the charge and responsibility of power, that it [was] always ready to give its support to all loyal and courageous efforts of democratic reform, that it [was] always ready to confront, in light of the circumstances of the moment...the necessity to defend republican institutions or the existence of conditions permitting it to impress a determinant impulsion to the rhythm of the economic transformation of Society..." "La C.A.P. et le groupe parlementaire se sont réunis hier" *Le Populaire* November 12 1928.

⁹⁷ "Le Groupe Parlementaire et la crise ministérielle" *La Vie du Parti* December 6 1929. "Un important débat sur la participation: Séverac, Zyromski, Delépine, Faure, Bracke et Renaudel prennent la parole" *Le Populaire* December 11 1929. Jules Uhry "La circonstance exceptionnelle" *Le Populaire* December 22 1929.

⁹⁸ Marcel Déat "Réflexions sans joie" *Le Populaire* November 17 1929; Marcel Déat "Mais où sont les révolutionnaires?" *Le Populaire* January 9 1930; "La fédération de la Seine a consacré toute la journée d'hier à un ample débat sur la participation" *Le Populaire* January 13 1930; Paul Perrin "Révolution capitaliste ou révolution prolétarienne?" *La Vie Socialiste* January 18 1930.

game the party left had already in effect revised the "Charter". It was those who insisted on going back to the 1905 Unity Pact against the more recent precedents set by the party who were the "authentic revisionists."⁹⁹ Moreover, there was no essential difference between the "exercise of power" and participation, the latter being only a modality of the former. The participationists began calling participation the "shared exercise of power" in order to make their point.¹⁰⁰ It was now up to the anti-participationists to be frank and choose between the "exercise of power", in all its modalities, and an exclusive commitment to the total "conquest of power"—the latter ultimately being indistinguishable from Bolshevism. To equivocate on this choice between democratic socialism and Bolshevism was, according to Déat, an act of bad faith built on doctrinal incoherence and contradiction:

One invokes the Charter: in order to tear it up. One displays doctrine: in order to reduce it to mush. Principles mix with circumstances of fact, dogma is permeated with opportunity, one baptizes an impossible salad a synthesis...Avow frankly that you are undertaking a maneuver to collect mandates, to conserve...a majority in the Party. But don't come presenting to us this incoherent rhapsody as the *Credo* of a regenerated socialism."¹⁰¹

After chastising the left for its lack of commitment to democracy, Déat also questioned their revolutionary credentials. The refusal to participate was for him a form of quietism that turned the party into a bunch of passive schoolmasters awaiting a revolution forever postponed. The left's revolutionary verbiage masked a lack of revolutionary ardor, and it was the anti-participationists who were "essentially *defeatist*" and showed "a formidable mistrust, not only of the leaders of the Party, but of its mass, not only of the means of which it disposes, but of its

⁹⁹ Marcel Déat "Mais où sont les révisionnistes?" *Le Populaire* December 12 1929.

¹⁰⁰ "Paul-Boncour et Renaudel parlent, au dîner de la Vie Socialiste, de l'exercice partagé du pouvoir" *La Vie Socialiste* November 23 1929; Marcel Déat "Visite aux centristes" *La Vie Socialiste* December 21 1929; "La Réunion de LVS: Une large discussion sur l'exercice partagé du pouvoir" *Le Populaire* December 22 1929.

¹⁰¹ Marcel Déat "Bouillie doctrinale et Charte en lambeaux" *La Vie Socialiste* January 11 1930.

doctrine itself."¹⁰² Developing his theory of the State as the expression of the balance of class forces, Déat instead affirmed the revolutionary value of participation, arguing that the revolution now "passed through the State" and that in assuming a share of power the Socialists could penetrate it and transform it in a revolutionary direction.¹⁰³ Within the SFIO, then, the left represented "regression", the center "immobility", and the right "movement." Déat hoped that at the January Congress it would finally become "clear in the eyes of all that those who [were], stupidly or perfidiously, baptized reformists [were] the only revolutionaries in the Party."¹⁰⁴

At the January Extraordinary Congress, the participationists continued to insist on the tactical nature of the debate, and accused the anti-participationists of opportunistically mixing doctrinal and circumstantial reasons for opposing participation.¹⁰⁵ If there was a question of revisionism, they claimed, it was that of the party left's pseudo-Bolshevik revision of the party's democratic tradition. Nonetheless, the Congress registered a clear victory for the anti-participationists, with the majority motion confirming the decision of the October Council—and declaring that the party "intended to stay faithful to the Party Charter"—winning 2066 votes to the 1507 for the participationist motion—a larger margin of victory than at the Council.¹⁰⁶

Once again, however, matters were far from settled. The participationists remained defiant. The Congress ended with a declaration from the minority challenging the authority of the CAP, stating that nobody could "consider as forever settled a question that depends much

¹⁰² Marcel Déat "Mais où sont les révolutionnaires?" *Le Populaire* January 9 1930.

¹⁰³ Déat also noted that the possibility of such a revolutionary modification of the State had already been accepted by everybody in the case of the "exercise" of power. Marcel Déat "Bouillie doctrinale et Charte en lambeaux" January 11 1930.

¹⁰⁴ Marcel Déat "Visite aux centristes" *La Vie Socialiste* December 21 1929.

¹⁰⁵ "Congrès National Extraordinaire du Parti" *Le Populaire* January 26 1930; "Le Congrès National Socialiste confirme à l'unanimité qu'il entend rester fidèle à la Charte de notre Parti" *Le Populaire* January 27 1930.

¹⁰⁶ Though the participationists managed to have a proposal requiring a two-thirds Party majority for accepting any future participation offer dropped, their own proposal to create a new executive committee with the authority to accept such offers was rejected in favor of language stipulating that any "exceptional circumstances" had to be "recognized firmly as such" by a Party Congress or Council—language that favored the status quo, especially given the Faurist secretariat's influence over the Party's federations. "La motion rapportée par Lebas au nom de la majorité est adoptée par 2066 mandats contre 1507" *Le Populaire* January 27 1930.

less on the will of the Party than on events themselves" and vowing to continue its agitation in favor of participation.¹⁰⁷ Despite remaining in the minority, the participationists claimed that the Congress, which also validated the "exercise" of power and accepted the principle of participation in "exceptional circumstances", had in fact been an implicit victory for them.¹⁰⁸ Arguing that the only decisive conclusion of the Congress was to reject the latest Daladier participation offer on circumstantial grounds, Déat and his allies still believed that they would ultimately triumph. As for the statement of fidelity to the "Charter" in the majority motion, what the party left had intended as a call to order was, because they had always denied violating party doctrine, nothing of the sort in the eyes of the participationists.¹⁰⁹

The anti-participationists had thus managed to beat back the participationist offensive, but the participationists were disinclined to fall into line. Furthermore, what had once been mutually recognized as a debate over tactics was now transmuted into a struggle over the legitimate definition of socialist doctrine. Not only, then, could neither side back down without disavowing itself and admitting its doctrinal deviation, any further conflict over participation was bound to take on a doctrinal cast, with worrisome consequences for party unity.

Déat's Theoretical Challenge

As it became clear that there was no left-wing majority in the legislature, the question of participation temporarily took a back seat. Factional tensions nonetheless kept rising as new disagreements over the agrarian question, national defense, and the official functions of Socialist

¹⁰⁷ "Le Congrès National Socialiste confirme à l'unanimité qu'il entend rester fidèle à la Charte de notre Parti" *Le Populaire* January 27 1930.

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Renaudel "Le gouvernement de coalition est en marche" *La Vie Socialiste* February 1 1930; Marcel Déat "Réflexions sur un Congrès: Fin, Suite, ou Commencement?" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* February 15 1930.

¹⁰⁹ The majority motion in fact consisted of four different paragraphs, each of which was voted on once the minority resolution had been rejected. The participationists voted with the anti-participationists for the first paragraph declaring fidelity to the "Charter", which Séverac later decried as a maneuver designed to confuse the issue. Jean-Baptiste Séverac "Les résultats du Congrès National" *La Nouvelle Revue Socialiste* February 15 1930.

parliamentarians emerged. Although the participationists continued to deny the conflict's doctrinal character, both sides increasingly began to see it as one between two different conceptions of socialism. Thus Renaudel, following the January Congress, wrote that the debate would henceforth take place on a "broader terrain", and appealed to all those who were for "a socialism of reformative penetration and 'revolutionary evolution'" and not a "socialism of revolutionary destruction"¹¹⁰ It was Déat, however, who emerged as the participationists' chief theoretician.

Before throwing himself into politics, Déat had been an especially talented student, attending the prestigious Lycée Henri-IV and the Ecole Normale Supérieure. From a modest family, Déat owed his social ascension to his intellectual ability. It is not surprising, then, that Déat exhibited a heightened intellectual arrogance and an abiding faith in the power of ideas—attributes that did not escape the notice of his contemporaries (Abellio 1975: 59; Lefranc 1980b; Montagnon 1969: 139; Varennes 1948: 251). Déat went on to become a promising young sociologist working under the tutelage of Célestin Bouglé, but would abandon his academic career for politics in 1926. In reinvesting his academic capital in the political field, it was as an intellectual that Déat entered politics, and it was within the Socialist Party that he sought to realize his intellectual ambitions. Yet Déat's intellectual agenda over the course of his career was not particularly coherent or homogeneous; in fact, it was highly eclectic. As I argue elsewhere, there was not really a particular content to Déat's "intellectual self-concept" (Gross 2002, 2008), but rather his self-concept was as an intellectual *tout court*, determining not so much his position-takings as it did the way he made sense of them. What Déat took from his education was not a particular set of ideas, but a particular relationship to ideas that, embodied in an

¹¹⁰ Pierre Renaudel "Le gouvernement de coalition est en marche" *La Vie Socialiste* February 1 1930.

intellectualist habitus and self-concept, functioned as a kind of symbolic capital marking the intellectual distinction on which Déat staked his political credibility (Desan and Heilbron 2015).

Déat was thus predisposed to approach problems intellectually, often transmuting personal and political rivalries into theoretical disputes. This helps to explain why, after the setback for the participationists at the January 1930 Congress, Déat began systematizing the ideas that would culminate in the publication of *Perspectives socialistes* in November 1930. In a series of articles for *La Vie socialiste*, he continued to warn against the neo-capitalist and fascist threats and developed his analysis of the State as the expression of the balance of class forces.¹¹¹ The central themes of *Perspectives socialistes*—i.e. the "anti-capitalist" coalition with the middle classes and the serialized socializations of power, profit, and property—were also elaborated at this time.¹¹²

Déat's interventions gave the factional conflict a theoretical scope that it hitherto lacked. As Burrin points out, Déat harbored clear intellectual ambitions and did not conform to the "classic type of reformist"—i.e. purely pragmatic and uninterested in theoretical formulations—represented by Renaudel (Burrin [1986] 2003: 53). Yet it would be a mistake to see in Déat's writings in this period a will to heresy. To suggest, as Bergounioux does, that the factional debate took a "clearer doctrinal twist" starting in 1930 is not quite right (Bergounioux 1984: 7). Even while developing the theses that would come together in *Perspectives socialistes*, Déat

¹¹¹ Marcel Déat "Démocratie et salariat" *La Vie Socialiste* February 15 1930; Marcel Déat "Textes équivoques et manœuvres obliques" *La Vie Socialiste* May 24 1930; Marcel Déat "Défense nationale et défense de classe" *La Vie Socialiste* May 31 1930; Marcel Déat "Les trois formes de la socialisation" *La Vie Socialiste* August 2 1930.

¹¹² Marcel Déat "Démocratie et salariat" *La Vie Socialiste* February 15 1930; Marcel Déat "Propagande rurale, et propagande agraire" *La Vie Socialiste* May 10 1930; Marcel Déat "Avenir socialiste et destins radicaux" *La Vie Socialiste* June 28 1930; Marcel Déat "Qu'est-ce qu'un programme d'action" *La Vie Socialiste* April 5 1930; Marcel Déat "Impuissance de la négation" *La Vie Socialiste* May 3 1930; Marcel Déat "Défense nationale et défense de classe" *La Vie Socialiste* May 31 1930; Marcel Déat "Propriété des biens et maîtrise des forces" *La Vie Socialiste* July 26 1930; Marcel Déat "Les trois formes de la socialisation" *La Vie Socialiste* August 2 1930.

continued to insist that there was no question of him revising the Party's doctrine,¹¹³ and that—between the party's traditional tactics and the democratic road to socialism traced in the book—at issue were "two hypotheses...and not orthodoxy faced with heresy".¹¹⁴

Déat's interventions in fact responded to the exigencies of the participation debate and amounted to a theoretical justification for ministerial participation. The urgent necessity of an "anti-capitalist" coalition and the historical possibility of divorcing capitalism and the State were so many reasons for an alliance with the Radicals, who represented the middle classes that Déat sought to lure and whose Republicanism made common cause in the "socialization of power" possible. Ministerial participation was validated by a theory of the State that allowed for its gradual penetration by socialism. Indeed, Déat's preoccupation seems to have primarily been to arm the party, and particularly his participationist colleagues, for the 1932 elections. In the retrospective words of Déat's contemporary, *Perspectives socialistes* became the "Bible of all French socialist parliamentarians who...wanted to arm their ambition with some apparatus" (Abellio 1975: 93). Déat certainly elevated the factional conflict to a theoretical level, but in doing so he never claimed to be revising the party's doctrine, much less founding a new one. As much as the ideas presented in *Perspectives socialistes* were a challenge to the Guesdist line, they were still inscribed in what, in the eyes of the party right, remained a tactical debate over participation. As such, Déat set out to provide a theoretical armature to a conventional reformist practice more than he sought to define a new political identity.

If Déat had hoped to influence party strategy by the force of his intellect, the book did not have the desired effect. In his memoirs Déat lamented the "profound and total silence in the

¹¹³ e.g. Marcel Déat "Au pouvoir, pour la paix!" *La Vie Socialiste* April 26 1930; Marcel Déat "Propagande rurale, et propagande agraire" *La Vie Socialiste* May 10 1930; Marcel Déat "Défense nationale et défense de classe" *La Vie Socialiste* May 31 1930; Marcel Déat "De quoi sera-t-il fait?" *La Vie Socialiste* June 7 1930; Marcel Déat "En marge de Charles Gide" *La Vie Socialiste* July 19 1930.

¹¹⁴ Marcel Déat "Reflexions sur quelques critiques" *La Vie Socialiste* January 31 1931.

interior of the party" surrounding the book (Déat 1989: 236). Especially stung by Blum's silence, the book's publication supposedly marked Déat's "intellectual and moral rupture" with him (Déat 1989: 237).¹¹⁵ In reality, the book did provoke a reaction, albeit a critical one from the party left. A series of critical reviews in *La Bataille socialiste* condemned Déat's departure from the Guesdist orthodoxy and again raised the specter of doctrinal revision.¹¹⁶ It was Lebas, in a pamphlet titled *Le socialisme: But et moyen. Suivi de la réfutation d'un néo-socialisme* [Socialism: Ends and Means. Followed by the Refutation of a Neo-socialism], who first baptized the theses of *Perspectives socialistes* a "neo-socialism." Lebas wrote that Déat's book represented not even a "renewed attempt at revisionism" but rather a "complete upheaval of socialist theories and tactics" (Lebas 1931: 35). Déat was further chastised for proposing an "entirely new socialism, unknown until yesterday," and a "new doctrine" that bore no relation to the party's revolutionary Marxist tradition (Lebas 1931: 35, 63). Of the socialism that was the basis of the 1905 unification of the party, Lebas went on, "there remain[ed] nothing" (Lebas 1931: 35-36).

These accusations, however, must also be taken in context. They did not straightforwardly register a doctrinal heresy, but were an extension of previous polemical efforts to discredit the participationists. With the publication of *Perspectives socialistes*, and his emergence as a leader of the party right, Déat became the privileged target of these efforts.¹¹⁷ Déat protested vehemently against what he considered to be slanderous misrepresentations of his

¹¹⁵ Of Blum, he wrote: "he understood then that I was not inclined to comport myself toward him as an obedient disciple and that I would soon become a nuisance" (Déat 1989: 237). That Déat was expecting a sympathetic reception from Blum, however, suggests that he did not intend the book as a heretical attack on the Party's core doctrine.

¹¹⁶ Jean-Baptiste Séverac "Quelques réflexions sur les 'Perspectives socialistes' de Marcel Déat" *La Bataille Socialiste* January 1931; Dr. Oguse "L'état, c'est moi" *La Bataille Socialiste* January 1931; Jean-Baptiste Séverac "Quelques précisions au sujet des 'Perspectives socialistes'" *La Bataille Socialiste* February 1931.

¹¹⁷ That Déat continued to be seen as a threat by the Guesdist leadership is further corroborated by the fact that Faure usurped an initiative by Déat to create a documentation office for the Party by setting up his own under the aegis of the secretariat. Henry Hauck "A propos de l'Office de Documentation Socialiste" *La Vie Socialiste* February 21 1931.

position, once again objecting to the invocation of the party "Charter" by LBS and demonstrating his fidelity by placing himself firmly in the democratic socialist tradition incarnated by Jaurès.¹¹⁸

In particular, Déat complained that the publication of Lebas's pamphlet by the party's Nord Federation and its continued advertising in the pages of the party daily, *Le Populaire*, gave the impression that Lebas's personal opinions were in fact officially sanctioned judgments of the party organization, and that he thereby appeared to be implicitly "excommunicated".¹¹⁹

Déat and his allies thus rejected the "neo-socialist" label, which had originated as a pejorative term used to anathematize Déat and throw the participationists into doctrinal discredit. But the term did not immediately catch on within the party at large; indeed, though there was a spike in 1931 in references to "neo-socialism" in the pages of *Le Populaire*, these were almost exclusively due to the ads for Lebas's pamphlet. In fact, there were no references to the term in 1932, and only after July 1933 when the factional conflict took a schismatic turn did "neo-socialism" and "neo-socialist" come to be widely used (Figure 2).

Figure 2. References to neo-socialism in *Le Populaire*

	"néo-socialiste" or "néosocialiste"	"néo-socialisme" or "néosocialisme"
1930	0	1
1931	0	44
1932	0	0
1933	59 (all in July or after)	54 (all in July or after)

Almost all 1931 references to "neo-socialism" in *Le Populaire* were due to ads placed for Jean Lebas's pamphlet, *Socialisme: But et Moyen. Suivi de la Réfutation d'un Néo-socialisme*. All 1933 references to "neo-socialism" and "neo-socialist" occurred after the July Congress.

To see the theses of *Perspectives socialistes* as the "charter" or the "doctrinal basis" of neo-socialism is thus premature, and risks taking the party left's tendentious denunciations at

¹¹⁸ Marcel Déat "Reflexions sur quelques critiques" *La Vie Socialiste* January 31 1931. Marcel Déat "Simple Constatation" *La Vie Socialiste* June 27 1931. Marcel Déat "Récidive et diversion" *La Vie Socialiste* July 25 1931.

¹¹⁹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXVIIIe Congrès national tenu à Tours les 24, 25, 26 et 26 mai 1931. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 21-23.

face value (Bergounioux 1978: 396; Lefranc 1982: 122). Though Déat's theoretical ambitions lend it a certain surface plausibility, such an interpretation ultimately depends on a teleological bias that reads Déat's later embrace of the neo-socialist label back into his past. At this point, the doctrinal status of *Perspectives socialistes* was still contested. Whether or not there existed such a thing as neo-socialism, and what its relationship was to party doctrine, were stakes of a classification struggle that was itself inscribed within the broader factional struggle over participation. Following the 1930 Extraordinary Congress and the publication of *Perspectives socialistes*, neo-socialism was still just the polemical invention of the Guesdist left, and had not yet come to define a self-conscious alternative to the SFIO's doctrine.

The Road to Schism

It was not until a schism became inevitable in 1933 that the factional conflict became mutually recognized as doctrinal in character, with the usually conciliatory Blum entering the fray and key figures of the party right self-consciously assuming the "neo-socialist" mantle. But the chain of events directly precipitating the schism was driven less by this doctrinal controversy than by the stubborn refusal of the participationists within the GP to submit to the Party majority in pursuing their parliamentary strategy. While the party left continued to accuse the party right of subverting the "Charter", the schism was in fact consummated over a question of indiscipline. Neo-socialism, as an explicit challenge to established party doctrine, was thus not the cause of the 1933 schism; rather, it represented an ideological adjustment to, and rationalization of, what had already become a *fait accompli*.

The longstanding debate over the party's attitude towards bourgeois governments became schismatic after the 1932 legislative elections. The elections were a boon for both the

participationists generally and Déat personally. Déat's ambitions to lead the party and his increasingly hostile rivalry with Blum were further nourished after he won a seat in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, edging out the Communist leader Jacques Duclos, who himself had taken the seat from Blum in 1928. The elections brought in a large left-wing majority to the Chamber, but were a mixed bag for the SFIO. Though winning a plurality of votes, the SFIO only won 131 seats to the Radicals' 160, too weak to form a government on its own but too strong to withhold its support without breaking the left-wing majority. With the party thus on an awkward footing, the participation debate was bound to be reopened. The participationists scored a victory when the post-election party Congress quasi-unanimously voted to approve Socialist participation conditional on the Radicals agreeing to a minimum program—known as the *Cahiers de Huyghens* [Huyghens Notebooks]—drafted by the Socialists.¹²⁰ A party majority had thus for the first time accepted the principle of Socialist ministerial participation in a Radical government. Moreover, that this was done pre-emptively, without a concrete offer of participation on the table, was an indication of participationist strength and the pressure put on the party by the new political conjuncture (OURS 1975a: 19-20).

¹²⁰ The idea of conditional participation had first been proposed by Déat in 1926. The conditions laid out in the *Cahiers de Huyghens*, which included a reduction in military credits, the nationalization of the arms industry, and the creation of a national social insurance system, among other things, were arguably unlikely to ever be accepted by the Radicals, which partly explains why the anti-participationists were able to rally to the idea of a conditional participation.

Illustration 10. The 1932 SFIO Congress at the Gymnase Huyghens



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

A Socialist delegation presented the *Cahiers de Huyghens* to the Radicals but were rebuffed. Not only did the Radicals reject the conditions, they likely never intended to solicit Socialist participation in the first place (Berstein 2006). Faced with this rejection, the party unanimously agreed to continue its old policy of parliamentary "support". Though the participationists had reason to be encouraged after this episode, their impatience would undo much of the progress they had made within the party. Things took a turn in January 1933 when Daladier offered the SFIO a place in his new government. Though the SFIO statutes stipulated that only a National Council could accept an offer of participation, Daladier let it be known that he could not wait, pressing the GP to make a decision itself before a Council could be convened

and consulted. The GP thus voted 64-17 to continue discussions with Daladier so as to obtain from him a general commitment to the broad outlines of the *Cahiers de Huyghens*, in the event of which Daladier's offer would be accepted.¹²¹ In the end, however, Daladier rejected both the letter and spirit of the *Cahiers de Huyghens*.

Though Daladier's offer was ultimately rejected, the February National Council overwhelmingly (2636 to 1070) repudiated the GP, which it judged to have overstepped its bounds. With this call to order, the relationship between the GP and the party leadership became more rancorous and the factional conflict increasingly turned on the question of party discipline. The next clash occurred in March when the GP majority decided to back an unpopular government budget measure containing cuts to civil servant salaries, prompting Blum and Vincent Auriol, a centrist theretofore tending to side with the participationists, to respectively resign their posts as President and Vice-President of the GP in protest and leading 20 Socialist deputies to break ranks with the GP majority in voting against the measure.¹²² The participationists argued that the vote followed from the politics of "support" favored by the party majority, which called for the GP to put its weight behind the center-left government but constrained it to vote for or against government measures without having a hand in their elaboration. Feeling themselves accountable not just to the party but also to their electors, which naturally included many non-Socialists, and continuing to cite the dangers of a reactionary government, the GP majority refused to take responsibility for breaking the republican majority in parliament by voting against the budget measure.

¹²¹ The GP was initially divided into three currents: 1) those for immediate acceptance (e.g. Renaudel, Adrien Marquet); 2) those for immediate refusal (e.g. Blum, Lebas); 3) those favoring the strategy that was eventually adopted (e.g. Déat). If Daladier accepted the spirit of the *Cahiers de Huyghens*, so the logic went, then the GP could accept a participation offer under the terms of the 1932 Congress without having to convene a new National Council to decide on the issue. The first current eventually rallied to third.

¹²² Socialist deputies were bound by Party discipline to vote as a bloc in parliament.

For the CAP, however, this was an unacceptable betrayal of the labor movement, which opposed the budget cuts, and of the "Charter". An Extraordinary Congress was thus called for April to bring the GP into line. The Congress saw another large victory for the party majority, with a Blum motion establishing guidelines for the GP winning 2807 votes compared to 925 for a Renaudel motion affirming the autonomy of GP. However, the majority motion did not level concrete sanctions against the GP and was sufficiently ambiguous to be interpreted by the participationists, however tendentiously, in a way justifying their behavior. Things came to a head again when in May the GP once again approved the budget, earning a quick rebuke from the party majority who saw this as a willful flouting of the April Congress.¹²³ The two factions now appeared irreconcilable and the specter of a schism came to dominate party discussion. Despite a declaration from the GP that any sanction would be tantamount to a call for schism,¹²⁴ the July Party Congress voted by a clear majority to censure the GP and called for sanctions in the case of further indiscipline.¹²⁵

The participationist leaders only became more defiant as their situation within the party became more hopeless. Despite the censure and the threat of sanction, they continued to push their position. The first shoe dropped when in August a group of participationists—including Renaudel, Marquet, and Montagnon—held a public meeting in Angoulême condemning the party line.¹²⁶ This public display of dissidence was in itself a violation of party discipline, but

¹²³ The GP for its part justified its vote by citing its mandate to defend the government from any reactionary maneuvers. The GP argued that the right had been planning on abandoning its customary approval of the budget, forcing the Socialists to either vote for it or topple the Radical government.

¹²⁴ "Réunion du Groupe socialiste" *Le Populaire* June 10 1933.

¹²⁵ The Faure motion censuring the GP won 2197 votes, a Renaudel motion approving the conduct of the GP won 752, and a compromise Auriol motion only expressing "regret" at the GP's conduct won 971. "Le 30e Congrès national du Parti a terminé, hier, ses travaux" *Le Populaire* July 18 1933.

¹²⁶ Déat was supposed to have spoken at the meeting but could not make it. He did, however, publicly express his solidarity with the speakers. Marcel Déat "Unité ou scission?" *La Vie Socialiste* October 7 1933.

matters worsened when it was reported that Marquet had called for the creation of a new party.¹²⁷ The other shoe dropped in October, when another deflationary budget measure came up for a vote. This time a majority of the GP voted against the measure, but 28 of the most intransigent participationists nonetheless voted for it, thereby defying both the party and GP vote discipline. According to Blum, the fate of the schismatics was effectively sealed when, following the vote, Renaudel "expressed himself as the chief of a new party, addressing as such the Chamber and...the country".¹²⁸ The November National Council convened to address the cases of indiscipline overwhelmingly voted to declare that those who spoke at, or publicly expressed their solidarity with, the Angoulême meeting *and* belonged to the GP minority voting for the October budget measure had thereby excluded themselves from the party.¹²⁹ Though this only directly affected 7 deputies—among which were Renaudel, Déat, Montagnon, and Marquet—they were followed out of the SFIO by a handful of supporters and a few department federations.¹³⁰ The dissidents quickly constituted a new parliamentary group, and in December held the founding congress of a new party, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF), of which Renaudel would be the president and Déat the secretary general.

The Birth of Neo-Socialism

The driving force of the 1933 schism was thus the mounting indiscipline of the participationists starting in 1932. However, during this time the conflict also came to take on a clear doctrinal dimension. The party left continued to accuse the party right of subverting party doctrine much as they had since 1929, but as the participationist insurgency became more

¹²⁷ "La manifestation d'Angoulême" *La Vie du Parti* September 11 1933.

¹²⁸ Léon Blum "La double fin" *Le Populaire* October 25 1933.

¹²⁹ "La décision du Parti" *Le Populaire* November 6 1933.

¹³⁰ In all, the SFIO lost 28 deputies and 7 senators. But not all participationists left the Party; an important fraction stayed in the SFIO, choosing caution despite sympathizing with the dissidents (Lefranc 1982).

desperate, and as it became clearer that their ambitions were wrecked, important figures of the party right, and especially Déat, also came to recast the conflict in doctrinal terms. Indeed, the birth of neo-socialism really dates from this period, and not from the publication of *Perspectives socialistes*. Neo-socialism was not the brainchild of any one person, but rather was elaborated situationally and collectively over the final stages of the factional conflict. Déat, who has retrospectively been credited as the architect of neo-socialism, was in fact just one player in this process, and his neo-socialism was less the driving force of this process than an adaptation to it.

Not all of the participationists who eventually left the SFIO took this doctrinal turn. Some like Renaudel continued their old line of argumentation and denied until the very end that there was any doctrinal controversy. Insisting on the tactical nature of his disagreement with the leadership, Renaudel chafed under the party left's persistent accusations of heresy.¹³¹ Although he did suggest revising the "Charter" at the 1933 July Congress to the end of facilitating a coalition government,¹³² and although he began to adopt some of Déat's ideas on the State,¹³³ Renaudel continually played down the novelty of the participationists' positions, preferring to place himself entirely within the democratic socialist tradition of Jaurès. Indeed, after the term "neo-socialism" started to spread, and even after the founding of the PSdF, Renaudel always rejected the label and the doctrinal innovation that it implied.¹³⁴ For a significant fraction of the schismatics, then, the schism remained within the old framework of the factional conflict over

¹³¹ For example, Renaudel complained that Séverac had taken it upon himself to "fan the flames of the stake where heretics will, one day, be offered in a holocaust to the orthodoxy of the 1905 texts." Pierre Renaudel "Le fléchissement du Groupe socialiste parlementaire!!" *Le Populaire* February 17 1933.

¹³² This earned him a rebuke from Blum, who accused him of placing the debate on a doctrinal level. Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. *Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, p. 361.

¹³³ e.g. Pierre Renaudel "Nous, Socialistes et la participation" *Le Populaire* January 6 1933.

¹³⁴ In Renaudel's words: "It would be an error to believe that in creating the Party...we are tempted to justify the famous label of "neo-socialism" that the citizen Lebas applied for the first time to Déat's pioneering book: *Perspectives socialistes*...I see that some friends often enough take up this label as a challenge, and apply it to themselves. But we are not neo-socialists forgetting socialism. Socialism remains our goal and our doctrine, such as is affirmed by the preliminary article of our statutes that by the way maybe merits to be clarified." Pierre Renaudel "Les difficultés et les tâches" *La Vie Socialiste* January 6 1934.

ministerial participation, and the new party represented little more than the freedom to pursue a tactic of parliamentary collaboration with the Radicals.

Bergounioux has argued that a "notable ideological revolution" occurred among the neo-socialists in 1933 (Bergounioux 1984: 12). Though denying a metamorphosis in their discourse, Bergounioux claims that there were important "modifications" that "tended to change the equilibrium of their doctrinal construction" (Bergounioux 1984: 12). He and others (e.g. Burrin [1986] 2003, Cointet 1998, Lefranc 1982) have rightly emphasized the impact of Hitler's rise to power in January 1933 and the subsequent collapse of the SPD—whose strength had always been a model for the socialist movement—on the neo-socialists. Having always warned against the dangers of a reactionary neo-capitalism, Déat and his allies saw in German events a further confirmation of the need, more urgent than ever, for a broad "anti-capitalist" coalition rallying the middle classes and a socialist penetration of the bourgeois State. But the effective collapse of the Socialist International and the disarticulation of the European economy with the global economic crisis also led to a modulation in the participationists' discourse as they increasingly emphasized the necessity to act within a national framework. Socialists could no longer wait for a "hypothetical and imaginary" revolution on the international level, lest they be "swept away" by the fascists as in Italy and Germany. Not only did circumstances constrain the Socialists to find a national solution to the crisis, Déat argued that the fascist threat meant Socialism could not afford to cut itself off from the middle classes, democracy, and "the Nation."¹³⁵ This accommodation to the "nation fact" represented a clear departure from the internationalist pieties of the SFIO, and would become a key element of neo-socialist discourse.

Still, this appeal to the nation was initially presented as a tactical adjustment to the international situation, not as a value in and of itself, and was in that sense in line with the

¹³⁵ Marcel Déat "Le fond du débat" *La Vie Socialiste* July 8 1933.

established rhetorical strategy of the participationists. Déat emerged from the 1932 Congress in which the *Cahiers de Huyghens* were drafted convinced that the party was now nearly unanimous in dropping its doctrinal objection to participation.¹³⁶ As such, Déat had little reason to abandon the strategy of insisting on the tactical and not doctrinal nature of the factional conflict, so long as it seemed that the participationists had a realistic chance at being in the majority, and indeed Déat continued to do so throughout the first half of 1933.

The 1933 July Congress, however, was a turning point, marking both the end of the participationists' aspirations to conquer the party and the full displacement of the factional conflict onto a doctrinal terrain. Surprisingly, Déat only played a secondary role in this particular drama, with the leading roles played by Montagnon and Adrien Marquet, the deputy-mayor of Bordeaux.¹³⁷ The Congress had been charged with discussing the behavior of the GP, and the debate was largely limited to disciplinary issues until the second day when Montagnon's speech effected a "*détournement*" of the Congress (Berstein 2006: 368).

Never one to show reverence for party doctrine, Montagnon had been a more marginal voice among the participationists than Renaudel or Déat. With his intervention at the Congress, however, he stepped forward as one of the leaders of the minority. Montagnon began his intervention expressing irritation that the Party was losing its time "discussing ridiculously inferior questions." The conflict, according to him, was a function not simply of differences between the GP and the party, but of a "doctrinal crisis" within the party. The economic crisis had inaugurated the death of liberal capitalism, but the working class was too weak to fulfill its revolutionary role. Meanwhile, the State's inability to address the crisis revealed a crisis of democracy. Revolutionary ferment was now strongest among the middle classes and the youth,

¹³⁶ "Une enquête de La Vie Socialiste auprès de nos camarades du Groupe Parlementaire sur la situation politique présente" *La Vie Socialiste* May 28 1932.

¹³⁷ On Marquet, see Bonin et al. (2007), Brana and Dusseau (2001), Lafossas (2012).

and they were demanding something new. The lesson of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and New Deal America was that a strong State—"master of its currency, capable of controlling the economy and finance, of imposing certain directives on big capitalism"—was necessary, even if it meant adapting socialist doctrine and even if "certain old texts" had to be left behind. The strength of fascism lay in recognizing the necessity of a strong State, and its success belied the Socialists' belief that there was but a single road to socialism.¹³⁸

Marquet's discourse was even more inflammatory than Montagnon's. Though prone to "bold and aggressive formulas" (Déat 1989: 279), Marquet was not an intellectual but rather a man of action and *provocateur* situated on the party's far right. Ambitious and impatient, he was an arch-participationist who had a reputation for opportunism, and was long held in suspicion by Blum (Lefranc 1982: 119). In Lefranc's estimation, Marquet was already determined to provoke a schism by the July Congress, and indeed his discourse there suggests as much (Lefranc 1982: 124). Lamenting the slow progress of socialism in France, Marquet remarked that one "does not give one's life to conquer thirty seats in the Chamber." The problem was that the crisis had benefitted reactionaries at the expense of Socialists, who were unwilling and unprepared to find a solution to the "sensation of disorder and incoherence" affecting the masses, including the middle classes. Socialism, according to Marquet, had to be "capable of appearing, in the current disorder, as an island of order and a pole of authority." Indeed, "order" and "authority" had to be the party's "new bases of action" if it hoped to attract the popular masses, and a strong power organized within a national framework was necessary to replace a "deficient bourgeoisie." Marquet's suggestion that the watchwords of order, authority, and nation were more adequate to

¹³⁸ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. *Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 250-260.

the time than liberty and justice famously provoked Blum into interrupting and exclaiming: "I'm listening with an attention of which you can be the judge, but I confess that I am appalled."¹³⁹

Though their interventions were uncoordinated and improvised, Montagnon and Marquet transformed the nature of the debate at the July Congress.¹⁴⁰ Not to be outdone, and perhaps to "remove the spotlight" from Marquet, on the final day of the Congress Déat—who had in his earlier intervention limited himself to the disciplinary issues of the GP—pronounced a second discourse in which he followed Montagnon and Marquet onto a more provocative terrain (Lefranc 1982: 124-125). According to Déat, the Congress was no longer simply about the GP's behavior, but had been elevated into a "confrontation of our worries, the affirmation and manifestation of sentiments and ideas...that have appeared, indeed, rightly...to give off a new sound." Marquet had expressed, "on the essential, things that we are more numerous than imagined in feeling and thinking in the interior of the Party." Déat went on to reiterate his calls for an "anticapitalist" front, a renovation of the State, and a realignment of socialism with the nation. However, these were now fully inscribed within a doctrinal assault against Blum and the party leadership. Socialists had prepared for a battle between an internationalized proletariat and bourgeoisie, and as such were in disarray on the new battlefield, "where they no longer encounter the adversary they were expecting, where the flags no longer have the same colors, where the language spoken is no longer the same as that to which [they] were habituated, where the watchwords have changed." Moreover, Déat felt that "something in socialism [had] been distorted, that something of its spirit, its program [had] been stolen by its adversary." To combat

¹³⁹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 305-317.

¹⁴⁰ According to Montagnon's testimony to Lefranc, Marquet did not warn his allies beforehand of the provocative nature of his discourse (Lefranc 1982: 124). White thus seems to be off base when he writes that "Montagnon, Marquet, and Déat informally coordinated their speeches around similar themes so as to construct as effective a platform for their case as they could" (White 1992: 105). This imputes too much intentionality and coherence to their discourses, which were only retroactively lumped together as a common intervention.

fascism, anti-fascism was not enough; Socialists could no longer wait fatalistically for the "dialectic of history", but had themselves to build and direct an "intermediary regime" between capitalism and socialism lest it be done against them.¹⁴¹

Though Déat was widely applauded, and though he had tried to temper some of Marquet's excesses, his intervention came to be associated with those of Montagnon and Marquet, and together the three became the "neo-socialist trio."¹⁴² Indeed, it was only after the July Congress that the term "neo-socialist" came to be widely used in both the party and general press to describe the positions of Déat, Montagnon, and Marquet. First invoked by Lebas in 1931 to describe Déat's *Perspectives socialistes*, "neo-socialism" as a label had not initially caught on. Thus in 1932, after the ad for Lebas's pamphlet had stopped running, there was not a single reference to "néo-socialisme" or "néo-socialiste" in *Le Populaire*. In 1933, by contrast, there were 43 and 26 references to each term respectively, all of them after the July Congress.

The proliferation of the "neo-socialist" label was of course a reaction to the sensational nature of Montagnon, Marquet, and Déat's interventions at the Congress, but it also contributed to their marginalization by highlighting the doctrinal character of their dissidence. The gulf between the neo-socialists and the SFIO was further widened as the press started painting them as left-wing fascists.¹⁴³ But the accusation of fascism was not limited to the bourgeois press. This became commonplace within the SFIO too, with Louis Lévy for example arguing that the neo-socialists' "doctrine of public salvation, national utility, social justice, international peace, and republican dictatorship" amounted to a left-wing fascism.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. *Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 435-450.

¹⁴² Marceau Pivert "Il faut s'entendre!" *Le Populaire* July 27 1933.

¹⁴³ E.g. "Encore le fascisme de gauche" *Le Temps* July 18 1933; "Fascisme et socialisme" *Le Temps* July 26 1933.

¹⁴⁴ Louis Lévy "Nos dictateurs" *Le Populaire* July 26 1933.

The decisive factor in the final ideological rupture between the neo-socialists and the SFIO, however, was Blum's intervention in the debate. For the first time since the 1920 schism, Blum did not act as a conciliator but as a full-fledged participant in the factional conflict. Resigned to the coming schism, Blum sought to limit its scope by doctrinally isolating the neo-socialist hard-core (Berstein 2006: 376-378; Burrin [1986] 2003: 147-148). Following the Congress, Blum launched a months-long campaign in *Le Populaire* criticizing the neo-socialists—whom he also began to label as such—for having abandoned socialist doctrine. Blum was dismayed that "in the middle of a Congress of the French Section of the International the manifesto of a national socialist party—if not national-socialist—was just resoundingly defined." The neo-socialists, "in wanting to turn away from fascism its potential clientele," were offering "to the same public, by the same means of publicity, a more or less analogous product." In doing so, they were transforming socialism from a "class party" to a "party of *déclassés*", and risked "drowning" the party under "that wave of 'adventurers'...that has carried...all of history's dictatorships."¹⁴⁵ Fascism could not be gotten rid of by "imitation, substitution, or one-upmanship."¹⁴⁶

The neo-socialists' appeal to heterogeneous elements like the middle classes and youth, their call for an "intermediary regime" between capitalism and socialism, and their retreat into the Nation were now all condemned by Blum as clear departures from socialist doctrine. It was, according to him, undeniable that "a certain number of...comrades belonging to the minority of the Party brought to the tribune of the Congress declarations that put into question the

¹⁴⁵ Léon Blum "Parti de classe et non pas parti de déclassés" *Le Populaire* July 19 1933.

¹⁴⁶ Léon Blum "On ne fait pas au fascisme sa part" *Le Populaire* August 3 1933.

fundamental notions on which socialism rested up until now."¹⁴⁷ The neo-socialists, Blum suggested, had placed themselves outside the socialist tradition:

There does not exist two species of socialism, of which one would be international and the other not. It is impossible to conceive the realization of socialism otherwise than as an international transformation of the regime of production and property. It is impossible to conceive a socialist organization and action that is limited and confined to the national framework. A national socialism would no longer be socialism and would rapidly become anti-socialism—if it were not so from the beginning.¹⁴⁸

In a relentless barrage of criticism spanning several months, Blum thus lent his moral authority to the stigmatization of neo-socialism as a proto-fascist heresy. With Blum's realignment on this point with the party left, the notion that Déat and his allies were engaged in a doctrinal deviation indisputably became the legitimate definition of the situation.

The possibility of a schism had led Blum and the rest of the Party to try to limit its scope by defining Déat, Marquet, and Montagnon outside the socialist tradition and thereby isolating them. This operation, of course, was a response to the doctrinal turn taken at the July Congress, itself a response to an increasingly hopeless situation. The campaign of anathematization in turn constrained Déat and his allies to double down on their heresy in preparation for an exit from the party that now appeared as the only plausible option.¹⁴⁹ Thus even Déat, who had always been more cautious due to his leadership aspirations within the party, no longer qualified his statements by insisting on the tactical nature of his disagreements, as he had before the July Congress (Figure 3). Indeed, his articles came to take on a more frankly heretical tenor. The conflict was now one that "[surpassed] by a thousand miles the parliamentary incidents," and the issue was "to decide between a socialism of immediate action and an obsolete [*inactuel*]

¹⁴⁷ Léon Blum "Le cœur du problème" *Le Populaire* August 1 1933.

¹⁴⁸ Léon Blum "Il n'y a qu'un socialisme" *Le Populaire* August 14 1933.

¹⁴⁹ Even if it were a possibility, Déat's intellectualist ambitions discussed earlier would likely have prevented him from making the necessary disavowals to come back from the brink.

socialism."¹⁵⁰ No longer simply a personal or disciplinary dispute, the quarrel was entirely "new [inédite]." Two clans now opposed each other, one "archéo" and the other "néo." The first, behind Blum, "refuse[d] to modify anything of dogmas and routines." The others, "shrewdly accused of fascism by the former, want[ed] to take the offensive, to keep the initiative of construction, even if doctrine [was] not entirely saved." It was "no longer about the perennial debate between Bernstein and Kautsky, nor between Jaurès and Guesde." The revolution had "changed camps" and was now "'néo.'"¹⁵¹ Déat began to openly chastise the SFIO for holding on to the "Charter," arguing that it did so only "in full symbolism, in full ritualism, in full craziness," and that meanwhile "events that could care less about Amsterdam, the Charter, or the statutes proceed[ed] at their breakneck pace."¹⁵²

Figure 3. Characterization of the conflict within the SFIO by the different factions

	1926	1929-1930	July 1933
Faure (Party secretariat)	Doctrinal	Doctrinal	Doctrinal
Lebas/Zyromski (Party left)	Tactical	Doctrinal	Doctrinal
Blum (Party center)	Tactical	Tactical	Doctrinal
Déat (Party right—"neo-socialists")	Tactical	Tactical	Doctrinal
Renaudel (Party right—"reformists")	Tactical	Tactical	Tactical

In 1929-1930 the participationists of the Party right mounted a serious challenge to the Party leadership. By July 1933 their fortunes had waned and a schism appeared inevitable.

The affirmations of doctrinal innovation became more common as the schism approached. But the autonomization of neo-socialism as a political discourse distinct from traditional socialism was sealed by the growing acceptance of the term by the dissidents themselves as a description of their enterprise. On this there was a split, as Renaudel and some other

¹⁵⁰ Marcel Déat "Ils exagèrent" *Le Populaire* August 5 1933.

¹⁵¹ Marcel Déat "La querelle de la S.F.I.O. est inédite" *Notre Temps* September 26 1933.

¹⁵² Marcel Déat "Unité ou scission" *La Vie Socialiste* October 7 1933.

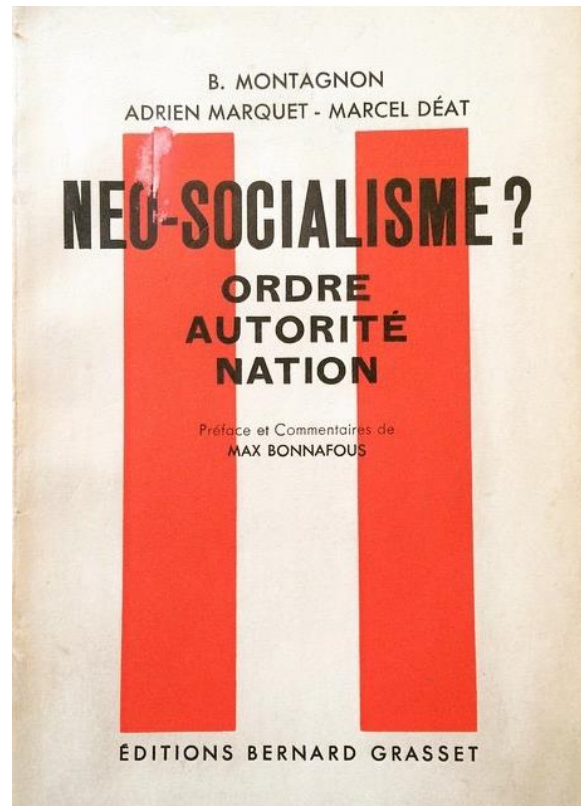
parliamentarians within the PSdF always denied that there was anything "neo" about their socialism. But others adopted the label with relish.¹⁵³ A critical factor in the construction of "neo-socialism" as a coherent body of thought was the October 1933 publication in a single volume of Montagnon, Marquet, and Déat's speeches at the July Congress under the title *Néo-socialisme? Ordre, Autorité, Nation*. The book presented what were uncoordinated and improvised discourses as expressions of a single and unified stream of thought under the sign of "neo-socialism".¹⁵⁴ In doing so, the book retroactively validated and enshrined a classification that had originally been applied polemically by its authors' adversaries, and represented an effort to transvalue the terms of a conflict that had become undeniably doctrinal. Neo-socialism's appearance on the scene as a coherent and self-conscious heretical movement was reflected in the proliferation of references to it in *Le Populaire* in the months following July 1933 (Figure 1).¹⁵⁵ After the constitution of the PSdF in December 1933, Montagnon, Marquet, and Déat dropped any remaining qualms they might have had and fully embraced "neo-socialism" as a distinct political identity and as the doctrinal foundation of their new party. What began as a pejorative label became openly proclaimed by those it was meant to discredit as the affirmation of a new position within the political space.

¹⁵³ The cleavage between the neo-socialists and the old-style reformists within the PSdF was widely remarked upon at the time and made itself felt in the founding congress of the PSdF. Robert Bobin "Le compte rendu du congrès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

¹⁵⁴ The book included a synthetic essay by Max Bonnafous, who, like Déat, was a promising sociologist.

¹⁵⁵ Almost all earlier references to neo-socialism were in advertisements for Lebas's critical pamphlet, discussed earlier. This suggests that the epithet of "neo-socialism" did not catch on at first. Only after July 1933 was the term widely used, supporting my argument about the emergence of neo-socialism in this chapter.

Illustration 11. "Order, Authority, Nation"



Conclusion

The 1933 schism was thus not the ineluctable outcome of doctrinal differences within the SFIO, nor was neo-socialism a heresy that emerged ready-made from the minds of its proponents. Neo-socialism, as a distinct doctrine, was not necessarily born with Déat's *Perspectives socialistes* as has been supposed. Indeed, its origins lie not in a preliminary and willful effort at doctrinal revision, but in the ebb and flow of the factional struggle over the SFIO's parliamentary strategy. Only when the participationists started presenting a tangible threat to the party's anti-participationist leadership did the would-be neo-socialists have aspersions of doctrinal deviation cast upon them. Though initially denying any heretical intention, Déat and his allies became bolder in their dissidence as their chances to conquer the party diminished. The critical moments

came after the 1932 elections, when the participationists misread their strength and persisted in defying the party majority. With a censure vote a foregone conclusion, and their hopes thus decisively dashed, Montagnon, Marquet, and Déat sought to change the terms of the debate at the 1933 July Congress. The inflammatory nature of their speeches provoked a furious reaction from the Party majority, this time including Blum and the party centrists. It was only then, with the schism having become inevitable, that "neo-socialism" became widely accepted as a term of classification. What was in fact a pejorative label meant to discredit and isolate the renegades of the July Congress in fact became the self-understanding of some of the schismatics themselves. In adopting the label, the neo-socialists accepted a definition of themselves that had originally been imposed by their adversaries. Neo-socialism was thus not originally an autonomous and coherent revisionist tendency, but only came to be constituted as such in and through the factional dynamics of the SFIO. In other words, neo-socialism was less the driver of the schism, than its product.

Part II.

The Vicissitudes of a Doctrine: The Rise and Fall of Neo-Socialism

Dispossessed of a party, Marcel Déat and his comrades were now armed with a doctrine: neo-socialism. Following their expulsion from the SFIO, the neo-socialists immediately set up a new party, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF), which they hoped would become the vehicle of this new doctrine. With the neo-socialists no longer constrained by the doctrinal pieties and factional conflicts of the SFIO, it is tempting to think that their newfound political independence finally allowed them to act freely on their convictions. If the conventional interpretation of neo-socialism's origin is as a ready-made and coherent doctrinal revision within the SFIO, then the 1933 schism is typically understood to mark the point after which it came into its own and expressed itself as an autonomous political force. Following the schism, neo-socialism could at last assert its true identity unencumbered, or so the argument goes.

But what exactly was neo-socialism's identity? At the 1933 July Congress of the SFIO, Marquet infamously made the case for adopting "order", "authority", and "nation" as new bases for socialist propaganda. This may have scandalized Léon Blum, but Déat and others took up the triptych and made it something of a signature slogan for the neo-socialists. Unsurprisingly, this

rhetorical innovation, uttered by avowed socialists, caused a sensation. Can we claim, as many of their contemporaries did, that in calling for "Order, Authority, Nation," the neo-socialists were already well on their way to fascism?

Much of the conventional wisdom on the neo-socialists rests on two assumptions. The first is that neo-socialist discourse was inherently ambiguous and exhibited proto-fascist tendencies—what I have called the "continuity thesis". Whether neo-socialism is understood to have always-already been necessarily fascist, or—as a typical "Third Way" ideology—only potentially fascist, the tendency has been to see the seeds of neo-socialism's future fascist turn within the terms of neo-socialist discourse itself. In other words, if Déat and his allies became fascists, it was because this possibility was already inscribed in neo-socialist doctrine—most apparently with the appeal to "Order, Authority, Nation."

A second, related assumption is what I have called the "idealist/intellectual bias". The assumption here is that concrete political engagements are straightforward expressions of prior ideological commitments and identities. For the neo-socialist case, this has meant a sometimes explicit, but often implicit, explanatory strategy of determining when and to what extent neo-socialist ideology could appropriately be classified as fascist. Regardless of where this threshold is thought to ultimately lie, the focus has therefore been at the ideational level, as if the neo-socialists' political practice were always driven by their doctrinal conceptions. In other words, the tendency has been to see neo-socialism itself as the explanatory principle behind the neo-socialists' political engagements.

With these two assumptions, the conventional wisdom on the neo-socialists holds that neo-socialist ideology was a more or less consistent and determinant factor in their political evolution, and that neo-socialism was inherently pre-disposed to fascism. As such, commentators

have interpreted the period between the 1933 schism and the French defeat in 1940 as one in which neo-socialism's inherent fascist inclinations increasingly revealed themselves. The problem with this view, however, is that it overstates the coherence of neo-socialist practice and ideology over this period. In extant accounts of the neo-socialists' trajectories, some have tended to telescope this entire period and reduce every utterance and position-taking by the dissident socialists between 1933 and the Occupation to an expression of a self-identical neo-socialism that was congenitally fascist (e.g. Sternhell [1983] 1986). Others (e.g. Burrin [1986] 2003) have seen this period as one in which the neo-socialists became gradually seduced by a fascism whose apparent successes abroad led them to emphasize those aspects of neo-socialist thought that had an affinity with fascist thinking. Some (e.g. Bastow 2000, Irvine 2008) have also interpreted neo-socialism as a specific manifestation of the non-conformist "spirit of the 1930s" (Loubet del Bayle 1969, Touchard 1960), defined by the blurring of traditional political boundaries between left and right and a search for a "Third Way" between Marxist socialism and liberal capitalism that could, under certain permutations, break toward fascism. Although these approaches differ in their assessment of how to classify neo-socialism in 1933, they all tend to assume that the animating principles behind the neo-socialists' political engagements in the 1930s and beyond can be found within neo-socialist thought, and that the latter was, if not unchanging, at least coherent enough to constitute a stable source of identity and practice. In other words, the presumption is that if Déat and his allies were ready and willing collaborators in 1940, it was because neo-socialist ideology itself had, through its fascist affinities, accommodated them over time to Nazism.

The outsized role attributed to neo-socialist ideology as such and its supposed fascist inclinations is, however, problematic. The 1930s were a turbulent time in French politics, and

rather than being characterized by a steady fascisization, the neo-socialists' trajectories were in fact punctuated by multiple political and ideological re-positionings as they responded to rapidly shifting political circumstances. So, for example, the notion of a coherent neo-socialist ideology tending toward fascism is belied by the fact that Déat and his allies—despite some earlier equivocal statements and a limited flirtation with the political right—became constitutive elements of the Popular Front coalition, which explicitly defined itself as a Republican riposte to a perceived fascist threat in France. Moreover, those identifying as neo-socialists in 1933-1935 followed divergent paths by the end of the decade. While some remained loyal to Déat and his party, others rejoined the SFIO, while still others moved rightward. Even among Déat's supporters, however, the term "neo-socialism" eventually fell out of favor as they grasped for other sources of political identification. In truth, neo-socialism had only a fleeting existence.

Empirically, the claim that the RNP's fascism is reducible to elements of neo-socialist doctrine is thus unconvincing. There was no straight line between neo-socialism and fascism. Drawing on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse-analytic approach and the "Cambridge School" of historiography, particularly the work of Quentin Skinner, I begin Part II by suggesting that attending to neo-socialism's broader discursive context and its illocutionary force is important to our understanding of even the most ambivalent aspects of neo-socialist discourse—in this case the call for "Order, Authority, Nation". A close reading of the neo-socialists demonstrates that, in 1933 and the period immediately following their expulsion from the SFIO, this slogan was less a latent expression of fascist tendencies than a deliberate attempt to appropriate and re-articulate these terms within a specifically socialist and anti-fascist discourse.

During the Occupation, Déat and the RNP recycled much of neo-socialist discourse, claiming that their views had changed little in the intervening years. In fact, the meaning of their discourse did change over the years—despite some superficial continuities in language. The historical puzzle of the neo-socialists is not just how a group of socialists became German collaborators, but rather how a self-consciously anti-fascist discourse could be remade into a fascist justification of Nazi ideological hegemony.

While a discourse-analytic approach is useful in registering subtle but significant changes in discursive meaning, in itself it does not provide much analytical leverage in explaining why and when neo-socialist discourse changed in the particular way that it did. Indeed, this approach remains largely at the ideational level, and insofar as the neo-socialists' shifting engagements are considered, the presumption is that this reflected a prior shift in discourse and identity. These discursive shifts in turn are either taken for granted or interpreted as resolutions of inherent tensions or ambiguities within neo-socialism.

To complement the critical value of discourse analysis with an explanatory account that can shed light on the mechanisms by which the neo-socialists' political identities were transformed, I follow up the first part of Part II with a "situational analysis" (Jansen 2016) of the political practices and processes that mediated between the neo-socialism of 1933 and the neo-socialists' position-takings on the eve of the German Occupation. Neo-socialism was not just an abstract set of ideas, but a group of flesh-and-blood political actors. Political practice is not simply an expression of identity; what political actors actually do matters, not just in concrete political terms, but also for their identities. Political practice and the relational contexts in which it unfolds are thus critical mediating factor in the transformation of political identity.

Drawing especially on Bourdieusian field theory and Dobry's "relational perspective," I look at the relational contexts in which the neo-socialists actually acted and relate changes in their discourse to changes in these contexts. I argue specifically that the neo-socialists' political identities in the period between 1933 and 1940 were not expressions of an underlying neo-socialist essence, but were relationally constituted in and through the dynamics of the political field of the French left. The neo-socialists' transformation was not a linear unfolding of underlying tendencies; rather, they iteratively reworked their political identities in relation to their changing position in the political field and as they engaged in classification struggles with their competitors on the left.

The neo-socialists adapted their discourse to the vicissitudes of a turbulent political field. So although they adopted an equivocal posture and extended a hand to the *fascisant* right following a right-wing riot in 1934 that was widely interpreted as an abortive fascist coup, they quickly dropped their flirtations with the right and other dubious political elements and were pulled into the orbit of the anti-fascist Popular Front, thus unambiguously committing themselves once again to the left. However, the dynamic of the Popular Front—with the Communists' sensational tactical turn away from the language of class struggle toward popular-democratic republican rhetoric and the Socialists' acceptance of governmental responsibility—marginalized the neo-socialists within the coalition by effectively usurping their claim to distinction and depriving them of much of their *raison d'être*. Institutionally much weaker than their Communist and Socialist allies and displaced as the standard-bearer of a popular-democratic reconciliation of socialism and the republican nation, neo-socialism in the Popular Front period was characterized by its decomposition as a distinct doctrinal position within the

political field—a fact confirmed by the fragmentation of the neo-socialist core and their poor showing in the 1936 legislative elections won by the Popular Front.

Neo-socialist ideology as such thus has little explanatory value in accounting for the RNP's fascism. Déat's wartime alignment with Nazi totalitarianism was not the simple culmination of proto-fascist tendencies within neo-socialism that supposedly became more pronounced over the course of the 1930s. But then what was the significance of the period between the neo-socialists' expulsion from the SFIO and the Popular Front era? My argument is that this period is crucial in the neo-socialists' eventual fascist transformation not because it witnessed a progressively more assertive neo-socialism, but on the contrary precisely because of neo-socialism's marginalization and decomposition. In the context of a left political field monopolized by the Popular Front, the result of neo-socialism's failure to implant itself in that space was that Déat and his supporters found themselves unmoored from the French left, thus becoming "available" for more dubious political adventures.

Chapter 3.

From Anti-Fascism to Equivocation: Neo-Socialism in 1933-1934

Interpretations of "Order, Authority, Nation"

When Adrien Marquet suggested at the July 1933 SFIO Congress that "order and authority" become socialism's "new bases of action", and that it was necessary for socialism to adapt to a "new national reality" wherein each nation was "constituting within its interior framework a strong power substituting itself for a deficient bourgeoisie", Léon Blum famously exclaimed that he was "appalled" that such a thing could be said by a socialist.¹ But despite the scandal Marquet's discourse caused, Barthélémy Montagnon and Marcel Déat associated themselves fully with it, and their combined interventions at the Congress were published in October 1933 under the title *Néo-Socialisme? Ordre, Autorité, Nation*. Henceforth, "Order, Authority, Nation" became neo-socialism's defining slogan, invoked repeatedly by neo-socialist leaders over the coming months.

One could be forgiven for seeing in this slogan an expression of fascist sentiment, especially given the neo-socialists' subsequent trajectories. What could be more fascist than "Order, Authority, Nation"? Indeed, there is no shortage of historical accounts that suggest just

¹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 305-317.

that. Sternhell has of course argued that the authoritarian national socialism of the RNP was already contained in the slogan, epitomizing as it did neo-socialism's call for a broad class alliance within a national framework and the construction of a strong interventionist state (Sternhell [1983] 1986: 146). Sternhell is only the most consistent and explicit proponent of what I call the "continuity thesis", but this idea—that a fascist revision of socialism was articulated at the July Congress—has been taken up by others, particularly in more generalist works. So, for example, in his study of French fascism, Robert Soucy characterizes neo-socialism from its origin as a "left fascism", and he interprets "Order, Authority, Nation" as an appeal to "both nationalist and authoritarian sentiments" as well as an abandonment of political democracy in favor of dictatorship (Soucy 1995: 55).² In their contribution to the Cambridge History of Modern France series, Philippe Bernard and Henri Dubief go further, claiming that the triptych "Order, Authority, Nation" could be considered "even a form of Nazism" (Bernard and Dubief 1985: 204). Neo-socialism was thus "nearer to Nazism" than to even a left-wing fascism, and Déat and Marquet were "probably Hitlerians before Doriot" (Bernard and Dubief 1985: 204).³

More measured accounts have also interpreted "Order, Authority, Nation" as an expression of the neo-socialists' authoritarianism and nationalism. Nathanael Greene sees in it a rejection of democracy and a call for "an authoritarian nation-state" (Greene 1969). In his biography of Léon Blum, Joel Colton says that the neo-socialists invoked "some of the spirit and

² Contrary to what Soucy claims, Déat did not advocate dictatorship in his speech before the July Congress. In his account of Déat, Soucy is unfortunately often sloppy with the facts. For example, he claims that Déat's famous "clarion call for appeasement", "Mourir pour Dantzig?", was published "during the Munich crisis in 1938" (Soucy 1995: 55). In fact, it was published on May 4 1939, as a response to German threats on the Danzig Corridor—not to the Munich crisis.

³ The volume for the Cambridge History of Modern France is translated from two volumes in the *Nouvelle Histoire de la France Contemporaine*, a well-regarded series of historical surveys published by Le Seuil. The translations are from the first editions of the original volumes, published in 1975 and 1976 respectively. In subsequent French editions of the second volume, from which the above quotes originate, Henri Dubief has tempered these claims, no longer suggesting that Déat and Marquet were outright "Hitlerians" in 1933. Nonetheless, he still highlights what he interprets to be the *fascisant* thrust of their statements.

even the phrases of fascism," and that they "advocated rejuvenating socialism with a national and authoritarian spirit" (Colton 1966: 82). John T. Marcus sees neo-socialism as an example of "the penetration of fascist ideas into the Socialist movement", and argues that neo-socialism had "nationalist, authoritarian undertones" that became increasingly pronounced after the schism (Marcus 1958: 21, 28). Eugen Weber places the statements made by Marquet and Déat at the 1933 July Congress within the stream of French national-socialist thought that wedded the social concerns of socialism with nationalism (Weber 1962). Even Brian Jenkins, whose work has otherwise challenged essentialist approaches to the history of French fascism, characterizes Déat and Marquet in 1933 as "authoritarian nationalists" (Jenkins 2006: 337n.14).

To an extent these accounts merely repeat the polemical judgments of the neo-socialists' adversaries. Léon Blum, for example, wondered aloud at the 1933 July Congress if Marquet had not expressed "the program of a social-national party of dictatorship", insisting that true socialist propaganda was one of "freedom" and "justice", not "authority" and "order".⁴ Bracke, on the SFIO left, mocked Marquet in his turn: "After the lovely Adolf, here is the lovely Adrien!"⁵ Following the Congress, Blum launched a months-long press campaign against the neo-socialists, accusing them of fortifying fascist ideology by "plagiarizing" and "adopting" it.⁶ One does not, Blum wrote, "combat fascism by submitting to, and extending, its contagion."⁷ One does not "fight against fascism by stealing its weapons", nor does one rid oneself of fascism "by imitation, substitution, or one-upmanship."⁸ Placing the neo-socialists within a history of French socialists seduced by national and chauvinist sentiments, Blum remarked that, "In their authoritarian

⁴ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 368-369.

⁵ "La troisième journée du 30e Congrès Socialiste (S.F.I.O.). Fascisme de gauche" *Le Temps* July 18 1933.

⁶ Léon Blum "Parti de classe et non pas parti des déclassés" *Le Populaire* July 19 1933.

⁷ Léon Blum "Le double danger" *Le Populaire* July 20 1933.

⁸ Léon Blum "On ne fait pas au fascisme sa part" *Le Populaire* August 3 1933.

concision, the declarations of certain of our comrades unwittingly rediscover the accent of Bonapartist proclamations in the aftermath of the Second of December".⁹

Although Blum sought to delegitimize neo-socialism by highlighting its doctrinal distance from traditional socialism and its supposed affinities with fascism, authoritarianism, and nationalism, he did not accuse the neo-socialists of being outright fascists.¹⁰ Others were less subtle. So, for example, the Communists were quick to denounce the neo-socialists' appeal to the "Nation" and to the middle classes as fascist, although, committed as they still were to the ultra-sectarian "class against class" line, they denied any essential difference between the neo-socialists and the rest of the SFIO, whom they continued to portray as "social-fascist".¹¹ On the right, *Le Temps*, a daily closely associated with industrial—particularly metallurgical—interests, characterized the discourse of the neo-socialists as a "left fascism".¹² In the conservative and nationalist *Écho de Paris*, Henri de Kerillis characterized neo-socialism as a "veritable neo-fascism" within the SFIO. Socialists who invoked "order" and "authority" and, admitting the collapse of internationalism, favored action within a "national framework" definitively abandoned the "dogmas of the marxist church" as well as the terrain of parliamentarism and democracy. What were the neo-socialists, de Kerillis asked, if not "socialists of the Mussolinian or Hitlerian school, national-socialists?" The July Congress of the SFIO thus marked a watershed moment in French political history as it witnessed the "first affirmation of a French neo-fascism",

⁹ Léon Blum "La période intermédiaire" *Le Populaire* July 24 1933. The date refers to Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's December 2 1851 *coup d'état* against the French Second Republic. Subsequently, "Bonapartism" came to refer—particularly within the Marxist lexicon—to an authoritarian dictatorship led by a charismatic strongman with a popular veneer.

¹⁰ Ironically, Faure took a different tack after the 1933 schism. Faure had been among the first to accuse the neo-socialists of a doctrinal revision prior to the schism, but following it he accused them of lacking a solid doctrine, and pouring old wine into new bottles. So whereas before their ideas were to be rejected because they were not socialist, now their party was to be rejected because their ideas—notably the appeal to the middle classes and the priority of action within a national framework—did not present anything new that the old Socialist Party did not already advocate! See Faure (1934).

¹¹ André Ferrat "Deux aspects du social-fascisme" *L'Humanité* July 18 1933.

¹² "La troisième journée du 30e Congrès Socialiste (S.F.I.O.). Fascisme de gauche" *Le Temps* July 18 1933.

all the more significant since it came not from conservative elements lacking dynamism, but "on the left, within the forces of 'the movement', right on the proletarian terrain".¹³ Making the same point more vividly, a poster (Illustration 12) from the Centre de Propagande des Républicains Nationaux, an outfit founded by de Kerillis to support the parliamentary right, depicted Marquet, Montagnon, and Déat straddling a horse branded with a swastika, with Marquet holding up a sign reading "authority, order, nation", Déat giving the Nazi salute, and Renaudel trailing behind with Léon Blum's severed head.

Illustration 12. 1934 Poster from the Centre de Propagande des Républicains Nationaux



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

The text reads: "The neo-socialists are leaving for war! They won't go far!" Montagnon's sign reads: "Program? Portfolios". The poster is likely from 1934.

¹³ De Kerillis was nonetheless skeptical of the neo-socialists' chances of leading a successful "neo-fascist" movement. They lacked a heroic leader in the mold of Mussolini or Hitler, and remained beholden to antimilitarism, freemasonry, and other "anti-French forces". Moreover, though they were "national-socialists", they were not yet "nationalist-socialists" as in Italy and Germany. Henri de Kerillis "Par 2.197 mandats contre 752 le Congrès socialiste blâme son groupe parlementaire" *L'Écho de Paris* July 18 1933.

Across the political landscape, the immediate reaction to the neo-socialists' call for "Order, Authority, Nation" was thus to cry fascism. It would be a mistake, however, to take these representations of neo-socialism at face value. They were not disinterested descriptions of neo-socialism's ideological substance, but rather polemical interventions by neo-socialism's opponents in a broader classification struggle. As such, the labeling of neo-socialists as fascists or proto-fascists responded to a situational political logic, not the scientific logic of taxonomy. Immediately following the 1933 schism, neo-socialism's enemies—on both their right and left—had an interest in de-legitimizing and isolating the neo-socialists by playing up some of their more equivocal statements. The neo-socialists, for their part, protested vigorously and repeatedly against being labeled fascists, insisting, as we will see, on their anti-fascist *bona fides*. To call the neo-socialists fascists in 1933 was indeed disingenuous, a fact that only becomes more apparent when one considers that the Socialists and Communists dropped their insinuations following the formation of the anti-fascist Popular Front coalition, of which the neo-socialists were also constitutive members. On the right, too, the neo-socialists were only considered fascists when convenient for propaganda purposes. So, for example, the neo-socialists' stubborn fidelity to left-wing causes like the union rights of civil servants led *Le Temps* to accuse them of betraying their own slogan of "Order, Authority, Nation" and of being no different from other parties of "disorder" on the left.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Une faillite et un échec" *Le Temps* October 23 1934. Raymond Millet "Le Parti socialiste de France va préciser des positions" *Le Temps* January 26 1935.

"Order, Authority, Nation" as an Anti-Fascist Slogan

a. Illocutionary Force and Argumentative Context

A superficial reading of the slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" and an uncritical acceptance of what were in fact partisan and situationally mediated representations have thus led commentators to misjudge the meaning of neo-socialist discourse—a tendency made worse by the understandable instinct to see everything through the prism of Déat's later trajectory. The error of teleology should be avoided, however, as should an essentialist interpretation of the terms "order", "authority", and "nation". These terms were indeed part of the right-wing lexicon in inter-war France, which explains the undeniably provocative nature of their being uttered at a Socialist congress. Even "Nation", which had historically been associated with the left as a term denoting popular sovereignty against aristocratic rule, had by the time of the Dreyfus Affair switched discursive camps (Jenkins 1990). Nonetheless, as Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School of historiography more generally have taught us, what matters in understanding any political utterance is not simply the literal meaning of what is said, but also its illocutionary force, i.e. what a speaker is *doing* in producing a particular utterance within a given argumentative context (Skinner 2002).¹⁵ In our case, this means taking seriously the neo-socialists' own self-understandings and justifications for saying and writing what they did, to recover something of their intentions. Were they unwitting bearers of a "subterranean" fascist "contagion", cultural dopes of a kind who were ignorant of the grave implications of their utterances? Should we follow Blum in thinking that, in speaking the language of fascism—albeit for strategic purposes—the neo-socialists were in actuality being spoken by it? Answering these questions affirmatively would be to unfairly dismiss what the neo-socialists were hoping to do in invoking "Order, Authority, Nation", however we may wish to retrospectively judge the perspicacity of

¹⁵ Skinner takes the concept of "illocutionary force" from J.L. Austin's (1962) speech act theory.

their statements. What becomes clear after examining the neo-socialists' discourse immediately preceding and following the 1933 schism is that they were in fact making the case to self-consciously appropriate these terms and to re-articulate them within a socialist discourse, with the goal of inflecting their meaning toward the left and thus forestall the appeal of fascism.

As discussed at length in the previous chapter, the argumentative context for the call for "Order, Authority, Nation" was the factional debate within the SFIO over ministerial participation and, more broadly, socialism's relation to the bourgeois state. The neo-socialists were sharply critical of the prevailing socialist orthodoxy that rejected participation and that doggedly avoided any responsibility for a state apparatus that was in its essence an instrument of class domination. The traditional socialist position was that any attempt to govern within a bourgeois framework was futile, and that socialist transformation was predicated on a revolutionary conquest of power in which the proletariat would smash the bourgeois State and impose its own dictatorship. Against this, the neo-socialists, first within the SFIO and then later in the PSdF, argued that it was possible for the spirit of socialism to penetrate even the bourgeois State, and that the State could, in turn, be used to leverage serialized transformations that opened an evolutionary path to socialism. Consequently, it was necessary for socialists to be present in the State, even as minority partners in a bourgeois government.

The central concern of the neo-socialists in the period immediately preceding and following their November 1933 expulsion from the SFIO was thus to justify their longstanding aim for socialists to accept their responsibility to govern, even within the framework of capitalist society. Following Hitler's consolidation of power in early 1933, the most important justification deployed by the neo-socialists for their position was the looming threat of fascism. The neo-socialists spoke of a "speed race" between fascism and socialism to win over the disaffected

masses reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. If socialists persisted in isolating themselves in their proletarian ghetto and in waiting passively for a distant revolution, the neo-socialists claimed, they would fatally cede the political initiative to fascism. To block fascism's path to power, then, socialists had to broaden their appeal to the middle classes, enter into a governing coalition with the center-left Radical Party, and take immediate measures to combat the economic crisis—which the neo-socialists saw as the root cause of fascism—through the construction of an "intermediary regime" with a planned (but for the most part not socialized) economy.

b. "Order, Authority, Nation"

The call for "Order" was specifically counter-posed to the anarchy of liberal capitalism. The dislocatory effects of the crisis had led the masses to clamor for some kind of order as a remedy, and it was up to socialists to channel this demand toward the left. The question was who would win the race between a "reactionary order" and a "socialist order."¹⁶ At the constitutive congress of the PSdF on December 3 1933, Marquet declared that it was necessary to "bring order, order in the name of the majority, in the name of the working class, which will make it so that the State will govern the banks!"¹⁷

In his work on populism, Laclau argues that "in a situation of radical disorder, the demand is for *some kind* of order, and the *concrete* social arrangement that will meet that request is a secondary consideration." He points out that "order" as such has no positive definition. The semantic role of such terms "is not to express *any* positive content but...to function as the [name] of a fullness which is constitutively absent." As such, it functions as an "empty signifier" capable

¹⁶ Claude Bonnier "Le rapport sur les équipes de techniques" *La Vie Socialiste* February 10 1934.

¹⁷ "Le Premier Congrès National du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

of condensing within it a series of political demands (Laclau 2005: 96). In the case of neo-socialism in the period of its emergence as an independent political force, "order" referred not to the jackboot, but to a politics of economic organization that could stimulate recovery and overcome the economic disorder afflicting Europe and the world. In this the neo-socialists were especially influenced by the "Plan du Travail" [Plan of Labor], adopted by the Belgian POB/BWP in December 1933. Drafted by the heterodox Henri de Man, the Plan delineated a cumulative series of economic and political reforms whose goal was to stimulate demand and deepen economic democracy through the immediate construction of a mixed economy. The centerpiece of these reforms was the nationalization of key industries—most notably credit—that could then be used as levers to regulate and control the economy according to a conscious plan.¹⁸ For Déat, who saw a kinship between de Man's ideas and his own in *Perspectives socialistes*, the Belgian Plan represented the possibility of introducing a "socialist and democratic order in the present chaos" [emphasis mine].¹⁹ "Order" for the neo-socialists was thus synonymous with an intermediary regime which alone was capable of overcoming both the chaos of liberal capitalism and the fatalism of the SFIO. By undertaking a "methodical and implacable offensive" against the crisis and introducing what it could of socialism even within the framework of the bourgeois State, such a regime would begin the "exit from capitalism, generator, in its current form, of disorder, anarchy, impotence, corruption, social insecurity and international massacres".²⁰

As for "Authority", the neo-socialists were referring to their goal of reinforcing the state's capacity for economic intervention, as well as their hope that the popular classes—"in the name of democracy, in the name of anticapitalism"—would exercise their will over plutocratic

¹⁸ For an English translation of the Plan du Travail, see Dodge (1979: 289-299).

¹⁹ Marcel Déat "Autour du Plan belge: Crise et réadaptation" *La Vie Socialiste* January 20 1934.

²⁰ Marcel Déat "La Nouvelle Épouvante de Léon Blum" *La Vie Socialiste* January 27 1934.

interests through their presence in a reformed state.²¹ As Marquet observed, the time had come for the working class to "employ for itself the forces of government that, until now, were used against it".²² At its founding congress, the PSdF called for the proletariat, the peasantry, and the middle classes to band together so that "real power finally falls into the hands of the people, and that the people can finally make use of this power to impose its authority".²³ For this, however, a "strong State" was needed—though what this entailed remained vague at this time. In its current form, wrote Louis Vallon, the "State apparatus...cannot undertake the bold and energetic politics that is necessary to exit the chaos".²⁴ But the "strong State" of the neo-socialists' hopes did not amount to a dictatorial or authoritarian one. It was precisely because it was "passionately democratic," the PSdF explained in its first manifesto, that it wanted this "strong State".²⁵ Even Marquet, who was among the most vocal in decrying the impotence of the parliamentary regime, did not reject democracy or universal suffrage, but rather had in mind a reorganization of parliament along British lines, such that the failure to constitute a government would trigger new elections.²⁶ When the neo-socialists initially invoked "Authority", then, they went out of their way to avoid any authoritarian, dictatorial, or anti-parliamentary connotations. Indeed, they remained committed in principle to the democratic institutions of the Third Republic—which should not be surprising considering the parliamentary origins of many leading neo-socialists. The whole point of their endeavor at this time was to reform the State in a way that would extend

²¹ "Le Premier Congrès National du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

²² Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, p. 311.

²³ "Le Premier Congrès National du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

²⁴ Louis Vallon "Néo-socialisme?" *La Vie Socialiste* December 2 1933.

²⁵ PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

²⁶ "Le Premier Congrès National du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

democratic control over the economy and better equip it to redress the crisis, thereby undercutting fascism at its source.

Finally, the appeal to the "Nation" was not meant as a chauvinist deviation. Commenting on their interventions at the July 1933 SFIO Congress, Max Bonnafous insisted that Marquet, Montagnon, and Déat were not "victims of a flash of simple nationalism" (Bonnafous 1933: 132). The PSdF declared that it had nothing to do with "traditional nationalism, with its 'racist' philosophy, with its diplomatic combinations, its politics of alliances and balances, its designs of military hegemony".²⁷ In fact, just as the neo-socialists in this period were adamant that "Order" and "Authority" did not entail support for dictatorship, so too did they consistently deny any kinship between their invocation of the "Nation" and nationalism.²⁸

By making "Nation" a core part of their propaganda, the neo-socialists were—in their own thinking—merely observing the fact that all "real economic action" now gravitated around the "national axis" as a result of the disintegration of the global economy (Bonnafous 1933: 133). The retreat within a national framework was thus conceived as a contingent economic necessity, not the expression of a supreme value. But the appeal to the "Nation" also had a propaganda value in attracting the middle classes. The middle classes, Déat argued, demanded the "restoration of the state and the protection of the nation" in their efforts to liberate themselves from the ruinous effects of the crisis. If socialism persisted in defending only the narrow corporate interests of the proletariat, it would "cut itself off" from the middle classes—and the broadly democratic, national, and Republican sentiment they embodied—thereby leaving the terrain open to fascist demagogy. Socialism's task was thus to "rally the middle classes to the

²⁷ PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

²⁸ See e.g. Marcel Déat "Rapport Moral" *La Vie Socialiste* May 5 1934; Comité du Plan "Contre la Misère, la Faillite et le Chômage" *La Vie Socialiste* March 30 1935.

sides of the proletariat" by presenting itself as the bearer of the national interest.²⁹ In arguing so, the neo-socialists cited the legacy of Jean Jaurès, the revered democratic socialist: "The idea that socialists must try in difficult times to take charge of the interests of the national collectivity is without contest one of the most constant and powerful themes of the Jaurèssian symphony" (Bonnafeux 1933: 135).

c. Neo-Socialism: Fascism or Hegemony?

The slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" was thus far from being an expression of authoritarian, nationalist, or fascist proclivities. What the neo-socialists were *doing*—or at least trying to do—in uttering these watchwords was precisely to undercut fascism by appropriating and re-signifying some of its discursive elements. The slogan was part of a self-conscious maneuver to update socialist strategy and to make it adequate to new circumstances defined by the economic crisis and the rise of fascism in Europe. Anticipating Karl Polanyi's (1944) analysis of the rise of the protective "counter movement" against market society, the neo-socialists saw developments in the Soviet Union, Italy, the USA, and Germany as auguring the death of liberal capitalism and as part of a broader historical movement toward national and social economies. But neo-socialism did not simply express its historical moment; rather, it sought to intervene within its parameters so as to channel the "counter movement" toward socialist and democratic ends. The whole problem of modern socialism, according to the neo-socialist François Gaucher, resided in the following dilemma:

[...] will it be crushed by this evolution or could it take the direction, while reserving in the new regime a large place to labor and to its free organizations, while safeguarding the elementary freedoms and essential principles of democracy, that is to say the values forged by centuries of civilization? Official socialism, by

²⁹ Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. *XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, pp. 437-443.

the voice of Mr. Léon Blum, has refused to participate in the construction of what it considers intermediary forms between capitalism and collectivism. It would rather suffer a passing eclipse and even, who knows? consent to a temporary destruction...The neo-socialists...are determined to take the lead among the builders of a political and economic order that will doubtless be temporary, but are not all regimes transitory? (Gaucher 1934: 359-360).

Provocative as it may have been, the triptych was articulated within what was conceived as an anti-fascist discourse. In their anti-essentialist approach to political discourse, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have argued that the meaning of any given element within a discourse is not fixed in advance, but is instead overdetermined by the other discursive elements to which it is articulated and by the meaning of the discursive whole. In the conceptual language of Laclau and Mouffe, one could argue that "Order, Authority, Nation" were articulated as *moments* within a political discourse whose *nodal point* was, as Bastow (2000) suggests, the neo-socialists' demand that socialists assume the responsibilities of government so as to take constructive action against the crisis and thus forestall the rise of fascism. The positive content of neo-socialism's discursive identity was the "anticapitalist" *chain of equivalence* that linked the proletariat, the middle classes, and the peasantry, and this identity was negatively constituted through a *logic of difference* against a capitalist and fascist antagonist. Moreover, "Order, Authority, Nation" was articulated in early neo-socialist discourse to an affirmation of democracy and a defense of republican political freedoms.³⁰ These themes recur over and over again. It is through the lens of this discursive totality and the neo-socialists' broader intentions, then, and not at face value, that the meaning of their utterance of "Order, Authority, Nation" must be interpreted.

³⁰ For example, the PSdF declared that "France, land of freedom, land of free thought, nation that draws its unity, not from race, but from the serene universality of a thought exempt from all limitations of region, language, or belief, represents in the world an ensemble of values that merit defending and whose defense we are resolved to materially assure". "Le Premier Congrès National du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 9 1933.

Illustration 13. Déat at the founding congress of the PSdF, December 1933



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Background: portrait of Jean Jaurès.

If it was not a proto-fascism, what was neo-socialism at the time of its birth? In its founding manifesto, the PSdF justified its existence by citing its impatience with the millenarian prophecies of traditional socialism and its desire not to betray the confidence of "socialist democracy".³¹ The crisis of socialism was just one more in a series of crises that was upending

³¹ Neo-socialism had a strong pragmatic orientation, which partly explains its susceptibility to future mutations. Bonnafous, for example, criticized the certitude that undergirded the socialist faith in revolution. Against this, he declared: "We do not offer young people a system that allows them to glimpse the shores of the eternal! We renounce thinking *sub specie aeternitatis*. Our ideal is in the short-term and our certitudes provisional. We speak of approaching goals, of tasks at the measure of a generation" (Bonnafous 1933: 141).

French society. Economically, there was the failure of liberal capitalism and the big trusts. Politically, the parties were "prisoners of financial oligarchies" and an impotent State apparatus. Intellectually, the old ideologies of the 19th century—i.e. "liberalism, conservative authoritarianism, messianic and ossified socialism"—were bankrupt. Finally, a "fanatical individualism" had "sapped the bases of all collective conscience" and led to a moral crisis. Only a "rapid contagion of energy and a large burst" could save socialism from economic catastrophe, "and thus *fascism*, and thus *war*" [emphasis in original].³²

Economic recovery was the key to stopping fascism, but first it would be necessary to "reorganize the State, rejuvenate its workings, restore its power". Only a "democratic order and authority" could effectively impose popular sovereignty over private oligarchic interests and govern in the collective interest. This "militant democracy" would be the salvation of democracy against fascism, but it in no way entailed compromising the "precious values of free culture, free judgment, total humanism". Economic order, "rendered possible by political order and authority, [would] assure freedom of thought".³³

Echoing Déat's *Perspectives socialistes*, the PSdF called for a broad "anticapitalist" alliance of workers, peasants, and the middle classes. Citing Jaurès, it also called for the "reconciliation of the nation with itself." Yet it insisted on its socialist credentials, and saw itself as rejuvenating and adapting socialist doctrine, not rejecting it. The working class thus "remained the most conscious fraction of the forces standing against the capitalist regime." If it was important to convince the middle classes that they shared an interest in socialism, this was to "extend the battle front of the working class."³⁴ It would not be too far-fetched to call early neo-socialism a kind of Gramscian hegemonic project wherein socialism was called upon to

³² PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

³³ PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

³⁴ PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

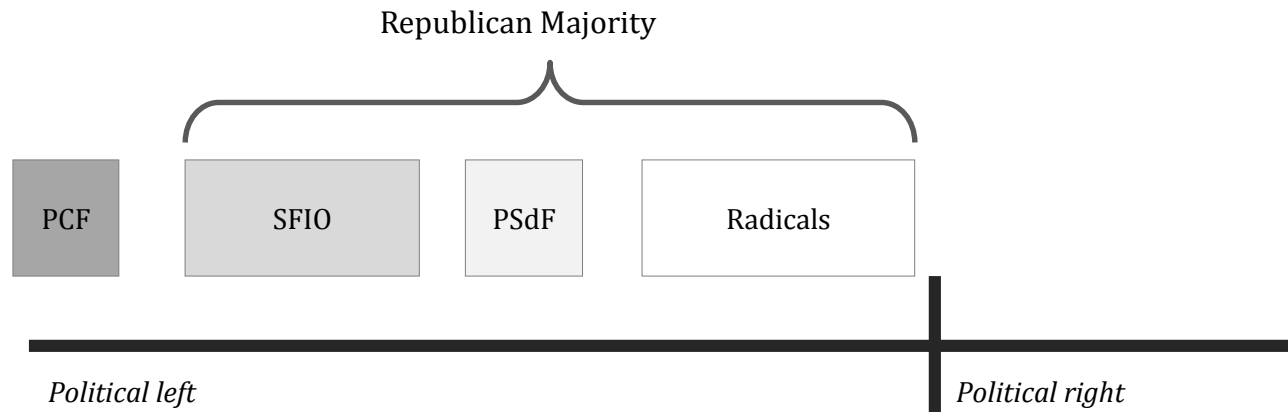
transcend its own particularity and become the organizing center of a popular-democratic will by proposing socialist solutions to national problems (Gramsci 1971).³⁵

In practice, this amounted to a justification of strategies that the neo-socialists had long advocated, and for which they were expelled from the SFIO: a durable alliance with the center-left Radicals and the willingness to govern, even as a minority partner, within a capitalist framework. Indeed, the PSdF's primary preoccupation in the Chamber of Deputies was to follow a "*realist action* to reconstitute a *left majority*" in order to form a "*barrage* against all the most audacious forms of reaction" [emphases in original].³⁶ To conscientiously assume their political responsibilities within the parliamentary regime was thus the *sine qua non* for the eventual post-capitalist transcendence announced by neo-socialism. This stance reflected their position within the political field in late 1933 and early 1934. The neo-socialist schism was smaller than might have been expected, with roughly 20,000 of the SFIO's 130,000 members following Déat out of the party, and with many prominent participationists who were otherwise sympathetic to the neo-socialist viewpoint adopting a wait-and-see attitude within the SFIO (Lefranc 1963: 437). Moreover, the neo-socialists did not provoke a similar schism among the Radicals to their right. Weak in members and resources, the neo-socialists thus counted for their political relevance on their pivotal position between the Socialists and Radicals and hoped to become the ideological fulcrum of a republican majority in parliament (Figure 4). Befitting their position in the field, the neo-socialists' posture was thus similar to what Howard Brick has called "social liberalism", i.e. a fluid admixture of liberal and evolutionary socialist principles (Brick 2006).

³⁵ In 1933 Déat explicitly denied that the middle classes would exercise any hegemony over the proletariat, implying that the working class would still constitute the center of any "anti-capitalist" alliance. Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. XXXe Congrès national tenu à Paris les 14, 15, 16 et 17 juillet 1933. *Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire, p. 443.

³⁶ PSdF "Manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France Union Jean-Jaurès" *La Vie Socialiste* November 25 1933.

Figure 4. The neo-socialists and the French left, 1933



My point here is not to repeat the error of the "classificatory logic"—in which political movements and ideologies are measured against an essentialist definition of "fascism"—denounced by Dobry (2003). The issue is less whether neo-socialism in 1933 was or was not *really* fascist in its ideational content than how the neo-socialists actually positioned themselves within the political field. The fact is that in the period immediately following the schism, neo-socialism was still firmly anchored on the left. Its *raison d'être* was to cement a stable left-wing parliamentary majority capable of governing effectively and to thereby block the advance of fascism. If the proletariat, peasantry, and middle classes were articulated in a *chain of equivalence* under the sign of the "Nation," the "people" so constituted were nonetheless defined against an imagined fascist threat. Also, the neo-socialists' frame of reference remained the international socialist left. Thus following the schism, the neo-socialists appealed—though to no avail—to the Labor and Socialist International (LSI) to arbitrate the dispute between the competing socialist parties. Moreover, to justify their positions in favor of a mixed economy and

intermediary regime, the neo-socialists cited not the examples of fascist countries, but rather of socialist parties in Belgium, Sweden, and Switzerland who had advanced similar positions.³⁷

Finally, the notion that the neo-socialism was already in 1933 meaningfully proto-fascist—and that this explains their engagement with the fascist RNP—is further belied by the fact that the founding leaders of the PSdF followed divergent paths in later years. I was able to reconstruct the political careers of 19 out of the 24 members of the PSdF's founding executive bureau (Figure 5). Within this group, six became primarily aligned with the Vichy regime during the German Occupation, five participated in the Resistance, and eight were involved to some degree with the RNP—although some distanced themselves from it as it became more Nazified, in one case even joining the Resistance. In short, to suggest that neo-socialism at its birth as an independent political force in 1933 expressed a latent—or sometimes not so latent—fascism and that this was the decisive factor in the later formation of the RNP is to engage in a teleological fallacy and misinterpret what was in fact conceived as an anti-fascist discourse.

³⁷ See e.g. "Une fructueuse réunion de propagande a eu lieu dans le 20e Arrondissement" *La Vie Socialiste* February 3 1934.

Figure 5. Political alignment of original PSdF executive bureau during the Occupation

Name	Alignment During Occupation
Marcel Bidegaray (1875-1944)	RNP
Max Bonnafous (1900-1975)	Vichy
Claude Bonnier (1897-1944)	Resistance
Bouvet	Unknown
Louis Cade (1895-?)	Unknown
Gaston Clémendot (1868-1952)	Vichy
Émile Cresp (1877-1950)	Vichy
Pierre Crouzet (1909-?)	Vichy
Marcel Déat (1894-1955)	RNP
René Gounin (1898-1983)	Vichy
Henry Hauck (1902-1967)	Resistance
Ernest Lafont (1879-1946)	Vichy
Jacques Laignel	Unknown
Louis-Louis (1883-1963)	RNP
Adrien Marquet (1884-1955)	Vichy, RNP
Barthélémy Montagnon (1889-1969)	RNP
Émile Mougins (1885-1967)	RNP
Louis Perceau (1883-1942)	Resistance
Paul Perrin (1891-1950)	RNP
Jacques Perrot	Unknown
Pierre Renaudel (1871-1935)	Deceased
Henri Schnitzer (1888-1941)	Unknown
Léon Thoyot (1880-1950)	RNP, Resistance
Louis Vallon (1901-1981)	Resistance

"Vichy" signifies either direct involvement with the Vichy regime, or alignment with its policy of administrative and political collaboration.

From Discourse Analysis to a Situational Analysis

Stanley Grossman has argued that by 1934, Déat had "taken a position close to fascism in a number of respects" (Grossman 1985: 51). So:

First, both Déat and fascists believed in the reconciliation of class interests, indeed, in the wholehearted cooperation of the classes in behalf of the national welfare. Consequently, each found corporatism and national economic planning attractive doctrines. Secondly, like his fellow fascists in France, Déat was not only authoritarian, but strongly elitist. The national elite, not just a single leader, was "to take the proletariat

by the hand" and show it the way to national regeneration. Thirdly, Déat and the fascists felt the need to use and increase the powers of the state, a party-state that would replace the outdated political formations that had survived until then (Grossman 1985: 51-52).

The German victory of 1940 thus "simply revived a national socialist stance that first blossomed in 1934 but then lain dormant in the shadow of the Popular Front" (Grossman 1985: 52).³⁸

Grossman is only half right. There was indeed a noticeable shift in neo-socialist discourse starting in 1934. It began trafficking in equivocations, was more ambivalent about its political commitments, and the neo-socialists started cultivating dubious associations with forces on the political right. However, as much as some of the neo-socialists' schemes evoked fascism, to assimilate neo-socialism to fascism is to overstate things greatly. Furthermore, to dismiss the neo-socialists' abandonment of this line during the Popular Front period as a mere parenthesis between 1934 and the Occupation is to fundamentally misunderstand the dynamic of Déat and his comrades' transformation. The problem lies in the essentialist way in which Grossman—and others—seek to retroactively classify neo-socialism, as if the significance and authenticity of the various turns in neo-socialist discourse and practice could be assessed by measuring these turns against a fixed definition of neo-socialism.

In fact, neo-socialist discourse and practice changed in important ways between 1933 and 1934, and would do so several times more before the end of World War II. Rather than dismiss some of these changes by reference to an essential neo-socialism that is here "dormant" and there "manifest", the analytical task should be to take these seriously as objects of inquiry and to suggest the explanatory principle behind them. Although discourse analysis is useful in interpreting neo-socialist discourse in its different historical moments and in establishing the fact

³⁸ Grossman conflates fascism with national socialism, as if all fascisms were really socialist, and as if all national socialisms were necessarily fascist. To label any socialism conceived within a national framework as a "national socialism" and thereby implying an affinity with Nazism is a misleading sleight of hand. The point is precisely that there were conceptions of "national socialism" that were explicitly anti-fascist.

of its mutation, therefore confuting the essentialist "continuity thesis," in itself it does not provide much analytical leverage in explaining why and how neo-socialism changed in the particular way that it did. Discourse analysis can thus only be one moment in the analysis of neo-socialism's trajectory.

To simply register a shift in neo-socialist discourse does not move us beyond the "idealist/intellectualist bias" noted earlier, with its presumption that changes at the level of practice simply reflect prior ideational changes. A second moment in the analysis is thus necessary to explain these shifts in neo-socialist discourse themselves in terms not immanent to the ideational sphere.³⁹ Here a "situational analysis" that examines how political actors are situationally constituted in and through specific relational contexts can fruitfully complement the critical move of discourse analysis (Jansen 2016). An example of such an analytical approach, Dobry's "relational perspective" has highlighted the plasticity of political ideologies and the porousness of their boundaries. Dobry (2003, 2005) specifically calls attention to the ways political identities emerge out of the competitive structure of the political field, and the ways in which discursive strategies are enabled or constrained by shifts in this structure. Instead of interpreting a given group's political practices as manifestations of a pre-constituted essence, a "relational perspective" interprets these practices within specific "contexts of action" in which agents seek to act and define themselves in relation to other agents in the field. To use Bourdieu's language, an agent's actual position-taking is thus conditioned by the relational structure of possible positions within a given field and the history of struggles within it. As such, political

³⁹ The "idealist/intellectualist bias" and the "continuity thesis" are thus connected in that the former often ends up falling back on some version of the latter in order to explain discursive transformations. For example, even someone as explicitly hostile to essentialism as Bastow (2000) explains these transformations in terms of the differential resolution of what he considers to be inherent tensions within neo-socialism discourse.

identities are relationally constituted in and through the dynamics of the political field as agents jockey for position and strategically redefine themselves and others in classification struggles.

To understand the changes to neo-socialist discourse and identity, then, one needs to relate these to changes in the "contexts of action" in which they were embedded. The neo-socialists' discursive transformations were mediated by their situated political practices as they continually reacted to shifts in their political circumstances in strategic ways. It is by looking at these conjunctural dynamics that we can fill in the gap, so to speak, and identify the mechanisms by which the political identities of the neo-socialists were transformed.

Political Crisis and Reconfiguration

a. February 6 1934

On the evening of February 6 1934, an anti-government protest by far-right paramilitary leagues degenerated into deadly riots that rocked Paris. Fearing a violent insurrection and under intense political pressure, Edouard Daladier, the Radical who only two weeks earlier had been installed as the President of the Council of Ministers (i.e. the Prime Minister), stepped down on February 7 and was replaced by the conservative Gaston Doumergue. The constitution of a new center-right government not only cancelled the left-wing majority of the 1932 parliamentary elections, it was the first time since 1870 that street demonstrations had toppled a government in France. February 6 1934 thus marked a profound political crisis, touching off a reconfiguration of the political field to which neo-socialist discourse would have to adapt.

The precipitating cause of the riot was a financial scandal that erupted in December 1933 when Alexandre Stavisky was found to have sold false bonds in a Ponzi scheme. A known con man, Stavisky was also a politically connected socialite. Not only had his operations been

protected in the past by these connections, several prominent Radical politicians were directly implicated in the scam. The Stavisky Affair, as the scandal came to be called, took a further conspiratorial turn when on January 8 1934 Stavisky, cornered by police in Chamonix after having fled Paris, was found dead by gunshot. Although he was officially reported to have committed suicide, speculation was rampant—in both the left- and right-wing press—that he had in fact been silenced.

The Stavisky Affair became a sort of condensation of the right's worst fears. It vindicated their hostility to what they saw as an ineffectual parliamentary regime and a corrupt republican establishment. That Stavisky was of Ukrainian Jewish origin only made the polemics more violent. As details of Stavisky's criminal dealings came to light, the reactionary press continued to whip up agitation against parliament, and the crisis escalated as various right-wing leagues engaged in aggressive street actions. As a consequence of the affair, Camille Chautemps's Radical government lost its parliamentary support, and he was replaced on January 30 by Daladier. Daladier took vigorous measures to restore public integrity, including dismissing the Paris Prefect of Police, Jean Chiappe, who was seen to be indulgent toward right-wing violence. It was specifically against the sacking of Chiappe, who was popular on the right for his tough stance against Communists, that the February 6 demonstrations were called.

The morning of February 6, the right-wing press, including the major dailies, published calls to action from various organizations, signaling a lack of confidence in the government and setting a menacing tone for the day. That evening, several contingents of demonstrators converged on the Place de la Concorde, across the Seine from the Chamber of Deputies. With parliament still in session, the crowd began attacking the police barricade blocking the bridge accessing the Chamber. As the violence grew more intense, the police opened fire, killing several

and setting off running street battles lasting through the night. By the end of the night, fourteen were dead and several hundred wounded (Jenkins and Millington 2015).

Illustration 14. Rioters at the Place de la Concorde, February 6 1934



The protestors were politically heterogeneous, but most came from various corners of the political right.⁴⁰ Among the participants were the royalists of the Action Française, several smaller fascist-inspired groups, war veterans organized into the large and influential Union Nationale des Combattants (UNC), and the authoritarian and nationalist paramilitary league, the

⁴⁰ The Communist-influenced veterans' association, the Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC) [Republican Association of Combat Veterans], was also present at demonstrations earlier in the day, but kept separate from the other protestors.

Croix-de-Feux [Cross of Fire].⁴¹ Whether the events of February 6 amounted to an abortive fascist *coup d'état* has been a matter of considerable debate. The dominant historiographical view has been to downplay the threat, citing the programmatic heterogeneity of the French right, the lack of a coordinated conspiracy, and France's supposedly entrenched democratic culture (Berstein 1975, Rémond 1966). In this view, the fact that there was no successful putsch, despite there being an opportunity for one, is proof that the fascist threat to the Republic was not serious.⁴² More recently, however, this view has come under criticism for relying on a teleological fallacy that deduces the event's meaning from its outcome. Not only does the established historiography misunderstand the processes by which European fascism actually came to power (e.g. neither Hitler nor Mussolini initially came to power as the result of a conspiratorial putsch), it overstates the rigidity of the ideological boundaries dividing different groups on the far right and underestimates the severity of the democratic crisis of which February 6 was both an indicator and catalyst (Dobry 2005, Jenkins 2006, Jenkins and Millington 2015).⁴³

⁴¹ Nobody doubts that the extremist leagues were at the forefront of the violence at the Place de la Concorde, but the extent to which the more moderate UNC participated in the violence is a matter of debate. The dominant historiography, of which Berstein's (1975) account is representative, minimizes UNC involvement in the violence, a judgment that is deduced in large measure by the perceived distance between their doctrine and those of the leagues. Chris Millington has criticized this view, arguing that the riots in fact created a fluid situation on the ground in which ideologically heterogeneous elements, including members of the UNC, intermingled and were drawn into the violent logic of the riots (Millington 2012, Jenkins and Millington 2015).

⁴² The Croix-de-Feux's contingent was not at the Place de la Concorde, but across the Seine on the Left Bank. Historians (Rémond 1966, Berstein and Winock 2014) have argued that the Croix-de-Feux could have easily breached the police cordon around the Palais Bourbon, where the Chamber of Deputies was housed, but that they chose instead to stand down is proof of the Croix-de-Feu's attachment to the Republic against fascism. Jenkins (2006) is more skeptical, and sees the Croix-de-Feu's restraint only as an acknowledgment of the limits of *putschism* as a strategy to subvert democracy.

⁴³ Drawing on Dobry's analysis of the 1934 riots (2005) and his general theory of political crisis (1986), Jenkins and Millington (2015) argue that crisis situations are fluid and entail a process of "decompartmentalization" in which formerly solid boundaries dividing disparate actors become less salient. Precisely a crisis of this kind, the events of February 6 could easily have generated an emergent fascist outcome, even if there was no pre-constituted fascist subject that was the sole author of the events. According to Dobry, Jenkins, and Millington, the fact that fascism did not come to France sooner had more to do with contingent factors such as the organizational weakness of the far right than with any *a priori* doctrinal incompatibility with fascism.

For my purposes here, whether or not February 6 was *actually* an attempted fascist putsch or a threat to the Republic is not especially relevant. What matters is that the events were widely seen as such, especially on the left, and political actors reacted *as if* this were truly the case.⁴⁴ After all, the abdication of Daladier and the reversal of the left-wing electoral mandate of 1932 marked a "brutal rupture with the 'Radical Republic'"—which the right hailed as a victory (Dobry 2005: 144). But the sense of emergency that pervaded the political field did not disappear after the constitution of the Doumergue government. The days and months following the riots saw further street violence as extra-parliamentary agitation intensified and the right-wing leagues grew bolder. Even the Doumergue government, which in its composition was a typical center-right *Union nationale* cabinet including both Radicals and the former conservative opposition, presented itself not as business-as-usual, but as an exceptional "government of truce." Responding to the anti-parliamentary mood, Doumergue and Tardieu, his Minister of State and a long-time *bête noire* of the left, undertook a constitutional reform project to strengthen executive power. Though this project ultimately failed, Doumergue was granted extensive decree powers, the use of which became normalized in successive governments. As Jenkins points out, the February 6 riots were not a self-contained event, but rather a "crucial stage in a prolonged and unfolding crisis of the Third Republic" in which French politics took an authoritarian turn.

b. Anti-Parliamentary Agitation and the Right

The sense of crisis was thus real enough that political actors calibrated their responses to it. The political field was particularly jolted by the emergence of a dynamic anti-democratic right with whom the political initiative now seemed to lie. Despite the programmatic

⁴⁴ As Kevin Passmore has argued, people in 1930s France "believed there was a crisis, and since they did, there was a crisis" (Passmore 2005: 153).

heterogeneity of the February 6 demonstrators, they shared a common matrix of ideas: e.g. anti-parliamentarism, hatred of democracy, authoritarianism, and anti-Marxism (Dobry 2005).

Though these were traditional themes on the right, they took on a more populist accent as economic anxieties and frustrations with parliamentary politics radicalized and broadened the constituency of the far right. With the parliamentary regime impotent to stem the economic crisis and the republican establishment tarnished by scandal, the anti-parliamentary right energetically asserted itself as a vital alternative to a moribund status quo. To many, February 6 represented the passage of revolutionary *élan* from left to right, and the emergence of a new political force capable of rallying the disaffected masses and displacing the socialist and communist left as a force for political, economic, and moral renewal.

The riots were a boon to the leagues, several of which came together in May 1934 to form the Front National.⁴⁵ Though the Front National saw some success and continued to have influence both in the streets and in parliament, it was ultimately eclipsed by the Croix-de-Feu, who benefitted the most from the February 6 mystique. Originally an exclusive organization for combat veterans, under the leadership of Colonel de la Rocque the Croix-de-Feu opened its doors to civilians and became an authoritarian and nationalist mass movement, complete with auxiliary organizations and paramilitary formations.⁴⁶ Although the Croix-de-Feu had not been involved in the violence on February 6, and had in fact declined an opportunity to storm the Chamber of Deputies, its discipline and restraint contributed to its appeal to those conservatives fearful of revolutionary agitation, with its membership consequently ballooning from under 100,000 in February 1934 to about 500,000 in 1936 (Kennedy 2007: 37, 88). The Croix-de-Feu became *the* formidable force on the anti-parliamentary right, and its provocative displays of

⁴⁵ This alliance is not to be confused with the present-day Front National, which was founded in 1972.

⁴⁶ On Colonel de la Rocque and the Croix-de-Feu, see Kennedy (2007) and Soucy (1995).

strength, including the use of intimidating motorized expeditions into left-wing neighborhoods, made it the principal object of the left's fears of an imminent fascist coup.

The Croix-de-Feu's prestige was due in part to its association with combat veterans, and indeed one of the major developments to come out of the February 6 events was the emergence of veterans as a political force. Veterans made up a large fraction of the demonstrators, and images of wounded World War I veterans being attacked by the cavalry of the Republican Guard roused public sentiment. Of the two major veterans' organizations, the Radical-leaning Union Fédérale (UF) and the conservative UNC, only the UNC participated in the February 6 demonstrations. Nonetheless, both organizations shared an anti-parliamentarian attitude that rejected political parties as selfish perversions of the national community. Although these organizations had hitherto focused mainly on defending the material interests of veterans, they increasingly presented themselves as the authentic voice of the nation, a force whose virtuous sacrifice in the trenches and moral authority transcended petty partisan divisions and uniquely qualified them to cleanse and regenerate a corrupt political establishment (Millington 2012, Prost 1992). The anti-parliamentary rhetoric of the veterans' organizations naturally resonated with that of the leagues, and the respect that veterans commanded in French society made them particularly valuable allies in the authoritarian projects of the far right.⁴⁷ For example, the UNC and the Croix-de-Feu grew increasingly close (Millington 2012), and even though the UNC—unlike some of the other leagues—was republican, it advocated a Republic reformed along

⁴⁷ In his account of the veterans' organizations in Interwar France, Alain Prost downplays the affinity between the veterans' ethos and the authoritarian right, arguing that despite the anti-parliamentary bluster, the veterans' organizations were loyal Republicans. Moreover, the moral righteousness that was a central part of veterans' self-image made it such that "It was impossible for any French fascism to recruit its soldiers of fortune or its strong men from among its respectable and morally high-minded leaders" (Prost 1992: 114). This is a dubious proposition, both because fascism and Republicanism are not mutually exclusive, and because it retroactively imposes a rigid boundary between political ideologies that was not *in the moment* experienced as such. In fact, there were many connections between the UNC and the Croix-de-Feu, and Jean Goy, president of the UNC, would go on to become a co-founder of the RNP (Jenkins and Millington 2015, Millington 2012).

authoritarian lines and heaped scorn on the "*République des camarades*" ["Republic of chums"] in terms that drew from the anti-democratic mood of the times (Jenkins and Millington 2015). In its call to participate in the February 6 demonstrations, the UNC railed against "the clan of sycophants", "political wheeler-dealers", and "the ballot paper merchants" in parliament. Moreover, it contributed to the cultivation of an insurrectionary climate by suggesting that February 6 was only a precursor to "D-Day" and "H-Hour" and that the fall of Daladier was only the "first part of the revolutionary act" (quoted in Jenkins and Millington 2015: 107-109). The veterans' movement as a whole came to appear as a decisive arbiter in the political crisis of 1934, with the movement becoming a focus of political intrigue as it hung like the Sword of Damocles over the government. Both the UF and UNC accentuated their anti-parliamentary rhetoric after February 6 as they took the lead in a broad push for constitutional revision aimed at redressing a deficient regime. With the adoption of a unified reform program in March, the Confédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants—an umbrella organization uniting the various veterans' organizations—announced that veterans were prepared to "intervene in public life to ensure the predominance of the general interest" (quoted in Jackson 1985: 152). Soon thereafter, the Confédération issued an ultimatum to Doumergue that if by July 8 the government had not introduced meaningful institutional reforms, the veterans would topple the government by recalling Georges Rivollet, Minister of Pensions and president of the Confédération, from his cabinet post. Given the political climate, an insurrection was distinctly plausible, and public anxiety about July 8 was further heightened when left- and right-wing forces announced mobilizations to coincide with the veterans' decision (Millington 2012). The confederation would ultimately vote narrowly to maintain Rivollet, but the veterans had made their mark as an extra-parliamentary force to be reckoned with.

c. Communist-Socialist Rapprochement

The February 6 events not only energized the anti-democratic right, they also provoked a vigorous reaction from the left. Communists and Socialists quickly mobilized to prevent what they saw as an imminent fascist coup. The left's major riposte came on February 12, with a one-day general strike called by the CGT and officially endorsed by the SFIO and PSdF, among others. The strike and associated demonstrations—held all over France—were a success, dwarfing the February 6 demonstrations. The day was thus seen as a triumphant defense of the Republic. But February 12 was equally significant in that it foreshadowed the eventual rapprochement between Communists and Socialists. The PCF at this time was still following the sectarian "class against class" line, and it continued to violently denounce the Socialists as "social-fascists" and objective allies of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it did call on its members to participate in the February 12 strike—albeit maintaining its autonomy of action and organizing a separate demonstration from the Socialists. The hostile relations between the SFIO and PCF at the leadership level did not, however, translate into a feared confrontation between the rank-and-file as the rival processions converged at the Place de la Nation. Instead, Communists and Socialists fraternized and joined in jubilant cries of "Unity" in a moment that came to take on mythical status on the French left.⁴⁹

The spontaneous display of solidarity on February 12 was the first expression of a groundswell of grassroots pressure for anti-fascist unity that intensified over the following months. SFIO and PCF leadership remained mutually suspicious for the time being, each

⁴⁸ E.g. "Avant le Congrès National du Parti Socialiste S.F.I.O. Les chefs manœuvrent contre les ouvriers socialistes mécontents" *L'Humanité* February 8 1934.

⁴⁹ For an account of the February 12 events, see Lefranc (1965).

rebuffing periodic overtures toward unity whose motivations they mistrusted.⁵⁰ But the climate of political emergency in France and developments abroad, such as the suppression of Austrian Social Democracy by the Austrofascist Dollfuss, created a sense of anti-fascist urgency that eventually became preponderant.⁵¹ Examples of informal Socialist-Communist cooperation became more common, the most famous of these being the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes (CVIA) [Vigilance Committee of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals], and unity of action was in fact daily being practiced at the local level (OURS 1975b).⁵²

Things took a turn when at a June 23-26 PCF national conference, party leader Maurice Thorez indicated that the PCF was willing to expand its conception of the "united front of combat against fascism" to include direct negotiations with the SFIO national leadership, effectively turning the page on the Communists' sectarian period.⁵³ The PCF immediately set out extending its arm toward the SFIO, addressing a concrete proposal for united action to the Socialist CAP on July 2.⁵⁴ On the Socialist side, the impulsion for unity came from the party's left-wing faction, whose weight in the party increased after the 1933 schism (Marcus 1958).⁵⁵ Longtime advocates of eventual organic unity with the PCF, Jean Zyromski and Marceau Pivert—leaders of the party left—were especially energetic in pushing Socialists toward a

⁵⁰ The PCF, for its part, was still uncompromisingly hostile to the SFIO leadership, and their overtures were conceived within a "united front at the base" strategy, which was designed to tear away the Socialist grassroots from the party. The SFIO, on the other hand, understandably doubted the sincerity of the Communists and feared just such a maneuver. The SFIO thus insisted on a party-to-party accord negotiated by the respective leaderships, and forbade its members to participate in any front organization likely to be dominated by Communists.

⁵¹ On the significance of the Austrian Civil War and, later, the failed miners' strike of Asturias in shaping European socialist strategy, see Horn (1996).

⁵² Constituted in March 1934 by intellectuals associated with the Socialist, Communist, and Radical parties, the CVIA is often considered a precursor to the Front Populaire. On the CVIA, see (Racine-Furlaud 1977).

⁵³ Maurice Thorez "Les travailleurs veulent l'unité!" *L'Humanité* June 25 1934. Thorez also condemned those who had in the past conceived of the "united front" as an opportunity to "pluck the feathers of the Socialist goose"—ironic, given that this had essentially been official PCF policy.

⁵⁴ "Nouvelles propositions au Parti socialiste" *L'Humanité* June 25 1934. "Réponse du Comité central du P.C.F. au membres de la C.A.P. du Parti Socialiste" *L'Humanité* July 2 1934.

⁵⁵ For example, the March 15 1934 issue of *La Bataille Socialiste*, the left-wing factional paper, was entirely consecrated to the theme of "unity."

rapprochement with the Communists. Under their initiative, and against official party policy, the SFIO Seine Federation organized a joint meeting with the PCF Seine organization on July 2 at the Salle Bullier in Paris. The meeting, which featured Communist and Socialist leaders sharing the stage, attracted such a crowd that a second simultaneous meeting had to be hastily improvised nearby.⁵⁶ Despite continued reservations in some quarters of the SFIO, this wave of grassroots enthusiasm for unity proved decisive, and the party voted overwhelmingly at its July 15 National Council to accept the PCF offer to act in common against fascism.⁵⁷ On July 27, the two parties signed a "Unity of Action Pact" which called for the mobilization of "all working people" against fascism, war, and the Doumergue government's decree-laws, and for the "defense of democratic liberties." Concretely, the pact set up a coordinating committee between the two parties and sanctioned the organization of joint meetings and demonstrations. Moreover, although each party was to maintain its autonomy when it came to propaganda and recruitment, they agreed to refrain from attacking one another for the duration of the pact.⁵⁸

The PCF-SFIO Unity Pact was a step toward the Popular Front, but only a step. Indeed, the text of the pact was inspired more by "the desire for an entente on the basis of class positions than by the preoccupation of a broadening to the Radicals" (Lefranc 1965: 54-55). The pact owed more to the mystique of "proletarian unity" than to the idea of a broad republican front. After all, the Radicals at this time supported—and sat in—the Doumergue government, which both the PCF and SFIO considered a reactionary legacy of the February 6 riots. In fact, the pact was just as much oriented against Doumergue's decree-laws—which were used to push through unpopular austerity measures without parliamentary approval, and which the Radicals helped

⁵⁶ *Le Populaire* estimated the crowd at 25,000. "Vingt-cinq mille travailleurs ont répondu hier à l'appel des deux partis ouvriers" *Le Populaire* July 3 1934.

⁵⁷ Léon Blum discussed the reservations in the party in "Les problèmes de l'Unité" *Le Populaire* July 7 1934, "Les données du problème" *Le Populaire* July 8 1934, "Action commune et unité organique" *Le Populaire* July 11 1934.

⁵⁸ "Le Pacte" *Le Populaire* July 28 1934.

draft—as it was against the threat of fascism. With the Radicals integrated into the *Union nationale*, the PCF newly open to collaboration, and an eruption of grassroots anti-fascist sentiment for unity, the Socialists had little choice but to tack left and draw closer to the Communists in defending workers' interests.

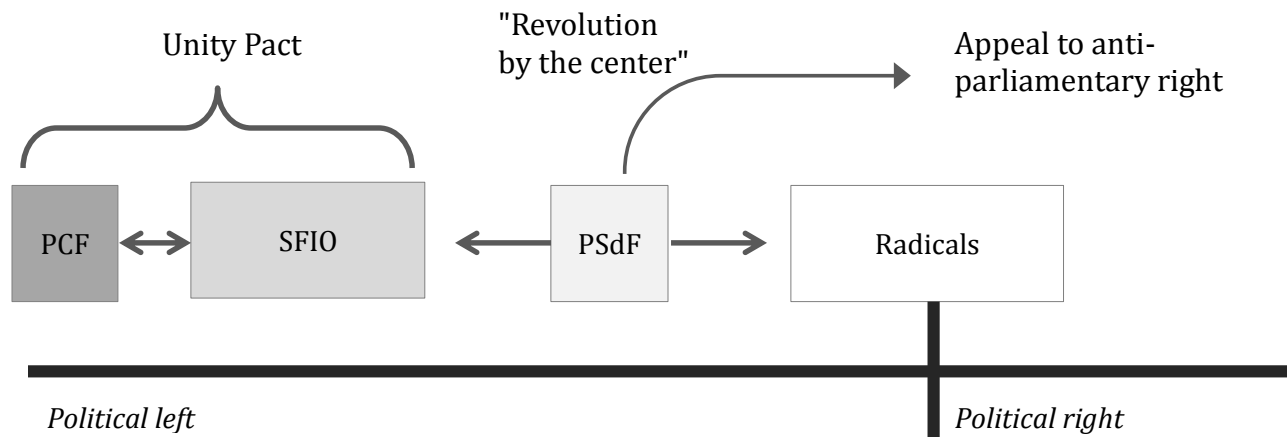
The PSdF had emerged from the November 1933 schism as the potential fulcrum of a left-wing Republican majority spanning the SFIO to its left and the Radicals to its right. It probably lacked the parliamentary strength or mass base to ever fulfill this role, but these hopes were in any case definitively dashed on February 6. The riots and their aftermath completely upended the political field. First, they represented a crisis of legitimacy for the political establishment, in which the Radicals were particularly implicated. The Radicals' response to this crisis was to abdicate and sheepishly integrate into Doumergue's center-right "government of truce," thus dislocating the left-wing electoral majority of 1932. Despite their presence in the government, the Radicals were temporarily neutralized as a political force. Second, the riots marked, and further catalyzed, the radicalization of the anti-parliamentary right. Extra-parliamentary agitation increased as new political actors like the nationalist leagues and veterans' organizations came to appear as the dynamic element of an otherwise torpid political field. The climate of political emergency thus continued well into 1934, despite the constitution of Doumergue's *Union nationale* government. Third, this all precipitated a countervailing galvanization of the far left with the rapprochement of Communists and Socialists under the mystique of "proletarian unity." The entente between the PCF and SFIO was conceived as an anti-fascist measure, but for the time being it entailed a leftward shift of the SFIO toward a class-based revolutionary discourse more than it did an embrace of republican positions by the PCF.

Neo-Socialism's Equivocal Turn

a. Rupture with the Past: Anti-Parliamentarism and the "Revolution by the Center"

The neo-socialists adapted to the new political conjuncture by seeking to capitalize on the new anti-parliamentary mood. With its political neighbors—the SFIO and Radicals—pulled in opposite directions, the PSdF re-positioned itself as the vanguard of a revolutionary center uniquely capable of transcending a left/right political divide it now described as outmoded (Figure 6). Despite having their origin in the parliamentary wing of the SFIO, the neo-socialists now railed against political parties and nourished extra-parliamentary ambitions. It was during this time, riding the wave of anti-parliamentary fervor that gripped French politics in the months following the February 6 riots, that neo-socialist discourse and practice was at its most equivocal.

Figure 6. The neo-socialists' equivocal turn, 1934



Certain favorite themes of the neo-socialists—such as the appeal to the middle classes and the construction of an intermediary regime—remained constant, but the neo-socialism of 1934 was not a straightforward continuation of the neo-socialism of 1933. February 6 was a clear inflection point for neo-socialism. For example, Déat initially minimized the Stavisky Affair as a

case of a few bad apples that did not fundamentally impeach the parliamentary regime or established political parties.⁵⁹ Following the riots, however, Déat and his fellow neo-socialists changed their tune. Déat recognized as much when in March he wrote that the PSdF, too, had "received the shock of February 6," and that since that day, it "undertook a certain number of profitable reflections."⁶⁰ At the May 1934 party congress, Déat again said that "by the force of things, and in the rush of events, a certain number of points were broached that had before been neglected," and that the PSdF had been forced to "clarify certain of [its] attitudes."⁶¹

Although the PSdF had co-organized the February 12 counter-demonstration with the CGT, it now portrayed the February 6 riots as an irrevocable rupture with a discredited past. The events had "revealed the gravity of the political crisis and the erosion of old institutions, as well the profundity of discontent born from misery and economic stagnation." The "combined impotence of the old parties" had engendered an anti-parliamentarism exploited by fascist agitation, and "traditional formulas" had become "exhausted" such that they no longer had any influence over "the crowds."⁶² According to the neo-socialists, France was now entering a revolutionary period, and it was up to the PSdF to undertake this revolution that had become both "necessary and possible."⁶³ To do this, however, it had to make a clean break with the past. The time was not for making alliances with spent forces such as the Socialists, Communists, or Radicals, but for something entirely new:

So we must free ourselves vigorously, savagely, from old impotencies and old formulas. So, we must regroup after having undergone a makeover [*après avoir fait peau neuve*], after having thrown into the

⁵⁹ "Le point de vue du Parti Socialiste de France dans le débat sur le scandale Stavisky: Les discours de Marcel Déat et d'Adrien Marquet" *La Vie Socialiste* January 20 1934.

⁶⁰ Marcel Déat "Et maintenant, travaillons!" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

⁶¹ Marcel Déat "Rapport moral" *La Vie Socialiste* May 5 1934.

⁶² "Un manifeste du Parti Socialiste de France" *La Vie Socialiste* February 17 1934.

⁶³ The expression "necessary revolution" was likely borrowed from a book by Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu called *La révolution nécessaire* (1933). Aron and Dandieu were central figures among the "non-conformists of the 1930s" (Loubet del Bayle 1969).

mass grave of history old concepts and old ideas...We must speak to the country as new men, a new language, bring to the nation a plan for its salvation, for its material and moral renewal...All ideologies are vain and pernicious, because they are outdated, expired because they endlessly divide rather than unite.⁶⁴

To "do away with a heavy heritage of immorality, impotence, anarchy" and "intellectual laziness," the PSdF called for a series of "liquidations": of the Stavisky Affair, of "abuses and defects," of a "disordered administrative and judicial regime," of "uncoordinated governmental methods," of "party egoisms and clan rivalries," of Marxist ideology, of "democratic verbalism," of economic liberalism, of bureaucratic statism, of unemployment and the economic crisis, of militarism, and of a confused foreign policy.⁶⁵ Within a few weeks, the neo-socialists had gone from investing their hopes in the parliamentary game to turning the page on a political, social, and economic regime that was badly exposed on February 6.

As the above hints, neo-socialist discourse took on a stridently anti-parliamentary tone. Isolated by a dynamic that drew the SFIO and Radicals further away from them, they made a virtue out of necessity by rejecting parliamentary combinations altogether. The PSdF was not "a new party in competition for clientele with other political formations." Instead, it "placed itself on another level."⁶⁶ Even before February 12, Déat noted that all parties, including the SFIO and the Radicals, had been "cleansed, swept away, ruined." Consequently, the neo-socialists intended to "repudiate all routines" and not let themselves be "hypnotized by a parliamentary action that is no longer the only one, or even the most important."⁶⁷ During this period, they repeatedly characterized themselves as a "movement" rather than a mere "party." They wrapped themselves in the prevailing anti-parliamentary mood and spoke of a "grand cleansing of parliament, the

⁶⁴ "Tactique de désastre" *Paris-Demain* February 15 1934.

⁶⁵ Parti Socialiste de France "Message au Pays" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

⁶⁶ Parti Socialiste de France "Message au Pays" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

⁶⁷ Marcel Déat "Après la crise" *La Vie Socialiste* February 10 1934.

administration, justice, the police, finance, and the press."⁶⁸ Parties "hardly count anymore," Déat wrote, and it was "to be hoped that they would end up dissolving themselves in the crucible of the revolutionary events now in motion."⁶⁹ Déat even went so far as to suggest that the PSdF take the initiative in founding a new extra-parliamentary league.⁷⁰

A leitmotif of neo-socialist discourse at this time was the fear of a looming civil war between the leagues on the right and the Socialist-Communist bloc on the left.⁷¹ The PSdF was still explicitly oriented against a perceived domestic fascist menace—thus complicating any account according to which the neo-socialism of 1934 was unambiguously fascist—but it also rejected the "negative" anti-fascism of the far left as too divisive. Against this backdrop of polarization, the neo-socialists urged the abandonment of "metaphysical quarrels" and sought to rally all "men of good will" around a positive minimum program designed to attract broad support across the political spectrum.⁷² In doing so they were accused by some of lapsing into a dangerous pragmatism that was unanchored by any clear doctrine or ideal. But in Déat's mind, the choice facing neo-socialism was clear:

[...] either we organize a little party that will be tightly united at the level of general ideas and philosophical principles, and which will therefore be one more chapel destined for practical impotence, for periodic excommunications, for a permanent withdrawal into oneself. Or we undertake a vast rally [*rassemblement*], around positive formulas, by not demanding an absolute similitude of interpretations and a rigorous metaphysical conformism (Déat 1934).

This was not, however, an appeal to centrist moderation. Indeed, the neo-socialists considered the situation revolutionary and called for a "revolution by the center" to pre-empt a catastrophic

⁶⁸ Marcel Déat "Inventaire de nos ennemis" *Paris-Demain* April 28 1934.

⁶⁹ Marcel Déat "Nous resterons indépendants" *Paris-Deman* February 24 1934.

⁷⁰ Marcel Déat "Conditions d'un rassemblement efficace" *La Vie Socialiste* July 7 1934.

⁷¹ E.g. Marcel Déat "Veut-on la guerre civile?" *Paris-Demain* March 3 1934.

⁷² E.g. "Un grand discours de Déat à Perpignan" *La Vie Socialiste* March 31 1934. The expression "men of goodwill" was taken from the Belgian Plan du Travail drafted by de Man and adopted by the POB/BWP.

revolution by both the extreme left and right. This center, moreover, would encompass the "immense majority of the nation" and be a wedge "shattering all resistances."⁷³

The neo-socialists' pretensions were to transcend the left-right divide. In response to misgivings among some within the PSdF over the neo-socialists' new attitude, Déat claimed that the division of the country between left and right, which he described as a holdover from the 19th century, had become "outdated."⁷⁴ Following February 6, a revolution was brewing "in the most absolute confusion of ideas and doctrines." From all sides, "men without programs and almost without leaders" were rallying to this amorphous revolution out of an "elementary taste for collective action." These forces, even those "lined up on the right," were "still available" to the neo-socialists.⁷⁵ By bringing the message of the "necessary revolution" to the disaffected masses, the neo-socialists could draw "men who today are enlisted under the banners of the right, and who by instinct are ours."⁷⁶ In the words of Louis Vallon, a *polytechnicien* and rising intellectual voice among the neo-socialists, those youths typically classed on the right "no longer want to be the guard dogs of bank vaults, not more than we desire to become the bodyguards of old politicians of the supposed left whom a healthy and prompt popular justice will enchain, on the same boat headed to the penal colony, to the financiers and fiddlers that they have protected and aided for so many years."⁷⁷

⁷³ Marcel Déat "Devoirs de vacances" *La Vie Socialiste* July 14 1934. Marcel Déat "Axe de marche" *La Vie Socialiste* May 12 1934. The notion of a "revolution by the center" of course recalls Seymour Martin Lipset's (1960) characterization of fascism as an "extremism of the center," except that to call neo-socialism in 1934 fascism is questionable.

⁷⁴ Marcel Déat "En guise de réponse" *La Vie Socialiste* April 7 1934.

⁷⁵ Marcel Déat "Problèmes politiques et questions pratiques" *La Vie Socialiste* February 24 1934.

⁷⁶ Marcel Déat "Et maintenant, travaillons!" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

⁷⁷ "Le Plan du 9 juillet. Conférence de Louis Vallon à Belleville Saint-Fargeau" *Paris-Demain* November 24 1943.

b. Strange Bedfellows and Discursive Ambiguity

Following the February 6 riots, the neo-socialists recast themselves as the political vanguard of a burgeoning mass movement that transcended partisan divisions and rejected routine politics. In this sense neo-socialism did indeed, at least in this period, resemble the kind of "neither left nor right" discourse that Sternhell argues is typical of fascism. Although the neo-socialists still opposed fascism, at least domestically, they also cultivated an aura of ambiguity that left many guessing at their intentions. This ambiguity mirrored that of the newly assertive veterans' organizations, with whom the PSdF now sought common ground. *La Vie Socialiste* (the PSdF's official weekly) and *Paris-Demain* (a weekly directed by Déat) began devoting considerable coverage to veterans' groups, and the neo-socialists clamorously echoed the veterans' demands for constitutional revision. PSdF propaganda also increasingly cleaved to themes generally associated with the veterans' movement. These overtures, moreover, were not limited to veterans on the political left, but encompassed the full heterogeneity of the movement, including the conservative UNC.

The neo-socialists did not just express sympathy for the veterans' cause; they sought to exploit the anti-parliamentary dynamic to stake a novel position for themselves in the political field.⁷⁸ Their ambition was to emerge as the political expression of a generalized anti-parliamentary sentiment extending from the veterans on the right to the labor movement on the left. The neo-socialists thus focused their propaganda efforts on conjugating the spirit of February 6, represented by the veterans, to that of February 12, represented by the CGT. They lauded the recent opening of the CGT to the middle classes and its acceptance of the idea of a

⁷⁸ In his memoirs, Déat wrote of the veterans' movement: "There was here an interesting state of mind that I was resolved to use" (Déat 1989: 303).

"plan" in the Belgian mold.⁷⁹ By rallying "all categories of producers" around a "plan" of structural reform and speaking in a "national language," the CGT had moved beyond narrow sectional interests and entered the realm of politics. A partnership now seemed possible with the veterans, who also shared the CGT's newfound interest in institutional reform. Indeed, Déat argued that the different programs of the CGT and the veterans were sufficiently similar that they could easily be brought together.⁸⁰ Both groups in their own way criticized the deficiencies of the parliamentary regime, and the PSdF hoped to consolidate and channel this wave of discontent to sweep away the established parties. If the veterans joined forces with the CGT, the neo-socialists argued, the politicians would be "dead" and politics "entirely renovated."⁸¹ At its May 1934 congress, the PSdF announced its hope that the party, "within the framework traced by the...CGT and the veterans...will be able to work toward the rapid gathering of all popular and sound elements of the Nation."⁸²

The PSdF not only endorsed the veterans' July 8 ultimatum to the Doumergue government, it insinuated itself into the campaign by pretending to be its political center of gravity and invested its own ambitions for power in the governmental crisis that would be provoked by the veterans. Déat did his best to incite the veterans to make good on their ultimatum and break with the Doumergue government (Déat 1989: 303). Just as public anxiety about July 8 was mounting, the neo-socialists made their own contribution to it by scheduling the PSdF Central Council meeting to coincide with the veterans' decision, so that the party could react quickly to exploit the situation. The insurrectionary tenor of the ultimatum was further

⁷⁹ The push to elaborate a CGT "plan" came in large part from the civil servants' federation, in which neo-socialist ideas had penetrated and which at this time held a preponderant influence within the CGT (Lefranc 1967, Pouydesseau 1983).

⁸⁰ Marcel Déat "Rassemblement: La France se cherche" *La Vie Socialiste* April 28 1934. See also Robert Bobin "Confrontation des 'Plans'" *La Vie Socialiste* April 28 1934.

⁸¹ "Des Anciens combattans à la CGT l'accord devient possible" *Paris-Demain* April 7 1934.

⁸² "La déclaration de politique générale" *La Vie Socialiste* May 27 1934.

heightened as the neo-socialists spoke of the "July deadline" and called for a "relief" [*relève*]—with its military connotation—of the Doumergue government by a team composed of veterans, syndicalists, and—naturally—themselves.⁸³ What exactly such a "relief" entailed remained vague and the neo-socialists were widely accused of fomenting a coup. What was clear, however, was that whatever came next would not include the "old parties", but would instead bring forth "a coalition formed of all the constructive elements of the country, elements taken as much from the right as from the left." The *relève* was to accomplish the task for which the Chamber had proven deficient, namely to prevent the country from "returning to the rut" from which the February 6 riots had shaken it (Déat quoted in Plumyène and Lasierra 1963: 88).⁸⁴

In the end, the veterans voted narrowly to maintain Rivollet as cabinet minister, thus saving the Doumergue government and disappointing the neo-socialists' aspirations. As Burrin has commented, "neither the combat veterans nor the CGT intended to let themselves be annexed by [Déat] and it was presumptuous to conclude a certain convergence of programs from an encounter of wills" (Burrin [1986] 2003: 159-160). However, this episode was not the only time the neo-socialists tried to link up with the elements of the right in 1934. As Déat recalled in his memoirs, between the 1933 schism and the advent of the Popular Front, there were "crossovers, encounters, multiple contacts made, an elaboration, a work of critical revision, that events in 1936 cancelled in appearance" (Déat 1989: 320).⁸⁵ One such encounter was the Plan du 9 Juillet [July 9 Plan], an initiative for state and economic reform designed to appeal across partisan

⁸³ Marcel Déat "L'échéance de juillet" *L'Œuvre* May 24 1934; Marcel Déat "La caravane passera" *Paris-Demain* June 2 1934.

⁸⁴ The quote is from an interview with Déat in the June 13 1934 issue of *1934*.

⁸⁵ Déat added that nothing of these efforts was "really lost," suggesting that the neo-socialists' subsequent integration into the Popular Front represented a kind of suspension of their true selves more than it did a turn (Déat 1989: 320). This is questionable, and is an example of the retrospective imposition of cohesion and consistency that is typical of memoirs, especially Déat's.

divides.⁸⁶ Besides the neo-socialists Vallon, Georges Roditi, and Paul Marion, participants included a heterogeneous mix of syndicalists, Socialists, and Radicals, as well as members of the social-Catholic Jeune République, the non-conformist Ordre Nouveau, the right-populist Parti Agraire et Paysan Français, the nationalist Croix-de-Feu, and the fascist Jeunesses Patriotes.⁸⁷ Although the plan did not engage the PSdF officially, Déat publicly supported it in his articles and speeches. The plan itself amounted to a vague technocratic corporatism and its appeal to "the idea of service" and the "restoration of hierarchy" lent it a distinctly conservative tone (Groupe du 9 Juillet 1934). As such, it was roundly condemned by the left—both for its equivocal content and for its suspicious roster of contributors (Jackson 1985, Lefranc 1974).

The neo-socialists' dubious associations with the right continued with a short-lived campaign to convene a constitutional convention. Following the February 6 events, pressure for constitutional revision grew from different quarters of the political arena. Once again, the neo-socialists tried to get ahead of the curve and place themselves at the head of what they saw as an ineluctable movement, leading them to make common cause with former adversaries. Thus at public meetings campaigning for a constitutional convention, Déat, Montagnon, and Marion shared the stage variously with Jean Hennessy (cognac tycoon and founder of the proto-fascist Parti Social-National), Robert Cornilleau (leader of the conservative social-Catholic Parti Démocrate Populaire), André Grisoni (conservative deputy-mayor of Courbevoie), Georges Scapini (far-right nationalist Paris deputy), and the right-wing writer, Jacques Bardoux.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Though published only in September 1934, the plan was titled "July 9" to recognize its origins in the agitation for the July 8 ultimatum.

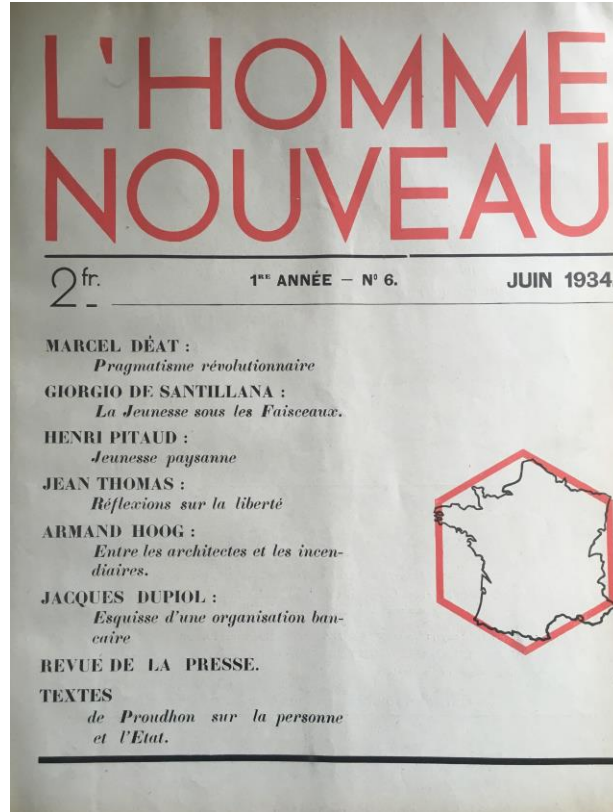
⁸⁷ Not all participants signed their name to the finished document. This was the case with Robert Marjolin, the lone Socialist participant, whose participation was short-lived. Dissatisfied with the plan, he left the group and refused to lend his name to the text (Jackson 1985: 155).

⁸⁸ "Un auditoire de 2000 personnes réclame à Courbevoie la convocation de la Constituante" *Paris-Demain* October 20 1934. "Rapport Moral Présenté par Marcel Déat au Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* January 12 1935.

The neo-socialists' efforts to effect a political reclassification found a particularly favorable reception within the non-conformist milieu that was similarly elaborating a "Third Way" between socialism and liberal capitalism. As the non-conformist writer Alfred Fabre-Luce said before joining the PSdF, "the hour of the neos" had sounded.⁸⁹ The convergence between a politically nebulous non-conformism and neo-socialism marked an especially ambivalent moment in the latter's history. This new ideological matrix found particular expression in the journal *L'Homme Nouveau*. Though not a PSdF publication, the journal came to be a kind of "ideological laboratory of the neos" where heterodox intellectuals from both left and right could be found side by side (Burrin [1986] 2003: 160). Next to neo-socialists "of the first hour" like Déat, Montagnon, Henry Hauck, Louis Deschizeaux and Louis Vallon, one could find the names of the famous technocrat Jean Coutrot, the author of *Socialisme fasciste* (1934) Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, the "personalist" Pierre Andreu, the Frontinst Georges Izard, and Claude Popelin of the *Volontaires Nationaux* [an auxiliary of the *Croix-de-Feu*]. The journal also displayed a fascination with developments in Italy and Germany, and reproduced articles by Nazi sociologist Gerhard Mackenroth and "left-wing" Italian fascist Ugo Spirito among other doubtful sources.

⁸⁹ "Retentissement de notre message au pays" *Paris-Demain* March 10 1934. Like many non-conformists, Fabre-Luce exhibited sympathy for fascism, and joined the fascist Parti Populaire Français in 1936. On Fabre-Luce, see Burrin ([1986] 2003: 89-93), Fabre-Luce (1962).

Illustration 15. *L'Homme Nouveau*



The editorial line of *L'Homme Nouveau* was a kind of synthetic *fascisant* neo-socialism. This tendency was most clearly represented by Georges Roditi, the director of the journal, and Paul Marion, who sat on its editorial committee. Both Roditi and Marion were members of the PSdF, but neither were in the neo-socialist mainstream. More so than Déat, Roditi and Marion plainly exhibited the "subterranean fascination" with fascism described by Burrin ([1986] 2003). For example, they helped to organize a May 1935 congress in Rome at the Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista [National Institute of Fascist Culture] whose purpose was to acquaint French dissident intellectuals with fascist corporatism (Sternhell [1983] 1986). Marion also participated in the Travail et Nation [Work and Nation] group with Yves Paringaux and Pierre Pucheu of the Croix-de-Feu, with whom he ended up joining the fascist Parti Populaire Français (PPF) in 1936.

In their writings, Roditi and Marion betrayed an obvious sympathy with fascism abroad and the nationalist right at home. Neither showed any hesitation in citing fascist or reactionary sources, nor did they shy away from lauding the accomplishments of fascist regimes. Thus Roditi wrote that France had to leave behind its "obsessive fear of the word 'fascism'" and heed the lessons of countries—even Germany and Italy—that had installed intermediary regimes.⁹⁰ According to Marion, the common appeal of "Sovietism, Fascism, Hitlerism, and Rooseveltism" to French youth spoke to the converging aspirations of the extreme left and right, though he added that the *Volontaires Nationaux* were closer to the coming revolution than were Cachin [a Communist] and Blum.⁹¹ Claiming the legacy of such eclectic figures as Vauvenargues, Chateaubriand, Napoleon, Guizot, Lacordaire, Bergson, Proudhon, Péguy, Jaurès, Sorel, and de Man, Roditi envisioned an austere socialism combining "an economic and social politics of the extreme left and a traditionalist moral and intellectual universe."⁹² He extolled the virtues of a "military spirit" and the "spirit of social discipline" suited to an organized economy, arguing that this "new morality" would become the "basis of a neo-socialist education." It was necessary, he continued, to fight against "the mentality of the conscientious objector, against the spirit of revolt and demands, that one finds so often with militants of the left and extreme left."⁹³ The problem with Marxist socialism was its lack of "hierarchical feeling" and its conflict with "the national instinct of the people." Neo-socialism, on the other hand, was "patriotic without shame, without remorse, without reticence." The nation was more than just an economic entity; the *patrie* was "a reality of the heart and spirit" to which all owed a duty.⁹⁴ In short, the version of neo-socialism espoused by Roditi in *L'Homme Nouveau* had unmistakable authoritarian, hierarchical, and

⁹⁰ Georges Roditi "Fascisme et 'régime intermédiaire'" *L'Homme Nouveau* September 1934.

⁹¹ Paul Marion "Devoirs des Jeunesses Politiques" *L'Homme Nouveau* September 1934.

⁹² Georges Roditi "Sur un seul tableau" *L'Homme Nouveau* June 1935.

⁹³ Georges Roditi "Quelques vérités solaires" *L'Homme Nouveau* October 1934.

⁹⁴ Georges Roditi "Du néo-marxisme au néo-socialisme" *L'Homme Nouveau* March 1935.

nationalist accents. Its frame of reference, moreover, was dominated by the fascist experience, and its sensibilities tilted noticeably more toward the revolutionary right than to the left.

Although Roditi and Marion were outliers among the neo-socialists, Déat and others lent their pens to *L'Homme Nouveau* and came to assume something of its spirit. Indeed, there was a distinct modulation within neo-socialist discourse that tracked the neo-socialists' shifting political company. There was, for example, a new indulgence toward fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The neo-socialists still did not wish to emulate fascist regimes, but only because fascism supposedly did not accord with French political culture. The implication, of course, was that Italy and Germany had the regimes appropriate to their national spirit.⁹⁵ Whereas before neo-socialism was conceived as a hegemonic project of the left, there was now a subtle shift wherein neo-socialism was rendered as the specifically French manifestation of a historical trend toward intermediary regimes that included Fascism and Nazism. The relationship between neo-socialism and fascism thus became ambiguous: on the one hand, the neo-socialists could claim to oppose fascism at home, but on the other hand, at the international level neo-socialism and fascism were represented as analogous—not antagonistic—phenomena, with the former drawing on the mystique of the latter.

As the neo-socialists began looking rightward for allies, they increasingly spoke the language of the right. Thus Déat lauded European youths' "aspiration toward discipline, service, intelligent obedience, competence, effective order." Fascism delivered on these aspirations abroad, and it was neo-socialism's mission to satisfy, in a way appropriate to the French character, the same generational desire for something "austere, severe, but fervent and quasi-religious."⁹⁶ Echoing themes typical of the anti-parliamentary right, calls for "competence,"

⁹⁵ Marcel Déat "Jeunesses d'Europe" *L'Homme Nouveau* December 1 1934.

⁹⁶ Marcel Déat "Jeunesses d'Europe" *L'Homme Nouveau* December 1 1934.

"discipline," and "sacrifice" became commonplace within neo-socialist discourse. This time, however, the point was not to appropriate this language for the left, but to lay the basis for a conjunction with the revolutionary right.

The articulation of a right-wing lexicon to neo-socialist discourse inflected the political valence of the latter more than it re-signified the former. This can be seen in how the terms "order," "authority," and "nation" were redeployed. For example, at the May 1934 congress of the PSdF, Max Bonnafous equated "order" with the "notion of social sacrifice," while Montagnon spoke not just of "authority," but of the need for an "authoritarian government."⁹⁷ To "Order, Authority, Nation," the neo-socialists now also frequently added "Morality." Following the lead of the anti-parliamentary right, they began blaming the crisis not just on the failure of liberal capitalism, but also on the moral decadence of French society. Hitler's success, wrote one neo-socialist, could be attributed to the contrast between the SPD's "immorality" and Nazism's austere morality. Too long had socialism been complicit in the "slackening of morals," weakened by "aesthetes," the "jaded," "skeptics," a "certain form of feminism," a "cowardly internationalism," and a "certain antimilitarism." The PSdF, to the contrary, was "the Party of morality."⁹⁸ The definition of "morality" adopted here by the neo-socialists was not a creative appropriation, but was taken virtually unchanged from reactionary discourse.

The meaning of "Nation" also shifted. It no longer referred simply to a contingent retreat within a "national framework." The "Nation" was increasingly exalted as a value in itself, and the neo-socialists began speaking of a "national revolution." Class struggle was definitively condemned; instead, the "general interest" and "national salvation" were hailed as the

⁹⁷ "Le rapport moral et la situation politique" *La Vie Socialiste* June 2 1934.

⁹⁸ A.A. Blanc "Soyons le Parti de la moralité" *La Vie Socialiste* March 17 1934.

revolutionary ideas *par excellence*.⁹⁹ To a certain extent this was less a clean break in language than a shift in emphasis. But this shift did indicate a changing conception of the "Nation" and its place within the neo-socialists' political vision. Thus its previous character as an element of socialist hegemony tended to fade away. The *chain of equivalence* interpellated by the "Nation" was expanded beyond the "anticapitalist" coalition described in *Perspectives socialistes* to include veterans, youth, small industrialists, and all "vital forces" of the nation. A deficient political class and a parasitic finance capital replaced the reactionary right and capitalism as such as the chief antagonist defined by the *logic of difference*.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, more and more the working class was displaced as the node of this chain by the middle classes, who together with the veterans were said to best incarnate the national spirit. When neo-socialists called for the nation to "reconcile with itself," now it was so that it could "rediscover its calm, its equilibrium" by forgetting "old formulas" and exploding the "old framework of parties."¹⁰¹ The neo-socialists' promise to establish a "new equilibrium" lay at the basis of their newfound embrace of corporatism—a doctrine calling for the regulation of national economic and political life through the organization of industrial and professional interest groups within a collaborative framework.¹⁰² Corporatism was closely associated with the Catholic right and Italian Fascism, and as such its embrace by the neo-socialists raised suspicions on the left.¹⁰³ The neo-socialists protested that their corporatism, by retaining free unions, was democratic and not fascist, but like

⁹⁹ Marcel Déat "Inventaire de nos ennemis" *Paris-Demain* April 28 1934. Marcel Déat "Marxisme et néo-socialisme" *L'Homme Nouveau* September 1 1934.

¹⁰⁰ Bastow (2000) makes a similar argument, but in not distinguishing between the neo-socialism of 1933 and 1934 his periodization differs from mine.

¹⁰¹ "Un cycle de conférences dans l'Indre: Deschizeaux, Montagnon, Déat" *La Vie Socialiste* April 21 1934.

¹⁰² Marcel Déat "Epreuve de la démocratie" *La Vie Socialiste* March 10 1934. Philippe Schmitter provides a fuller definition of corporatism: "a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports" (Schmitter 1974: 93)

¹⁰³ On the history of corporatist theory in France, see Elbow (1953).

all corporatism it remained premised on a hierarchical conception of society as an organic body.¹⁰⁴ Within the neo-socialist discourse of 1934, then, an organicist vision of the "Nation" in which various social forces were held in equilibrium and subordinated to the general interest came to appear as an end in itself.

Neo-Socialism and Fascism in 1934

One might wonder if the shifts to neo-socialism in 1934 were really all that significant, given that there still existed some discursive continuity. But there does not need to have been a wholesale "conversion" for there to have been a meaningful change in neo-socialist discourse. Contemporaries registered just such a shift, and in fact there was much consternation within some quarters of the PSdF over the new direction the party took. The flirtations with anti-parliamentary agitation, the dubious company of the Groupe du 9 Juillet, and the joint public meetings with right-wing nationalist personalities all provoked vigorous protestations at party meetings, as did Marquet's sensational entrance at the second PSdF congress when he and the rest of the Gironde Federation came dressed in grey uniforms.¹⁰⁵ Louis Perceau, for example, condemned the "equivocal gathering" [*rassemblement équivoque*] that had become the party's strategy.¹⁰⁶ Paul Perrin—ironically, a future RNP cadre—accused the party of remaining "confused" and "nebulous" in its identity, and particularly objected to the PSdF's associations with right-wing veterans' organizations like the UNC who participated in the reactionary actions of February 6.¹⁰⁷ Jean Texcier excoriated the party leadership for having shunned a left-wing

¹⁰⁴ "Les 'Néos' ne sont pas des fascistes" *Paris-Demain* September 1 1934.

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Renaudel "Mon sentiment vrai, profond" *La Vie Socialiste* May 26 1934. "Conseil central du Parti Socialiste du France" *La Vie Socialiste* October 27 1934. "Rapport Moral présenté par Marcel Déat au Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* January 12 1935. "Congrès National de Montrouge" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

¹⁰⁶ "Congrès National de Montrouge" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

¹⁰⁷ "Ce que furent les deux journées de notre IIe Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* June 2 1934.

coalition and for instead suggesting that the party's *raison d'être* was to draw "those who, currently, march behind the large reactionary associations."¹⁰⁸

The increasingly ambivalent statements by some neo-socialists also came under fire. Thus Montagnon was harshly criticized by several party members for having said in parliament that there was "in the Hitlerian movement something curious and profound," and for a general indulgence toward Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁹ Marquet's view that the PSdF should appear as an "anti-Blumist, anti-Marxist bastion" caused just as much dismay, particularly among older parliamentarians like Renaudel and Paul Ramadier.¹¹⁰ As early as February, Ramadier criticized Déat for his sudden hostility toward the Republic's parliamentary institutions and for his recommendation that they "kill the past".¹¹¹ Déat's overtures to Catholic groups and his consequent abandonment of anti-clericalism—long a pillar of left politics—also triggered a polemic with Perceau, who wondered aloud if Déat's new attitude after February 6 did not represent a "rupture with democracy" and accused him of betraying republican values.¹¹² Texcier bemoaned the fact that certain neo-socialists now acted as if their past in the SFIO were a lie, and expressed his opposition to "certain *neo* revelations" that only blossomed, he remarked, after the constitution of the PSdF. He complained further that the party was constantly having to clarify its attitude to "dissipate misunderstandings." Indeed, misgivings about the slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" became more common as its anchoring within a clearly socialist discursive terrain

¹⁰⁸ Jean Texcier "Pas d'équivoque" *La Vie Socialiste* March 17 1934.

¹⁰⁹ "Congrès fédéraux: Région parisienne" *La Vie Socialiste* January 26 1935. "Congrès national de Montrouge" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

¹¹⁰ "Le Congrès Néo-socialiste s'est clos sur des votes d'unanimité" *L'Œuvre* May 22 1934. Pierre Renaudel "Mon sentiment vrai, profond" *La Vie Socialiste* May 26 1934. "Le Conseil Central du Parti Socialiste de France" *La Vie Socialiste* July 14 1934.

¹¹¹ "Le IIème Conseil Central du Parti Socialiste de France: Dimanche 25 février 1934" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

¹¹² "Ce que furent les deux journées de notre IIe Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* June 2 1934. See Déat's reaction to Perceau's accusations in Marcel Déat "Ma 'trahison républicaine'" *Paris-Demain* November 10 1934.

became more tenuous.¹¹³ Thus a malaise gripped the PSdF in 1934 as those who remained committed to a democratic and republican socialism balked at the equivocations that came to characterize neo-socialism following February 6.¹¹⁴ That this turn in neo-socialist practice and discourse was recognized as such and became an object of contention within the PSdF suggests that it was not simply an expression of tendencies inherent to neo-socialism from the very beginning, but in fact represented a meaningful transformation.

The neo-socialism of 1934 was different from that of 1933. From a democratic and republican socialism with a parliamentary vocation, it recast itself as a movement of national renewal with anti-democratic and anti-parliamentary overtones whose frame of political reference extended to the nationalist right. Neo-socialism's reinvention as a national movement transcending left-right divisions might suggest a barely concealed fascism, an interpretation that is all the more tempting given some neo-socialists' subsequent political careers. But was the neo-socialism of 1934 already fascist? Such a claim remains dubious. Despite neo-socialism's equivocal tendencies in this period, the neo-socialists still insisted—albeit more and more defensively—on their opposition to fascism and their commitment to democratic freedoms. The indulgence shown toward Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was offset by the many more positive references to Roosevelt's New Deal. And the hand extended to the nationalist right did not prevent the neo-socialists from maintaining that their movement was "national without being nationalist."¹¹⁵ As Burrin argues in the case of Déat, there was a "tense cohabitation of

¹¹³ Jean Texcier "Pas d'équivoque" *La Vie Socialiste* March 17 1934.

¹¹⁴ Déat himself recognized the malaise in the party and worked to assuage the fears of those within the PSdF who were critical of the new line. According the Déat, the malaise was especially intense between May and July, which coincided with the campaign around the veterans' July 8 ultimatum. "Rapport Moral présenté par Marcel Déat au Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* January 12 1935.

¹¹⁵ Parti Socialiste de France "Message au pays" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934.

potentially fascist traits" and the "classic baggage of the left".¹¹⁶ He had clearly ceased being a classic democrat, but neither was he yet unambiguously a fascist (Burrin [1986] 2003: 174). More generally, neo-socialism's defining trait after February 6 was precisely its equivocal and ambivalent orientation. Contra the continuity thesis, then, the neo-socialism of 1934 was a distinct phenomenon—both from its socialist origin and from its fascist future.

But what explains this turn in neo-socialist practice and discourse? In a move that betrays the "intellectualist/idealist bias" at the heart of his account, Burrin attributes neo-socialism's equivocations to vague notions of a "fascist contagion" and a "secret fascination" for fascism (Burrin [1986] 2003: 174). The implication is that the neo-socialists' changing position-takings only reflected their gradual exposure to—and "impregnation" by—fascist ideas.¹¹⁷ Burrin thus inscribes the neo-socialism of 1934 within a linear process of fascist seduction—which presumably culminated in the RNP.¹¹⁸ In fact, the equivocal turn in neo-socialist practice and discourse did not simply express a nebulous intellectual mood—whether a *fascisant* "spirit of the 1930s" or the search for an amorphous "third way"—but rather followed a different logic.

The neo-socialism of 1934 represented a practical adaptation to a new political conjuncture. In embracing certain doubtful formulas, the neo-socialists were not passive vectors of fascist influence, but were rather staking a novel position for themselves within a transformed political field. After February 6, the neo-socialists' "context of action" was characterized by the leftward lurch of the SFIO as it made a pact with the Communists, the integration of the Radicals

¹¹⁶ Burrin argues that neo-socialism still lacked the "essential traits of fascist ideology": hypernationalism, militarism, a leadership cult, and the valorization of authority, hierarchy, force, power, and expansion (Burrin [1986] 2003: 173). One could take issue with the specifics of Burrin's argument, but the larger problem here is that by comparing the neo-socialism of 1934 to an essentialized fascism, he remains within the framework of the "classificatory logic" criticized by Dobry.

¹¹⁷ The notion of a fascist "impregnation" of French politics in the 1930s comes from Raoul Girardet (1955).

¹¹⁸ If at first this influence was only partial, eventually it became preponderant and crossed a threshold beyond which it was appropriate to call the neo-socialists fascists—or so Burrin implies with his essentialist definition of fascism.

into the Doumergue government, and the emergence of widespread anti-parliamentary agitation. With political polarization undermining the strategic supports for their earlier ambitions, the neo-socialists were forced to look for new grounding in their bid for political relevance. Hence they reinvented themselves in such a way as to exploit their marginal and independent status, presenting a new image of neo-socialism as the political expression of a trans-partisan movement outside and against a deficient regime. This inflection in neo-socialism's political identity was not entailed by any inherent feature of neo-socialist discourse, but was instead mediated by the neo-socialists' attempts to practically situate themselves within the relational structure of a political field profoundly altered by the events of February 6. By redefining the space of possible positions and redrawing the lines of possible alliances, the new "context of action" distanced the neo-socialists from their immediate political neighbors and brought them into contact with heterogeneous political actors—including various non-conformists and elements of the right. This in turn transformed the "argumentative context" within which the neo-socialists intervened, such that neo-socialist discourse came to take on the discursive features of its new interlocutors as it sought to conjure a new political subject encompassing them. The equivocal period of neo-socialism is thus better understood as a function of its ambivalent position in a transformed political field than as the manifestation of a progressive ideational "contagion." The 1934 version of neo-socialism was thus a practical innovation, situationally constituted in and through a specific relational context. But as this context changed again, so too would neo-socialism.

Chapter 4.

The Popular Front and the Decomposition of Neo-Socialism

The notion that the neo-socialism of 1934 foreshadowed the RNP—either because it was already fascist, or because it evinced a fascist "contagion"—is complicated by the fact that the neo-socialists were constitutive members of the Popular Front coalition, whose political identity was founded on anti-fascism. The formation of the Popular Front, which expanded the Communist-Socialist alliance to include the Radicals, completely reconfigured the political field. The strategic alignment of the three largest forces on the left under a common banner effectively monopolized the discursive space of the left and further polarized the political field between left and right. Under these conditions, and because their previous strategy had failed, the neo-socialists had little choice but to integrate into the Popular Front. Doing so, however, had several consequences for neo-socialism. First, after a period of equivocation and radicalization, it significantly moderated its tone and reaffirmed its democratic commitment as its parliamentary prospects brightened and as it became re-anchored on the political left. But while this new turn characterized neo-socialist discourse following the fall of the Doumergue government in November 1934 and during the initial phases of the Popular Front movement in 1935, by the

time of the Popular Front's dramatic electoral victory and the formation of the Léon Blum government in June 1936 the balance of forces within the coalition was such that the neo-socialists became marginalized and increasingly dispossessed of a distinct political identity. Thus the Popular Front inaugurated a period of decomposition for neo-socialism, with prominent neo-socialists defecting from the party and the term itself eventually abandoned by the faithful. There was thus no straight line between the neo-socialism of 1934 and the fascism of the RNP.

The New Political Conjuncture

a. The Fall of Doumergue's "Government of Truce"

The PSdF largely failed in its bid for relevance in the post-February 6 conjuncture. Its attempts to bring together the veterans' movement and the labor movement went nowhere, the mutual suspicion between the two proving too much to overcome. Hoping to ride the tide of discontent to power, the PSdF invested its political ambitions in the veterans' July 8 ultimatum to the Doumergue government. But despite their best efforts to incite a ministerial crisis, the neo-socialists' hopes were dashed when the Confédération voted by a narrow margin to maintain its representative in the government, thus saving Doumergue. Likewise the neo-socialists' other schemes also fizzled out. This was true of their campaign for constitutional revision and the Plan du 9 Juillet—despite the sensation caused by the latter in the press.

The PSdF itself suffered from internal dissension and persistent organizational weakness. As mentioned earlier, there were general misgivings over the neo-socialists' new attitude following February 6.¹¹⁹ But the most persistent grievance within the PSdF had to do with

¹¹⁹ Many accounts, including Déat's own, attribute this to a congenital split within the PSdF between reformist parliamentarians like Renaudel and true neo-socialists like Déat, Montagnon, and Marquet. There is good reason to believe, however, that such an interpretation gives too much retrospective coherence to the divisions within the party. In fact, disagreement tended to arise over specific points, and there were constant performances of unity. Still, fault

Adrien Marquet's presence in Doumergue's "government of truce." Marquet entered the government as Minister of Labor, but he did so on a personal basis and without prior approval from the party, which was largely hostile to a government seen to be reactionary. Marquet—who was effectively placed on sabbatical from the party—would eventually be forced to leave the PSdF in October 1934, and he formed his own party shortly thereafter. But for months his continued presence in the government put the neo-socialists in an awkward position, seriously undermining their claims to represent a rupture with the political status quo in general, and the Doumergue government in particular.¹²⁰ Despite Déat's many efforts to square the circle of Marquet's ministerial participation, the issue remained an embarrassment for the party and blunted the impact of its anti-parliamentary propaganda.¹²¹ The PSdF thus struggled to present a coherent face, and its equivocations seem not to have done much for its popularity. Indeed, party discussions in 1934 reference difficulties in recruitment and newspaper sales, and attest to a general lack of enthusiasm among the membership.¹²² For a party that claimed to be more of a movement, it never developed a mass base and its activity was largely limited to parliament.

The final nail in the coffin for neo-socialism's anti-parliamentary posture, however, was a change in the political conjuncture itself. The climate of political emergency that was cast by the February 6 riots gradually subsided, and with it so too did the usefulness of the Doumergue government. The continued pursuit of ineffective deflationary measures and the aggravation of

lines did develop over the course of 1934. The point is simply that these were emergent, and not simply the expression of a prior split between reformists and neo-socialists.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Jean Texcier "Par d'équivoque!" *La Vie Socialiste* March 17 1934.

¹²¹ When Marquet initially entered the government, Déat brokered a compromise within the PSdF whereby Marquet's presence in the government would be tolerated so long as it was understood that it did not engage the party in supporting the government. Later, Déat sought to use Marquet's ministerial presence as a pawn in the agitation around the July 8 ultimatum, threatening Marquet's withdrawal from the government if the veterans also withdrew Rivollet.

¹²² Examples include the "action teams" and the "technical teams" that the PSdF set up in an attempt to innovate its party structure. The former were responsible for propaganda and security, while the latter were conceived as study groups charged with formulating policy planks. The idea, however, never really took off, and party leadership complained about the lack of participation in either. E.g. Henry Hauck "Rapport des Equipes d'action" May 5 1934.

the economic crisis harmed the government's credibility. But the issue that finally toppled the government was its pursuit of constitutional reform. The Radicals and others on the left objected to the government's measures and grew increasingly skittish about Doumergue, behind whom they saw the authoritarian hand of Tardieu. The final straw came when Doumergue requested temporary decree powers, which provoked the Radicals to withdraw from the government, leading to Doumergue's resignation on November 8.

The fall of Doumergue ushered in a brief period of relative political normalcy. The liberal Pierre-Etienne Flandin formed a new centrist "concentration" government that was widely regarded as a rebuke to Doumergue's authoritarian designs and a defense of parliamentary governance. The left welcomed the new government precisely because it represented an abatement of the anti-parliamentary pressures aroused on February 6 and signaled the definitive end of the push—by Doumergue and others—for constitutional revision. For this reason Flandin had the tacit—if not explicit—support of the Socialists. The governing majority once again extended to the Radicals on the left, but this time the government's axis ran through the center and the Radicals, after effectively being sidelined within the Doumergue government, regained their political footing. Whereas between February and July 1934 the Radicals "virtually withdrew from politics," they once again emerged as a key player in any possible governing majority (Larmour 1964: 153). The end of Doumergue's conservative "truce" government thus effected a political realignment toward the center and announced the return, however brief, of routine parliamentary politics.

The Flandin government nonetheless had difficulty pleasing both sides of the governing coalition. Having succeeded a conservative government and buried its major initiatives, Flandin was distrusted by the right. On the other hand, his failure to turn the economy around and his

reluctance to suppress the right-wing paramilitary leagues sapped his support on the left. The Radicals eventually grew disenchanted, and they once again felled the government when they denied Flandin's request for decree powers to address fiscal and monetary troubles. But after attempts at forming another centrist government failed, the Radicals fell into line behind Pierre Laval, who formed another center-right *Union nationale* government on June 7 1935. Ironically, parliament granted Laval the decree powers it had denied Flandin, and the government took advantage of its plenary powers to vigorously pursue a policy of deflation.¹²³ This rankled the left, who once again raised the specter of dictatorship. By mid-1935, however, an alternative dynamic had developed on the left that would eventually wrest the Radicals from the center and completely upend the political field.

b. The Popular Front

As noted earlier, the PCF-SFIO Unity Pact was conceived under the sign of revolutionary proletarian unity. Nonetheless, this framework was quickly rendered obsolete. The fear of fascism lay behind the Unity Pact, but this fear also led Socialists to relax their traditional opposition to ministerial participation under a Radical government. To many Socialists, the February 6 riots and their aftermath qualified as "exceptional circumstances" and as such authorized participation. Thus Blum suggested to Daladier on the morning of the 7th that he could count on Socialist ministerial participation if he did not capitulate to the rioters (Colton 1966: 96). Likewise, the SFIO leadership again signaled its openness to ministerial participation in a Radical government following the fall of Doumergue in November 1934, and did so once

¹²³ The best discussion of French economic policy in this period is Jackson (1985).

more when Flandin fell in June 1935.¹²⁴ Each time the Radicals went in the other direction, and the Socialists remained in the opposition throughout the Doumergue, Flandin, and Laval governments. Still, the SFIO had now effectively revised its longstanding hostility to ministerial participation—the primary issue over which the neo-socialists had been expelled. As if to doctrinally validate this attitude, Blum now wrote of the "occupation of power," which—unlike his previous formulations of the "conquest" and "exercise" of power—did not engage the SFIO to prepare a socialist transformation, but instead justified a purely defensive and preventive presence in government in order to preclude a fascist coup.¹²⁵

More sensational, however, was the PCF's dizzying tactical turn. The PCF had abandoned its sectarian "class against class" line for the sake of proletarian unity. But within just a couple months of signing the Unity Pact with the SFIO, the Communists stunned everyone by calling for the proletarian alliance to be further widened to include the middle classes in an anti-fascist front. To this end, the Communists launched the idea of a "Popular Front against fascism" in October 1934.¹²⁶ The "Popular Front" went beyond the "United Front" with the Socialists in that it was not limited to the proletariat, but was explicitly pitched to the broader republican masses. Politically, this translated into a direct appeal to the Radicals to abandon the center-right governing majority and to join in the Popular Front. Moreover, the PCF did not demand that Radicals rally to Communist positions, but instead expressed their intent to back the Radicals'

¹²⁴ "Une motion du Groupe parlementaire et une résolution de la C.A.P." *Le Populaire* November 8 1934. Après toute une journée de consultations M. Pierre Laval, chargé de constituer le cabinet, a renoncé à cette tâche." *Le Populaire* June 6 1935.

¹²⁵ Léon Blum "Le problème du pouvoir et le fascisme" *Le Populaire* July 1 1935. Léon Blum "Conquête, exercice et occupation du pouvoir" *Le Populaire* July 2 1935. Léon Blum "Occupation du pouvoir et Front populaire" *Le Populaire* July 4 1935.

¹²⁶ See Marcel Cachin's articles in *L'Humanité*: "Front Populaire contre le Fascisme" *L'Humanité* October 22 1934, "Élargir le Front Populaire" *L'Humanité* October 24 1934, "Trente mille travailleurs acclament le Front Populaire anti-fasciste" *L'Humanité* October 25 1934, "Nous comptons déjà dans le Front Populaire de nombreux antifascistes venus des classes moyennes" *L'Humanité* October 26 1934.

republican agenda.¹²⁷ In yet another stunning departure from Communist tradition, the PCF even communicated its willingness to support—and perhaps even participate in—a Radical government.¹²⁸

The initial impulsion behind the Popular Front thus came from the Communists. Through the end of 1934 and into 1935, the PCF insistently promoted the notion of a vast anti-fascist movement defending democracy that would encompass the Communists, Socialists, and Radicals and thereby effectively unify the left. This represented a complete turnaround from the PCF's history of self-imposed isolation. The fact that this initiative for unity came from the Communists made it all the more astonishing. The Popular Front mystique found a wide echo within left circles and provoked an upsurge of grassroots enthusiasm. Although reticent at first, the SFIO could not refuse the Communists' initiative and eventually warmed up to the Popular Front formula.¹²⁹ Support also grew among Radicals, who—despite their presence in it—lacked enthusiasm for the Laval government. The Radicals were naturally wary of the Communists, but there was enough interest on the left wing of the party that, combined with the Radicals' floundering fortunes since they deserted the 1932 electoral majority in 1934, the party was willing to take a leap into the unknown. A major obstacle to unity for the Radicals was lifted when, following the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact in May 1935, the PCF accepted the

¹²⁷ For example, the Communists reassured the Radicals that they "never thought for a single moment of pressuring the Radicals to adopt...[the Communist] program in order to fight jointly with us" (quoted in Larmour 1964: 172).

¹²⁸ On the occasion of the fall of the Flandin government in 1935, the PCF expressed its willingness to support, but not participate in, a Radical government if the latter pledged to truly apply a Radical program. Later, a conflict developed between the national leadership of the PCF and the Comintern, with the former favorable increasingly favorable to participation but the latter firmly against (Wolikow 1998).

¹²⁹ The SFIO generally distrusted the PCF and its intentions, but in this case the Socialists' main reservation seems to have come from their preference to conclude an organic unity with the PCF before throwing themselves into an alliance with the Radicals. Ever since the 1934 Unity Pact, there had been fitful discussions about merging the two proletarian parties, but to no avail.

principle of national defense, thus freeing the Communists to vote for military credits—a precondition to supporting any government.¹³⁰

The Popular Front mystique created tremendous pressures toward left unity. Besides a rapprochement at the party-to-party level, talks were also underway to re-unify the labor movement which had split into separate Communist and non-Communist federations in 1922, and individual Communist, Socialist, and Radical militants began cooperating within various anti-fascist committees and civil society associations at the local and national levels. But it was July 14 1935 that cemented the passage from hypothesis to reality for the Popular Front. The idea for a demonstration of anti-fascist unity to be held on Bastille Day—a date charged with republican symbolism—came out of the Mouvement Amsterdam-Pleyel. The major organizations of the left signed on and constituted an organizing committee composed of representatives from the PCF, SFIO, Radicals, the neo-socialists, the two major labor federations, and a handful of other associations.¹³¹ Under the theme of "bread, peace, and liberty", the day's events began with a mass meeting at the Stade Buffalo where speakers from the different organizing groups shared the stage. Those present at the meeting publicly swore an oath to "remain united to defend democracy, to disarm and dissolve the factious leagues, to place our liberties beyond the reach of fascism," and to defend the "democratic freedoms won by the people of France, to secure bread for the workers, work for the young, and the peace of mankind for the world."¹³² The meeting was followed by a massive procession numbering as many as

¹³⁰ The reasons for the PCF's sudden tactical shift is a matter of debate. Some have argued that the PCF's tactical line was largely dictated by the Comintern, whose primary concern was the security of the Soviet Union. Thus in this view the PCF's newfound goodwill toward the Radicals was designed to cement the conditions for a military alliance between France and the Soviet Union as a counterweight to Nazi Germany (e.g. Guérin 1963). Others, however, have argued that the PCF had a measure of autonomy in taking the initiative for the Popular Front, and that it was motivated largely by domestic concerns.

¹³¹ Montagnon represented the neo-socialists on the committee.

¹³² "Le serment" *Le Populaire* July 15 1935.

500,000 from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Nation, with Communists, Socialists, and Radicals marching together for the first time.

Illustration 16. Official tribune at the July 14 1935 Popular Front demonstration



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Front Left to Right: Léon Blum (SFIO), Yvon Delbos (Radical), Edouard Daladier (Radical), Maurice Thorez (PCF), Roger Salengro (SFIO), Charles Spinasse (SFIO), Maurice Viollette (USR), Pierre Cot (Radical).

The euphoria generated by this successful display of unity exceeded even that of February 12 a year earlier. Riding the wave of enthusiasm, the July 14 organizing committee unanimously decided to honor the oath it swore and continue working together. Thus was created the Comité National Pour le Rassemblement Populaire [National Committee for the Popular Rally], a coordinating committee which gave the Popular Front an official existence and which

was charged with drafting a common program for the April/May 1936 legislative elections. At a superficial level, the Popular Front was a classic electoral cartel—albeit wider in span—in which the member parties agreed to desist for whichever candidate of the left was best placed to win. In fact, the Popular Front was as much a mass movement as it was a parliamentary coalition. The committee counted 98 member organizations, most of which were not political parties but rather labor unions and other civil society associations (Lefranc 1965: 445-447). In addition to a Popular Front of politicians, there was therefore also a "Popular Front of combat" based in the streets and on the shop floor (Guérin 1963). Furthermore, the new mode of mass politics embodied by the Popular Front was galvanized by the elaboration of a new cultural imaginary synthesizing different left traditions. The "mystique of unity"—as Julian Jackson has called it—reverberated across the left and forged a common ethos transcending partisan attachments (Jackson 1988). In short, the dynamic of the Popular Front—as coalition, movement, and myth—effectively monopolized the political, social, and symbolic space of the left. Once the dynamic was set in motion, practically the entire political left was drawn into its logic. From 1935 to about 1938, to be on the left was to be in—and of—the Popular Front.

The date and location of the Popular Front's inaugural demonstration was meant to inscribe the new formation within France's national and republican heritage. Indeed, demonstrators waved the French *tricolore* next to the red flag, and they sang both the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*. The republican symbolism was natural for the Radicals, but it represented a significant departure for the Socialists and the Communists, for whom national and patriotic references had previously been anathema. Yet it was precisely this articulation of the republican and socialist traditions that became the master identity of the Popular Front, an identity that both the Communists and Socialists faithfully assumed. Thus in contrast to the past

in which Communists heaped scorn on the Republic, Jacques Duclos announced at the Stade Buffalo that the Communists saw "in the *tricolore* flag the symbol of past struggles and in our red flag the symbol of future struggles and victories," and he reminded the audience that if Communists now sang both the *Internationale* and the *Marseillaise*, it was because they did not forget that the latter was also a "revolutionary chant."¹³³ Likewise the Socialists claimed that the Popular Front descended "in a straight line from the French Revolution," and that its purpose was to realize the alliance of "the French Revolution and the social revolution."¹³⁴ According to Léon Blum, the Popular Front embodied "the two great cries of history: "Long live the Nation! and Long live the Revolution!"¹³⁵

Illustration 17. The *Tricolore* at the head of the July 14 1935 Popular Front demonstration



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

¹³³ "Le discours de Jacques Duclos à Buffalo" *L'Humanité* July 15 1935.

¹³⁴ Amédée Dunois "L'immortelle journée du 14 juillet 1789" *Le Populaire* July 7 1935.

¹³⁵ Léon Blum "La vraie France" *Le Populaire* July 13 1935.

The Popular Front coalesced around a vision of anti-fascism that was republican in character and national in content. It was an appropriation of the Jacobin tradition, and as such articulated a popular-democratic discourse that downplayed the Marxist language of class struggle in favor of a populist discourse upholding the sovereignty of the people against financial and political oligarchy.¹³⁶ This language was the natural province of Radicalism and neo-socialism, but a surprising feature of the Popular Front was that it was in fact the Communists who took it up most zealously and who became the principal bearers of the Popular Front mystique.

The PCF outflanked the SFIO to its right to become the center of gravity of the Popular Front. Thus during initial discussions at the end of 1934 to draft a common program with the Socialists, it was the Communists who insisted on omitting any mention of the conquest of power or the overthrow of capitalism, in the hopes of attracting the widest range of allies in the fight against fascism. Likewise when a Popular Front program was finally agreed upon in early 1936, the Communists, for fear of alienating the middle classes, sided with the Radicals in favoring redistributive reforms over the structural reforms (i.e. nationalizations) preferred by the Socialists and the CGT.¹³⁷ The final program—whose main thrust included the defense of democratic liberties, the dissolution of paramilitary leagues, the protection of workers' wages and rights, economic relief, and a call for disarmament and peace—was based largely on Communist proposals, which were themselves designed to be palatable to the Radicals (Lefranc 1965:90-98, 441-445).¹³⁸ Indeed, the Communists positioned themselves closer to the Radicals than to the Socialists with whom they ostensibly shared a doctrine. Thus in a remarkable turnabout from the

¹³⁶ For the ways in which the Popular Front constructed "the people," see Wardhaugh (2009).

¹³⁷ On this point, the neo-socialists sided with the SFIO.

¹³⁸ The only concessions to the "structural reforms" advanced by the Socialists were the nationalization of the armaments industry, a revision of the Banque de France's statutes, and the creation of a grain board.

abusive rhetoric of the past, they now sang the praises of the Radicals, whom they saluted as "the great republican party whose roots are in the very body of the great French Revolution and in the purest Jacobin traditions of [France]," and as "the party which, in the past, has always been the most ardent defender of republican liberties" (quoted in Larmour 1964: 172-173).

However, the PCF did not simply range itself behind the Radicals. Although the republican and democratic populism of Popular Front discourse was traditionally closer to Radicalism and even the Jaurèssian strain of French socialism, it was in fact the Communists who emerged as its most ardent spokesmen. For example, in a lexicometric analysis of Communist discourse, Denis Peschanski shows that between January 1934 and Spring 1935, there was a shift from a language of class and combat to a populist, institutional, and humanist vocabulary. Thus references to "class," the "proletariat," "struggle," and "revolution" gave way to invocations of "the people," "liberty," "France," and "men" (Peschanski 1988). Moreover, the Communists' chief antagonist was no longer defined as the bourgeoisie as such, but rather as the "200 families" and more generally, "the rich."¹³⁹ In total contradiction to its previous "class against class" line, the PCF now presented itself as a national mass party leading a cross-class movement. For example, Thorez expressed the Communists' "heartfelt gratitude" toward the "anonymous mass of peasants, artisans, modern proletarians and the remarkable elite of scientists and artists, of thinkers and statesmen who made the wealth, power, and glory of our country."¹⁴⁰ The old insult of "social-patriotism" hurled at the Socialists was also abandoned as the Communists themselves increasingly spoke in a patriotic register. "We love our country," the PCF central committee now declared, "We are proud of the people of France's grand past"

¹³⁹ The "200 families" referred to the 200 largest shareholders of the Banque de France, and to many at the time represented the oligarchic power of finance capital. The PCF's slogan for the 1936 elections was, "make the rich pay."

¹⁴⁰ P.C.F. *VIIIe Congrès National du Parti Communiste Français (Lyon-Villeurbanne, 22-25 janvier 1936)*. *Compte-rendu sténographique*. Paris: Editions du Comité populaire de propagande, p. 121.

(Thorez 1952: 194).¹⁴¹ The manifesto published after the PCF's January 1936 congress called for "the unity of the French nation" to restore French grandeur and hailed the unified "French people" to fight for its own salvation under the banner of the Popular Front.¹⁴² The Communists increasingly wrapped themselves in the language of the "nation." No longer did they insist with Marx and Engels that "working men have no country" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1978: 488). "Order," too, was no longer beyond the pale for the Communists. The Popular Front, wrote Gabriel Péri, "is order, order in respect of workers' and democratic liberties, order that excludes the dictatorship of finance capital's armed bands."¹⁴³ Indeed, as Jessica Wardhaugh argues, the Popular Front was, in addition to being an anti-fascist movement, a broader movement "symptomatic of a deeper concern to counter the experience of instability with the reassuring image of a new order encompassing the entire people" (Wardhaugh 2009: 92). It was the Communists who most devotedly took up this mantle, and it was the Communists' popular-democratic discourse with republican and national accents that became the hegemonic discourse of the Popular Front.

Neo-Socialism Between Doumergue and the Popular Front

a. Neo-Socialism Back in the Parliamentary Fold

When Doumergue fell in November 1934 and the constitutional crisis opened by the February 6 riots passed, the neo-socialists followed suit and turned their attention to more prosaic concerns. Gone now were the intimations of insurrection and the indulgences to anti-

¹⁴¹This surprising profession of love by a party that had hitherto insisted with Marx that the "workers have no Fatherland" was first made in June 1934, before the SFIO-PCF Unity Pact was even finalized, suggesting that the Communists had always envisioned a broader coalition. Such declarations of devotion to the *patrie* and to France's patriotic history would increase manifold as the Popular Front coalition coalesced.

¹⁴² P.C.F. "Pour le salut du peuple français" *L'Humanité* January 28 1936.

¹⁴³ Gabriel Péri "Protégeons l'ordre du peuple" *L'Humanité* July 12 1935.

parliamentary sentiment. Instead, Déat and his fellow neo-socialists concentrated on the parliamentary scene, into whose routine they sought to re-integrate themselves. The neo-socialists were cautiously optimistic about the new Flandin government, whose abandonment of deflationary economic policies nourished hopes that Flandin might play the role of France's Roosevelt, saving democracy and building a directed economy.¹⁴⁴ Though these hopes ultimately proved misplaced, by the end of the Flandin government the neo-socialists pivoted away from their earlier fascination with street agitation and once again invested their ambitions in the Chamber. As Burrin remarks, after having "maintained the grandest hopes of national renovation, neo-socialism appeared to return to the most banal parliamentarism" (Burrin [1986] 2003: 172).

Gone too were the equivocations and flirtations with the right. The neo-socialists settled back into their position on the left as a "hinge party" between the Radicals and the Socialists (Burrin [1986] 2003: 173). Thus after months of ambiguity that divided the party internally, the February 1935 National Congress of the PSdF unanimously re-affirmed the party's opposition to fascism, its fidelity to Jaurèssian socialism, and its respect for democracy, leading Déat to proclaim that the party had "recovered its balance" and newspapers to quip that the "Renaudel tendency" triumphed over the "Marquet tendency."¹⁴⁵ The neo-socialists grew increasingly anxious to demonstrate their democratic socialist and anti-fascist *bona fides*, insisting for example that Déat was just as much of the left as Blum, and that if fascism ever came to France, the neo-socialists would in fact be the ones to suffer most!¹⁴⁶ This leftward turn meant that the neo-socialists' dubious associates of 1934 were now rejected as reactionaries, while the Socialists

¹⁴⁴ Marcel Déat "Que sera Flandin? Kérensky? Bruning? Roosevelt?" *Paris-Demain* November 24 1934. Marcel Déat "Un pas vers Roosevelt" *Paris-Demain* December 1 1934.

¹⁴⁵ "Les résolutions du Congrès" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935. Marcel Déat "Le Parti a retrouvé son équilibre" *La vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

¹⁴⁶ "Les coups convergent contre Déat" *Paris-Demain* April 6 1935.

and Radicals re-emerged as natural allies.¹⁴⁷ When the Flandin government was formed Déat suggested a new parliamentary majority including the right wing of the SFIO and two thirds of the Radicals.¹⁴⁸ By the time Flandin fell in May 1935, the neo-socialists were demanding the constitution of a Radical-led government "based on a large democratic majority" and possibly supported by the SFIO and PCF, both of which had recently relaxed their previously intransigent attitudes toward bourgeois governments.¹⁴⁹ Just as the idea of a Popular Front was taking off, then, the PSdF was busy re-establishing itself on the left as a potential partner to the Radicals, Socialists, and even Communists.

According to Burrin, Déat, "engaged in his parliamentary maneuvers, chastened in his expression," presented in the spring of 1935 the "unblemished image of a man of the moderate left" (Burrin [1986] 2003). Indeed, in the new conjuncture, neo-socialism put the accent back on the "social liberalism" of its origins (Brick 2006). This development was further reinforced when in November 1935 the PSdF merged with the reformist Parti Socialiste Français and Parti Républicain-Socialiste to form the Union Socialiste Républicaine (USR), with Déat as the new party's secretary-general and Joseph Paul-Boncour, the noted parliamentarian who preceded the neo-socialists in leaving the SFIO over its anti-participationist attitude, as president.¹⁵⁰ The merger was the consequence of the PSdF's failure to develop into anything more than a party of parliamentarians. From around 30,000 in late 1933, membership dropped to 12,000 in January 1935 (Burrin [1986] 2003). Despite its aspiration to become a mass party, its efforts to foster grassroots participation were failures, and it had persistent difficulties sustaining a viable press.

¹⁴⁷ On the condemnation of the Croix-de-Feu, see Claude Bonnier "M. Ybarnégary a défini le programme 'Croix de Feu' comme celui de la Réaction la plus traditionnelle" *La Vie Socialiste* December 14 1935.

¹⁴⁸ Marcel Déat "Que sera Flandin? Kérénsky? Bruning? Roosevelt?" *Paris-Demain* November 24 1934.

¹⁴⁹ "Craquements de Front Commun" *Paris-Demain* May 25 1935. "Les discussions entre les groupes" *Paris-Demain* June 8 1935.

¹⁵⁰ The organic unity between the three parties was the culmination of months of cooperation and discussion.

But rather than reversing this state of affairs, the merger in fact confirmed it. Even more so than the PSdF, the Parti Socialiste Français and the Parti Républicain-Socialiste were parties of parliamentary notables, made up of independent socialists who could not abide by the SFIO's internal discipline. Both parties were explicitly reformist offshoots of French socialism that did not harbor any doctrinal pretensions and were content to act as the moderate wing of parliamentary socialism. As such, their merger with the neo-socialists only accentuated the parliamentary character of the latter, and the formation of the USR marked the neo-socialists' definitive re-integration into the moderate parliamentary left. The USR was thus conceived as a "hyphen" between a "too hesitant Radicalism" and a "doctrinal Marxism in which the country would not recognize itself."¹⁵¹ By uniting with other republican socialists, the neo-socialists hoped to augment their weight within the Popular Front and become its anchoring force in the center. With its call to "defend the Republic," "surmount the crisis," and "save the peace," the USR aligned itself faithfully with the anti-fascist and popular-democratic message of the Popular Front.

¹⁵¹ "L'Union Socialiste et républicaine" *Le Front* November 16 1935. "L'Union Socialiste eest réalisée" *Le Front* November 16 1935.

Illustration 18. Insignia of the Union Socialiste Républicaine



The insignia is a Phrygian cap, a typical republican emblem.

With the formation of the USR, the neo-socialists embraced their parliamentary vocation. One index of this was the neo-socialists' reversion to the participationist preoccupations that had motivated them within the SFIO. As before, they took their cues from the Belgian socialists. In March 1935, the POB/BWP joined the Catholics and Liberals in entering a coalition government led by the center-right Paul van Zeeland. It did so based on van Zeeland's commitment to aggressively tackle the economic crisis through expansionary policies, but the decision to join the government—and particularly Henri de Man's presence as Minister of Public Works—represented a significant retreat from principle in that the van Zeeland government did not adopt the "Plan du Travail." The "Plan" had been the centerpiece of POB/BWP propaganda and the party had previously made its wholesale adoption (i.e. "the Plan, the whole Plan, and nothing but the Plan") a condition of its ministerial participation. Nonetheless, the neo-socialists, who themselves had taken up the idea of a "government of the Plan," welcomed the van Zeeland experience as an example to be emulated in France.¹⁵² Déat also used this opportunity to hammer

¹⁵² E.g. Marcel Déat "Au-delà des élections" *Paris-Demain* May 11 1935.

the SFIO again for what he perceived to be its evasive attitude toward participation. In a passage that recalled the factional conflict within the SFIO, Déat admonished the Socialists to assume "their responsibilities, accept their part of power, demand it boldly, or else abdicate definitely, accept the most shameful failure, in the betrayal of workers' interests."¹⁵³

The neo-socialists' eagerness to participate even at the expense of certain principles continued after their adherence to the Popular Front. Whereas the SFIO and PCF favored waiting until the April/May 1936 legislative elections to form a government, the USR insisted that the Popular Front look to constitute a government immediately.¹⁵⁴ Given the composition of the Chamber elected in 1932, such a cabinet was certain to be led by the Radicals. In fact, such a government would look a lot like the one envisioned by the neo-socialists back in 1932 and 1933 when they were still in the SFIO. The USR nonetheless granted that a Popular Front government should be based on a common "Plan" or program that would serve as a governmental contract. Ministerialist temptations proved too strong, however, and even these conditions were put aside as the USR sent two ministers—including Marcel Déat to the Ministry of Aviation—to the centrist Albert Sarraut government formed in January 1936. This was neither a Popular Front government, nor one based on a "Plan," and as such the neo-socialists' participation ran counter to their own propaganda of the past few months. In June, for example, Déat stated that the PSdF had no business in a cabinet that was not constituted on the basis of a "Plan."¹⁵⁵ But the neo-socialists now justified their presence by citing renewed agitation by the far right and the urgency of defending the Republic from violence.¹⁵⁶ Raising the specter of a "new February 6,"

¹⁵³ Marcel Déat "La leçon du socialisme belge" *La Vie Socialiste* May 4 1935.

¹⁵⁴ "Devant une salle vibrante au cinéma Stella, nos orateurs exposent les solutions du Plan" *Paris-Demain* December 21 1935.

¹⁵⁵ Marcel Déat "La dernière expérience" *La Vie Socialiste* June 15 1935.

¹⁵⁶ "Devant 5000 personnes, Marcel Déat et Paul-Boncour ont exposé le programme de l'Union socialiste" *Paris-Demain* February 29 1936.

Vallon wrote that it was "the merit of the Sarraut government to be, maybe despite the real intentions of certain of its members, the protective rampart behind which the foundations for the next assault can be solidly prepared."¹⁵⁷ The neo-socialists readily acknowledged the limited ambitions of the new government, and claimed that its main goal was to assure the continuity and functioning of republican institutions and to ensure calm for the upcoming elections in May.¹⁵⁸

There was indeed an increase in street agitation by the far right, and the Sarraut government did dissolve the royalist Action Française after its activists nearly lynched Blum when his car crossed paths with a funeral procession for the reactionary historian Jacques Bainville. But the neo-socialists still struggled to justify their presence in a lame duck government when elections were only a few months away. Their participation in what was a routine parliamentary combination lacking a clear mandate undermined their pretensions to political novelty and seemed to betray thinly veiled ministerialist ambitions that the neo-socialists were accused of harboring during their days in the SFIO. Indeed, Déat congratulated himself and his colleagues for being the first socialists to enter a government with the full accord of their party, and Montagnon declared that the neo-socialists were "more participationist than ever."¹⁵⁹ The contrast with 1934 was stark: whereas before the neo-socialists had aligned themselves with the anti-parliamentary insurgency and threatened to disrupt normal politics, they were now a governing party in a government whose agenda fell well short of their own political program. Rather than a mass movement for national renewal transcending political divisions, the

¹⁵⁷ "Louis Vallon "Contre la menace d'un nouveau six février" *Paris-Demain* February 1 1936.

¹⁵⁸ "Contre la menace fasciste l'Union socialiste délègue ses hommes au Gouvernement" *Paris-Demain* January 25 1936.

¹⁵⁹ "Un millier de militants et de sympathisants acclament du Père-Lachaise la candidature de Marcel Déat" *Paris-Demain* February 1 1936. Barthélemy Montagnon "Donnons au courant populaire un sens réalisateur" *Paris-Demain* February 22 1936.

USR cut the familiar figure of the moderate left party of parliamentary notables willing to compromise on principle for the sake of a cabinet post. As the arch-participationist Paul-Boncour later recalled approvingly, the USR "appeared as solidly patriotic as it was republican, and formed the left wing of a governing majority" (Paul-Boncour 1945: 323).

b. Planism

Before further discussing neo-socialism's relationship to the Popular Front, a brief excursus into planism is necessary. Planism refers to the movement for a planned economy that emerged in the 1930s broadly inspired by Henri de Man's "Plan du Travail" adopted by the Belgian POB/BWP in December 1933. As noted earlier, the neo-socialists were early enthusiasts of de Man's "Plan," whose affinity with their own conceptions they tried to emphasize. This interest in translating the "Plan" into a French context would last through the Popular Front period, and the neo-socialists came largely to be associated with planism. Indeed, references to plans and exhortations to elaborate one were regular features of neo-socialist discourse even through its mutations between 1933 and the end of the Popular Front. It might seem tempting, then, to see in the neo-socialists' promotion of planism a factor of consistency that can help to explain their later trajectories. Sternhell does just that, arguing that planism effectively presaged fascism by articulating a national, authoritarian, and anti-Marxist form of socialism (Sternhell [1983] 1986). Likewise Reinhold Brender writes in his book about Déat that "planism is to be regarded as a determinant in the political itinerary of future collaborators" (Brender 1992: 51). In fact, planism was not a unitary movement, and its proponents in France were just as likely to join the Resistance as they were to become collaborators.¹⁶⁰ But just as planism cannot be reduced to

¹⁶⁰ Among planists on the left, Déat, Marion, Montagnon, Gabriel Lafaye, Francis Desphelippon, Georges Albertini, Ludovic Zoretti, Lucien Laurat, Georges Soulès, and René Belin would engage in some form of collaboration. But

the neo-socialists, neither can neo-socialism itself be reduced to an essentialized conception of planism. At the time of planism's widest influence in 1934-1935, there were almost as many planisms as there were planists. Indeed, planism came to represent a nebulous intellectual fad more than it did a single coherent doctrine, and it only became more fluid as it was taken up by disparate forces across the political spectrum. As such, it would be a mistake to see in the neo-socialists' practices and position-takings a simple expression of planist principles. Rather, planism constituted the larger discursive terrain within which they acted.

In de Man's conception, the "Plan" was a socialist response to the twin crises of the Depression and fascism. Combatting the latter required eliminating its roots in the former, but this in turn necessitated a revision of socialist strategy. Socialists could no longer hold out for total revolution, but neither were palliative measures that left the basic framework of liberal capitalism intact sufficient. Moreover, the class composition of modern capitalism was such that the working class could not solve the crises alone, but had instead to make common cause with the middle classes who would otherwise be seduced by fascism. The idea behind the "Plan" was therefore to transcend the traditional antinomy between reform and revolution by presenting a program of structural reforms capable of addressing the fundamental causes of the crisis but limited enough in scope that a broad economic majority could be won over to it.¹⁶¹ The "Plan" thus stopped short of socializing all property, but instead prescribed the construction of a mixed economy in which the nationalization of basic industries, particularly credit, would break the power of monopoly and finance capital and allow the State to consciously but indirectly regulate

among those who did not were Jules Moch, André Philip, Léon Jouhaux, Louis Vallon, Robert Marjolin, and Claude Bonnier.

¹⁶¹ At an international conference on planism in 1934, de Man stated that an "economic majority is at least as indispensable as [a] political majority" given that "the functioning of a system of mixed economy presupposes under all circumstances a minimum of consent" (Dodge 1979: 304-305). The idea of an "economic majority" beyond a simple "political majority" in parliament was a favorite theme among French planists as well.

economic life. With liberal capitalism in terminal crisis, only a planned economy of this kind could stimulate economic revival and thereby undercut the appeal of fascism. However, the "Plan" did not hold this intermediary regime as an end in itself. Indeed, it was still inscribed within the general problematic of the transition to socialism. A crucial dimension of the "Plan" was its propaganda value in rallying "all men of goodwill" regardless of class behind a socialist initiative.¹⁶² As Laclau and Mouffe have argued, the "Plan" was not just an economic document; it was "the very axis for the reconstruction of a historical bloc which would make it possible to combat the decline of bourgeois society and to counter the advance of fascism" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 74). The point was not simply to rescue the economy and democracy, but to consolidate the material and moral foundation for an eventual socialist transformation. In this sense, the Belgian "Plan" was both a blueprint and a mobilizing myth.

The idea of a "plan" found a wide and enthusiastic echo across Europe and especially in France. 1934 was the year of "planomania," with plans seeming to proliferate from every corner of the political world (Figure 7) (Jackson 1985: 150-156).¹⁶³

¹⁶² The POB/BWP Plan du Travail appealed "not only to the working class but also to all classes of the population suffering from the present economic distress, and to all men of good will regardless of party or of faith, for joint action" in the direction of the Plan (Dodge 1979: 291).

¹⁶³ For an overview of the different plans and planism in general, see Amoyal (1974), Biard (1985), Jackson (1985), Kuisel (1981), Laurat (1965), Lefranc (1966, 1974), Vergnon (1997).

Figure 7. Planism in France

"Foreign Plans Published in France: (all published by Révolution Constructive)	Belgian Plan British Plan (Socialist League) Polish Plan (Victor Alter)
Radical Plans:	Emile Roche Plan (May 1934) Young Radical Plan (May 1934) Committee of Vigilance Plan (1934)
Socialist Plans:	<i>Eléments d'un Plan français</i> (Révolution Constructive's Plan)
Others:	Plan of 214 Deputies (April 1934) <i>Nouvel age</i> Plan of Georges Valois (June 1934) 9 July Plan Plan of the War Veterans (officially the Programme Civique de la Confédération Générale des Anciens Combattants - but it was rapidly known as their Plan) (March 1934) <i>La République des Combattants</i> (the Plan of the Union Federale des Combattants) (September 1934) Plan of the Etats Généraux du Travail (April 1934) C.G.T. Plan (September 1934)"

From Jackson (1985: 150-151).

Most of these plans, however, lacked coherence and remained vague in content. Beyond expressing an inchoate desire for some form of a rationally organized and directed economy, the different plans had little in common and testified more to the vogue that the notion of planism enjoyed than to any real convergence in agenda.

Broadly speaking, there were two wings of the planist efflorescence: a neo-liberal and a syndicalist/socialist one (Kuisel 1981). Neo-liberal planners generally favored indirect controls, corporatist schemes, and improved accounting and forecasting mechanisms. This form of planism was typically advanced by business managers, engineers, and civil servants, and cut a distinctly technocratic figure. The direct heirs of de Man, however, were to be found within the socialist left and the labor movement. Planist ideas found expression in two currents within the

SFIO: *Le Combat Marxiste* and *Révolution Constructive*.¹⁶⁴ In the beginning of 1934, the two currents joined forces with the left-wing *La Bataille Socialiste* faction to launch an insurgent campaign within the SFIO to follow the POB/BWP's example and re-orient party strategy along planist lines.¹⁶⁵ The planists' hopes to win over the party were dashed, however, when the February 6 1934 riots interrupted and sapped their momentum.¹⁶⁶ At the May 1934 SFIO congress, with the exception of a few recalcitrants, the Socialist planists rallied to the majority motion that only paid lip service to the idea of a plan.¹⁶⁷ Henceforth, the mystique of proletarian unity and, later, the Popular Front, overcame the SFIO and further relegated planism to the margins of the French socialist movement.

Following their failed push in the SFIO, the disappointed planists re-invested their energies in the CGT labor confederation, where they found a more sympathetic milieu. Indeed, planist influence was already apparent in a resolution adopted by the CGT national confederal committee in February 1934, and the notion—if not the substance—of a plan was ratified again at the *Etats Généraux du Travail* [Estates General of Labor] organized by the CGT in April 1934. In March, the CGT constituted a Bureau of Economic Studies—modeled on that of the Belgian POB/BWP—charged with drafting a plan. The Bureau was mainly composed of economists, professors, and engineers, many of whom were close to the SFIO, but it also included two neo-

¹⁶⁴ *Le Combat Marxiste*, who put out an eponymous journal, was led by Lucien Laurat, an Austrian Marxist notable, in addition to his planist activities, for introducing the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg to France. On *Le Combat Marxiste*, see Laurat (1965). On *Révolution Constructive*, see Clouet (1991) and Lefranc (1970).

¹⁶⁵ *La Bataille Socialiste*'s embrace of planism is somewhat surprising, given that it was the defender of Guesdist orthodoxy within the SFIO. In fact, Jean Zyromski and others in *La Bataille Socialiste* had a different conception of planism than *Révolution Constructive* and *Le Combat Marxiste*, but were attracted to it nonetheless as a radical alternative to parliamentary reformism. For the relationship of *La Bataille Socialiste* to planism, see Nadaud (1996).

¹⁶⁶ According to Lefranc, who was himself a founder of *Révolution Constructive*, the planists were constrained to abandon their offensive within the SFIO and to rally to the defense of republican institutions following the February 6 riots lest they be accused of sympathizing with anti-parliamentary agitation (Lefranc 1966, 1974, 1981). Indeed, *Révolution Constructive* had always been hostile to parliamentary socialism, which explains its coolness toward Déat and the neo-socialists despite their shared interest in planism.

¹⁶⁷ *Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. XXXIe Congrès national tenu à Toulouse les 20, 21, 22 et 23 mai 1934. Compte rendu sténographique*. Paris: Librairie Populaire

socialists, Louis Vallon and Claude Bonnier. In September 1934 the Bureau concluded its work and the Plan de Rénovation Économique de la CGT [Plan of Economic Renovation of the CGT] was adopted by the national confederal committee.¹⁶⁸ The CGT Plan called for a mix of reflationary measures such as a 40-hour week, public works, and rural relief, and more far-reaching structural reforms like the nationalization of credit and other key industries and the strengthening of the Conseil National Économique [National Economic Council].¹⁶⁹ According to Lefranc, who helped draft it, the Plan was based on three principles: 1) the economy must be directed; 2) it could only be so through the nationalization of credit and key industries; 3) the direction of the economy must have as its goal the liquidation of the crisis, the diminution of unemployment, the growth in consumption, and the stabilization of the rural economy (Lefranc 1966: 81).

With the release of its plan, the CGT emerged as the most significant advocate of planism on the left. Indeed, CGT propaganda in 1935 was largely oriented toward the further elaboration and popularization of its plan, which it did through a new journal (*L'Atelier pour le Plan* [Workshop for the Plan]) created for the purpose. Much as the POB/BWP did, the CGT presented its plan as the most viable basis for an anti-fascist and anti-capitalist politics in the present conjuncture. The plan would rally both the working and middle classes around the common cause of bringing finance capital to heel and eliminating the root causes of the economic crisis, thereby undercutting fascism and laying the groundwork for a democratic economy.

The Popular Front, however, would ultimately eclipse planism on the left. Planism's star had already begun to fall internationally. The POB/BWP's decision to enter the van Zeeland

¹⁶⁸ The Plan would not be officially adopted by the entire CGT, however, until its September 1935 national congress.

¹⁶⁹ The text of the CGT Plan can be found in *La Voix du Peuple* September 1934.

government in March 1935 represented a de facto abandonment of the "Plan du Travail," and Belgian planism virtually vanished by mid-1935 (Horm 1996: 93). In France, the CGT proposed that the Popular Front adopt its plan when in late 1935 and early 1936 a commission was set up to draft a Popular Front program. CGT was supported in this effort by the SFIO and the neo-socialists, but it ran up against the opposition of the Communists and the Radicals, both of whom thought that the structural reforms contained in the plan would frighten the middle classes. This opposition proved decisive, and in the end the CGT, out of loyalty to the Popular Front, acquiesced. The Popular Front program released in January 1936 was largely limited to redistributive reforms, and as such was a disappointment to planists. The irony, as Jackson points out, is that planism, whose appeal was staked on its ability to rally the middle classes to a radical solution to the crisis, was ultimately rejected in the name of the middle classes' timidity (Jackson 1985: 161). The enthusiasm generated by the Popular Front, moreover, belied the claim that only the plan could provide a mystique capable of reinvigorating the left. Indeed, by June 1936, the Popular Front formula—with its coalitional politics and popular-democratic discourse—proved to be a more potent mobilizing myth than planism, and the latter gradually receded from the scene.

The neo-socialists' position within the landscape of planism was neither coherent nor consistent. Although the language of planism was a constant in PSdF/USR propaganda from the 1933 schism through the Popular Front period and became something of an *idée fixe*, it was the idea of planism more than any specific conception of the plan that motivated the neo-socialists. The neo-socialists' conception of planism changed with the wind just as their discourse did more generally. Their politics in this period and beyond thus cannot be reduced to a stable image of planism any more than they can to an unchanging conception of neo-socialism. Planism was not

the principle of their action. Rather, it was a discursive resource that Déat and his comrades continually adapted to a changing conjuncture in ways they hoped would be politically profitable.

At first, the neo-socialists wrapped themselves in the POB/BWP "Plan du Travail" and professed its kinship with their own positions.¹⁷⁰ Seeing as both advocated a form of intermediary regime, there was some plausibility to this claim, but there were nonetheless significant divergences between the "Plan" and neo-socialism, particularly on the question of nationalizations.¹⁷¹ In any case, associating itself with the new official line of the Belgian section of the Labor and Socialist International was certainly convenient for the neo-socialists, anxious as they were coming off the 1933 schism to cover themselves in socialist legitimacy.¹⁷² But as the February 6 riots ushered in an equivocal period in the history of neo-socialism, their relationship to planism also changed. With "planomania" sweeping the political field, the neo-socialists sought to exploit the new fad at the same time as they sought to exploit the anti-parliamentary mood.

As Richard Kuisel points out, the neo-socialists turned to planism as a means of reviving their tottering movement. But rather than define their own plan, they now "indiscriminately endorsed existing plans" and provided only their own exegeses (Kuisel 1981: 113). Much like they presented themselves as a force transcending the left-right divide, the neo-socialists

¹⁷⁰ Marcel Déat "Le Plan belge et nous" *La Vie Socialiste* January 6 1934. Marcel Déat "Autour du Plan belge: Crise de réadaptation" *La Vie Socialiste* January 20 1934.

¹⁷¹ In *Perspectives socialistes*, Déat outlined a scheme that would grant the state some control over industries without nationalizing them. In contrast, the centerpiece of the "Plan du Travail" was the nationalization of credit. Moreover, before the publication of the Belgian plan, the neo-socialists had little to say about credit policy.

¹⁷² In fact, the Belgian socialists distanced between themselves from the neo-socialists. The leader of the POB/BWP, for example, noted that whereas the neo-socialists had split the SFIO, the "Plan" had instead been a factor of unity within the Belgian party, uniting the party right and left. Emile Vandervelde "Analogies nombreuses et saisissantes..." *La Vie Socialiste* January 13 1934.

positioned themselves as the "geometric locus" of planist opinion at large.¹⁷³ The neo-socialists welcomed the proliferation of plans from across the political spectrum and sought to unify them under their own leadership: "Up to us to animate this great movement and to precipitate the indispensable encounters so that...the new forces could definitively get in the game and assure, at the decisive moment, the orientation of the country."¹⁷⁴ To this end the PSdF pretended that the different plans differed only in nuance and sought to identify their common denominator. The aim was to eventually articulate a plan that, satisfying the minimum demands of the left while not exceeding the maximum of reforms tolerable to the right, would rally disparate forces behind a constructive program against the crisis.

The Plan du 9 Juillet, discussed earlier, was an attempt at just such a plan. Published in September 1934, the plan caused a sensation due to the heterogeneity of its contributors, which included individual Socialists, Radicals, neo-socialists, syndicalists, neo-liberal technocrats, Catholics, non-conformists, and figures from the nationalist right.¹⁷⁵ The plan was not a neo-socialist initiative *per se*, but Vallon, Roditi, and Fabre-Luce were among its principal authors and neo-socialist leaders actively promoted it. The plan was in line with their strategy of distilling a common denominator between the planist right and left, but it was met with suspicion on the left, both because of the problematic backgrounds of some of its authors and because the text itself was hopelessly vague and conservative. Indeed, the plan was little more than an assortment of planist pieties about the moral and material failures of liberal capitalism and the

¹⁷³ Robert Bobin "Confrontation des 'Plans'" *La Vie Socialiste* April 28 1934. Bobin cited in particular the CGT, the Etats Généraux du Travail, the Confédération Générale des Anciens Combattants, a plan signed by 214 deputies, the Ligue de la Jeunesse, the Ligue de l'Avant, La Jeune République, *L'Homme Nouveau*, and the Roche Plan.

¹⁷⁴ Programmes et plan" *Paris-Demain* April 21 1934.

¹⁷⁵ The 19 signatories of the plan were: Gérard Bardet, Raoul Bertrand, Aymery Blacque-Belair, Philippe Boegner, Jacques Branger, Jean Coutrot, Alfred Fabre-Luce, René Fouque, Pierre Frederix, Pierre Gimon, Armand Hoog, Pierre-Olivier Lapie, Bertrand de Maudhuy, Paul Marion, Georges Roditi, Jules Romains, Roger de Saivre, Jean Thomas, Louis Vallon (Groupe du 9 Juillet 1934). Several others supposedly contributed behind the scenes but did not sign the text due to their official responsibilities (Jackson 1985, Lefranc 1974).

need for a consciously directed economy. Rightist invocations of “service,” “order,” and “hierarchy” balanced out leftist appeals to “equality.” The grandiosity of its claims was also not matched by the coherence of its proposals. Reflecting the heavy presence of technocrats among its drafters, the structural reforms outlined by the plan were mainly limited to a reorganization of the state, strengthening executive power, and a rudimentary corporatist organization of producers. Completely missing were the nationalizations that were central to socialist and syndicalist conceptions of the plan (Groupe du 9 Juillet 1934).

The Plan du 9 Juillet was thus a victim of its own heterogeneity. Seeking to please everybody, it ended up pleasing nobody, and in the end nothing came of it. As Lefranc recounts, "concern outweighed satisfaction" on the left, as the ambiguous plan sat uneasily between "an equivocal corporatism and a socialist planism" (Lefranc 1974: 165). Indeed, several early leftist collaborators subsequently disavowed the plan for this reason (Jackson 1985: 155). Robert Marjolin of *Révolution Constructive*, for example, condemned the plan for simply replacing a moribund liberal capitalism with an organized capitalism that heralded a new "industrial feudalism." Without being anchored in a coherent revolutionary socialist vision, he wrote, planism risked degenerating into a mash of "words without substance."¹⁷⁶

But the ambiguous and politically doubtful character of the Plan du 9 Juillet was typical of the neo-socialists' triangulations through much of 1934. What Julian Jackson says of the increasingly nebulous character of planism in general is especially true of the neo-socialists: whereas for de Man the limits of any potential political alliance were defined by the plan, now "the limits of the plan were being increasingly defined by who could be brought into the *rassemblement*" (Jackson 1985: 154). For the neo-socialists in the months following February 6, planism represented an opportunity to exploit as much as it did a guiding principle, and they kept

¹⁷⁶ Robert Marjolin "Pour une conception révolutionnaire du Plan" *Révolution Constructive* December 1934.

their conceptions deliberately vague in order to encompass as much of the political heterogeneity of "planomania" as possible. In a contemporaneous critique of the neo-socialists, the Socialist planists Georges Lefranc and Jean Itard noted that, with the PSdF weak and lacking a mass base, Déat was constrained to wait for "popular movements to materialize outside himself in order to channel and utilize them." But this accommodating *attentisme* was all the more dangerous because it risked "spreading into the domain of thought" and rendering Déat amenable to ideas of dubious provenance.¹⁷⁷

The neo-socialists' indistinct yet capacious planism of 1934 thus responded to the same situational political logic that led them in the same period to flirt with the far right and to adopt an equivocal posture more generally. Indeed, planism was an integral part of their strategy of rallying a heterogeneous coalition around a program of national renewal. But as the political conjuncture changed, so too did their planism. Recall that the fall of Doumergue in November 1934 and the waning of the political crisis generated by the February 6 events ushered in a period of relative moderation and normalcy for the neo-socialists as they turned their attention back to parliamentary action and re-positioned themselves on the center-left of the political arena. This move was reflected in a corresponding pivot in their conception of planism away from the cultivated ambiguity that had characterized it before. Having returned to their natural position between the SFIO and the Radicals, the neo-socialists now presented the plan as the basis of a center-left parliamentary coalition. For this purpose they set up the Comité du Plan, to which all parties interested in studying and evangelizing the plan were invited to participate, but which in practice attracted only those who would eventually form the USR as well as a handful of isolated technicians. In its founding declaration, the Comité du Plan stressed its goal of finding "practical convergences" between opposing doctrines, but in a departure from the neo-socialists' previous

¹⁷⁷ Georges Lefranc and Jean Itard "Plan de travail et néo-socialisme" *Le Populaire* December 26 1934.

attitude, it stressed that its efforts were not "directed against the parties," whom it hoped bind together under a commonly elaborated plan.¹⁷⁸

The neo-socialists now envisioned a parliamentary road for planism, and presented the plan as a sort of electoral compact underwriting a moderate left coalition with the 1936 legislative elections in view. In other words, the plan was now subordinated to parliamentary legality, and was to be applied within a clearly democratic framework. The new planist majority sought by the neo-socialists would draw largely from the left, but would exclude the Communists.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, from the end of 1934 through the first half of 1935, the plan was counterposed as a "positive" or "constructive" alternative to what the neo-socialists characterized as the purely "negative" anti-fascist alliance embodied in the Unity Pact between the SFIO and PCF, whose failure to agree on a common program or a path toward organic unity the neo-socialists mistook as sure signs of the Unity Pact's imminent demise. Their hope was to pry the Socialists—and particularly the planists among them—away from the Communists and to constitute a new coalition whose nucleus would include the SFIO, the PSdF, and the CGT.¹⁸⁰ To this end the neo-socialists restored the socialist accents to their planism that they had suppressed in 1934. So, for example, Déat portrayed planism as "an adaptation and as a renewal of traditional socialism."¹⁸¹ At the January 1935 congress in which the PSdF re-affirmed its fidelity to Jaurèssian socialism, Déat also declared that planism was but a "phase in the international socialist movement."¹⁸² Moreover, having failed to come up with its own plan, the PSdF formally endorsed the CGT Plan at the congress, and the neo-socialists subsequently made it the

¹⁷⁸ "Contre la misère, la faillite et le chômage: Comité du Plan" *La Vie Socialiste* March 30 1935.

¹⁷⁹ Marcel Déat "Pour un Comité du plan" *La Vie Socialiste* March 2 1935.

¹⁸⁰ "Par et pour le Plan, vers le pouvoir. Depuis la conférence de de Man, la planisme fait des décisifs progrès" *La Vie Socialiste* December 22 1934.

¹⁸¹ Marcel Déat "Rapport Moral présenté par Marcel Déat au Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* January 12 1935.

¹⁸² "Le Congrès national du Parti socialiste de France s'est tenu à Montrouge" *Paris-Demain* February 2 1935.

basis for their planist agitation (Jackson 1988: 158). This decision to line up behind the CGT Plan—with its call for nationalizations and its unmistakably socialist pedigree—was a clear signal of the neo-socialists' return to the fold. In a further departure from their former posture, the neo-socialists also toned down their criticisms of the SFIO, and praised socialist planists like André Philip and the Révolution Constructive group.¹⁸³ By mid-1935, then, the neo-socialists' planism had essentially become a prop in their new strategy of rallying the democratic (i.e. non-Communist) left around a positive program capable of assembling a parliamentary majority—a far cry from the anti-parliamentary equivocations of 1934.

As with almost all their endeavors, the neo-socialists' pivot back to the planist left met with failure. The hope was to peel off those elements of the left favorable to planism—particularly within the SFIO—but left-wing planists remained overwhelmingly suspicious of the neo-socialists. For example, de Man himself disavowed the neo-socialists, even though the latter posed as Belgian planism's French emissaries.¹⁸⁴ Instead, de Man gave his blessing to the Révolution Constructive group within the SFIO (Lefranc 1966, 1974).¹⁸⁵ The planists within the SFIO—e.g. Révolution Constructive, Le Combat Marxiste—were also sharply critical of Déat, and they repeatedly rebuffed neo-socialist advances in late 1934 and early 1935.

Révolution Constructive in particular was anxious to create distance between Socialist planism and the maneuvers of the neo-socialists. On the one hand, they decried what they saw as the conservatism and ambiguity of the neo-socialists' planism, as well as their dubious associations during 1934. Thus Révolution Constructive accused the neo-socialists of harboring

¹⁸³ "Pour et contre le Plan. Depuis Bernstein et Kautsky depuis Jaurès et Guesde...il n'y a pas de plus importante controverse au sein du mouvement socialiste" *Paris-Demain* January 5 1935.

¹⁸⁴ Henri de Man and other Belgian Socialists had kept Déat at arm's length ever since 1933, reproaching him for having breached Socialist unity.

¹⁸⁵ Following a December 10 1934 conference on planism at the Sorbonne in which Déat was also a participant, de Man chose Révolution Constructive and not the neo-socialists as the French publisher of his intervention (Lefranc 1974).

fascist sympathies, remarking for example that the notion of "service" that was central to the Plan du 9 Juillet was a "daughter of the totalitarian state" (preface to de Man 1935).¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, Révolution Constructive also condemned the neo-socialists' (revived) electoralism. They criticized the neo-socialists for reducing the planist appeal to the middle classes to a parliamentary combination with the Radicals, and contrasted the revolutionary character of Socialist planism with the "neo-participationism" of neo-socialism. This harkened back to a longstanding difference with Déat, but what is noteworthy here is that the critique of the neo-socialists' parliamentarist inclinations once again became salient in early 1935.¹⁸⁷ This line of criticism, in other words, was an index of how much the neo-socialists' planism had shifted from 1934 to 1935 as they abandoned their earlier anti-parliamentary rhetoric and threw themselves once again into the intrigues of the Chamber. Pierre Boivin of Révolution Constructive was thus not off-base when he dismissed the neo-socialists' idea of the plan as little more than a "machine of war against unity of action" with the Communists and the "basis...for a program destined to 'regroup the forces of the left' on a parliamentary and electoral terrain." But if the neo-socialists sought to use the plan as a wedge separating Socialist planists from more traditional Socialists and the Communists, the Socialist planists insisted that the plan and proletarian unity went hand in hand.¹⁸⁸ They thus spurned the neo-socialists' maneuver to rally a planist majority encompassing the non-Communist left. This was not, however, primarily because of the neo-socialists' prior anti-democratic equivocations, but precisely because their notion of the plan had once again become subordinated to a moribund "parliamentary routine."

¹⁸⁶ See *Révolution Constructive* August-September 1934; Robert Marjolin *Révolution Constructive* December 1934; Georges Lefranc and Jean Itard "Plan de travail et néo-socialisme" *Le Populaire* December 26 1934; Pierre Boivin "Ce que nous pensons des néos" *Le Populaire* February 1 1935.

¹⁸⁷ Révolution Constructive was already critical of Déat's participationism in 1932 (Boivin et al. 1932). Despite a shared early interest in planism, Révolution Constructive had always been on the left-wing of the SFIO and was deeply distrustful of parliamentary reformism.

¹⁸⁸ Pierre Boivin "Ce que nous pensons des néos" *Le Populaire* February 1 1935.

From the common denominator of a politically heterogeneous insurgency for national renewal, by mid-1935 the neo-socialists' conception of the plan had mutated into a center-left parliamentary alternative to the PCF-SFIO Unity Pact. The neo-socialists were no more successful in this operation than they were in 1934, and in any case the Popular Front dynamic altered the political calculus. With the PCF adopting a popular-democratic discourse and extending its hand to the Radicals, there was no longer any question of isolating the Communists by constituting a coalition of the democratic left against it. As the Popular Front became reality, the neo-socialists' notion of the plan changed accordingly. They now sought to identify the Popular Front with the plan. Thus shortly before the July 14 1935 demonstration that inaugurated the Popular Front, the neo-socialists lauded the PCF's rhetorical embrace of democracy, the nation, and the middle classes, and celebrated the convergence of the different left parties around a popular-democratic discourse as a "triumph of planism."¹⁸⁹ In fact, this celebration was premature, as the Popular Front coalition remained divided on the question of planism, with the Radicals and Communists resistant to any structural reforms that risked frightening the middle classes. The neo-socialists subsequently sought to place themselves at the head of a planist push within the Popular Front. Thus they continued to back the CGT Plan, and joined in the efforts to have the CGT Plan adopted as the official Popular Front program. They supplemented this through their initiative in the Comité du Plan, which in November 1935 published *Le Plan Français* (Comité du Plan 1935), a plan ostensibly based on the CGT Plan but whose centerpiece was the setting of a "social price" to regulate the economy toward social ends.¹⁹⁰ This plan, too, was offered to the Popular Front as it worked to elaborate its program through the end of 1935.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ "Triomphe du planisme: Il n'est plus que question de rassemblement autour du Plan" *Paris Demain* June 22 1935.

¹⁹⁰ Although the *Plan Français* placed itself in the lineage of the CGT and POB plans, it eschewed nationalizations. Richard Kuisel describes the measures outlined in the plan as approaching "quackery" (Kuisel 1981: 113).

¹⁹¹ Marcel Déat "Vers l'expérience française" *Le Front* December 28 1935.

The release of the decidedly non-planist Popular Front program in January 1936 capped the failure of all attempts to orient the Popular Front toward planism. Yet even after planism was rejected by the Popular Front, the neo-socialists nonetheless remained faithful to the coalition, though never abandoning their commitment to planism. This speaks to the double-sided character of the relation between planism and the Popular Front for the neo-socialists in the period between mid-1935 and the Popular Front victory in May 1936. On the one hand, the neo-socialists hoped that the Popular Front could become the vehicle for their planist aspirations. In this they failed, but they did not for all that repudiate the Popular Front. This was because, in line with what I have suggested about their fluid conception of the plan, the neo-socialists' advocacy of planism within the Popular Front was as much a maneuver to stake a leadership claim over the coalition as it was a motivating reason for their engagement in the first place. In other words, it was not their planism that determined their engagement with the Popular Front. Rather, it was their engagement with the Popular Front—which they could not realistically refuse in the current conjuncture—that determined the specific form of their planism. Thus for the neo-socialists, planism at this time became primarily articulated with their ministerialist ambitions. As discussed earlier, the neo-socialists were eager to constitute a government in the current legislature and criticized the Socialists and Communists for holding out until the 1936 elections to form a Popular Front government. But given the composition of the 1932 Chamber, only a "government of the Plan" based on the "ensemble of lefts and republican elements," and complemented by planist converts from other parties, was possible.¹⁹² Planism was reduced to merely another argument for ministerial participation, and indeed its main purpose during these months seems to have been to justify the neo-socialists' rekindled participationism. Moreover, the relative weight of the neo-socialists' commitment to planist principles versus their

¹⁹² Marcel Déat "A qui le pouvoir?" *Paris-Demain* July 13 1935.

ministerialism was revealed in January 1936 when Déat and the USR accepted cabinet positions in the Sarraut government, which was neither a Popular Front government nor a "government of the Plan." The subordination of planist discourse to routine politics was further evidenced when for the 1936 elections the USR cloaked in planist language what was in substance little more than a typical electoral program and dubbed it a "Plan of immediate action."¹⁹³ By April 1936, then, the neo-socialists' conception of planism had undergone several transformations, but now their political ambitions were turned toward the upcoming elections.

Victory and Defeat: The Popular Front and Neo-Socialism

a. Overcoming Initial Reservations

The neo-socialists were initially skeptical of PCF intentions with the Popular Front. The Communists had long been seen as a cynical and manipulative party, and the neo-socialists interpreted their overtures toward the Radicals through that lens. Déat, for example, did not trust the "democratic sincerity" of the Communists, sensing in their new attitude the machinations of Soviet foreign policy imperatives, which were now oriented toward a rapprochement with France as a counterweight to Nazi Germany.¹⁹⁴ The neo-socialists were ostensibly worried about the fickleness of the Communists' democratic turn, but they were also suspicious of their ultimate aims. Thus Déat remarked that despite their calls for a broad class alliance based on an immediate program of defending democratic freedom and fighting the economic crisis, the Communists nonetheless "integrally maintained their goals and their doctrine." The Bolsheviks,

¹⁹³ Union Socialiste et Républicaine "Notre Plan d'action" *Paris-Demain* April 18 1936.

¹⁹⁴ Marcel Déat "Fronts et rassemblements" *La Vie Socialiste* November 3 1934.

Déat maintained, only valued reforms insofar as they could be exploited for an eventual violent takeover.¹⁹⁵

The propagation of the Popular Front idea in late 1934 and early 1935 coincided with the neo-socialists' passage back into the parliamentary left following the fall of Doumergue. But so long as the Popular Front remained a hypothesis only, the neo-socialists rejected the idea. As an alternative, they proposed a center-left "Republican Front" excluding the Communists.¹⁹⁶ As discussed above, they turned to planism as the basis of this alternative coalition, and their propaganda was oriented toward peeling the Socialists away from their Unity Pact with the Communists and toward a coalition with the Radicals of which the neo-socialists—much as they had hoped before February 1934—would be the fulcrum.¹⁹⁷ Even as it became clearer that the Popular Front represented an abandonment of the Unity Pact's revolutionary and proletarian pretensions, the neo-socialists nonetheless continued to anathemize the Communists, insisting for example that they remained "out of play" for any left coalition in March 1935.¹⁹⁸

The neo-socialists' efforts at building a center-left planist coalition failed, however, and the Popular Front dynamic proved to be irresistible. As the idea of a Popular Front made inroads among Socialists and Radicals, the neo-socialists' resolve began to falter. Thus in May they grudgingly admitted the prospect of Socialist and Communist support for a planist coalition.¹⁹⁹ By June they were openly lauding the Communists' embrace of democracy, the nation, and the middle classes.²⁰⁰ The neo-socialists had initially bet against the Popular Front, but with the

¹⁹⁵ "Rapport Moral présenté par Marcel Déat au Congrès National" *La Vie Socialiste* January 12 1935.

¹⁹⁶ Marcel Déat "Fronts et rassemblements" *La Vie Socialiste* November 3 1934.

¹⁹⁷ In January 1935, for example, Marcel Déat argued that the faltering negotiations between the SFIO and the PCF on a common program signaled the unsustainability of the Unity Pact. Marcel Déat "Les deux unités" *Paris-Demain* January 26 1935.

¹⁹⁸ Marcel Déat "Pour un Comité du plan" *La Vie Socialiste* March 2 1935.

¹⁹⁹ "Craquements de Front Commun" *Paris-Demain* May 25 1935.

²⁰⁰ Léo Huret "Ils y viennent tous: L'évolution des bolcheviks vers un régime intermédiaire" *Paris-Demain* June 8 1935. "Triomphe du Planisme: Il n'est plus question que de rassemblement du Plan" *Paris-Demain* June 22 1935.

Radicals and the Socialists signing on, the Popular Front effectively monopolized the left political space, and as such the neo-socialists had little choice but to join it too. Thus the neo-socialists accepted, out of "republican loyalism" and "without restrictions nor reserves", the call to participate in the July 14 1935 Popular Front demonstration. Given the participation of practically every organization of the left, abstaining, Déat remarked, would have been a "total impossibility."²⁰¹ Thereafter the PSdF, and later the USR, "resolutely took its place in the Popular Front for the defense of bread, peace, and freedoms," vowing "not to desert the combat" when the moment came.²⁰² Indeed, the USR became the fourth constituent party of the Popular Front, and was represented on the Comité National Pour le Rassemblement Populaire by Montagnon, Paul Ramadier, and Georges Etienne (Lefranc 1965).

b. A Neo-Socialist Popular Front?

The neo-socialists had been sucked into the logic of the Popular Front and now found themselves in an explicitly anti-fascist alliance with the Radicals, Socialists, and—most improbably—the Communists. Though the neo-socialists would be critical of the direction taken by the Popular Front, at least in its early stages before the 1936 electoral victory they were faithful partisans of the movement for anti-fascist unity. The Popular Front interlude thus gives the lie to the notion of a progressive impregnation of fascist ideas among the neo-socialists. Indeed, it represents a *caesura* between the *fascisant* equivocations of 1934 and the fascism of the RNP during the Nazi occupation. Because this period fits poorly with the usual narrative about the neo-socialists' fascisization, it has often been glossed over—not least by the leaders of the RNP themselves, who were eager to stress the continuity in their thought.

²⁰¹ Déat hints at the existence of some resistance among the neo-socialists to participating in the Popular Front demonstration. Marcel Déat "Gros problèmes et lourdes tâches" *La Vie Socialiste* July 13 1935.

²⁰² "Notre Parti dans le Front Populaire" *Le Front* November 6 1935.

In fact, the constitution of the Popular Front in 1935 capped a return to the neo-socialists' earlier democratic socialist themes that began with the fall of Doumergue. This can be seen in how the old slogan "Order, Authority, Nation" was redeployed in ways similar to how it was prior to the February 6 1934 riots. At the first meeting of the neo-socialist youth, for example, the group summarized the three "essential ideas" of neo-socialism:

1. The economic and social order that must be realized according to a plan against the large financial and industrial oligarchies;
2. The authority of the republican State that must be restored on the basis of universal suffrage by completely reorganizing the present political regime;
3. The nation that must be liberated from all feudalities and privileges.²⁰³

Despite calling for structural economic and political reforms, the neo-socialists once again made it clear that "Order, Authority, Nation" were to be understood as a defense of the Republic and political freedoms.²⁰⁴ They explicitly and repeatedly disavowed any nationalist, authoritarian, or fascist intentions and reaffirmed neo-socialism's identity as a "realist conception of socialism...attached at once to the Republic and to the nation."²⁰⁵ By joining the Popular Front, the logics of equivalence and difference which defined the neo-socialists' relative position in the political field were reconfigured, which in turn altered the meaning of their call for "Order, Authority, Nation" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The neo-socialists were now in league with the old parties that they had condemned at the height of their equivocal phase in 1934, and even within the USR they had made common cause with arch-parliamentarians such as Paul-Boncour. The nation whose sovereignty they wished to express and the order which they sought to defend were—as they had been in 1933—democratic and republican, constituted precisely against the

²⁰³ "La réunion constitutive des jeunesses néo-socialistes" *Paris-Demain* July 13 1935.

²⁰⁴ For example, at Paul Perrin's speech at the July 14 1935 Popular Front demonstration, "liberty" was the dominant theme. "L'appel unanime des manifestants du 14 Juillet" *Paris-Deman* July 13 1935.

²⁰⁵ Marcel Déat "Vers l'expérience française" *Paris-Demain* December 28 1935.

menace of those factious leagues and agitators with whom the neo-socialists were associating only a year prior. As the PSdF declared on occasion of the July 14 Popular Front demonstration:

Republicans and democrats, we will no tolerate the factious enterprises against popular sovereignty, and we will not hesitate, for the defense of freedoms, to take our place in the ranks of this People of Paris, that has the rightful pride of the most magnificent revolutionary past.²⁰⁶

In other words, with the Popular Front, neo-socialism rediscovered its anti-fascist origins.

Once drawn into its orbit, the neo-socialists embraced the Popular Front as an opportunity and presented themselves as its legitimate progenitors. Of course, the Communists had been the ones to take the organizational initiative. But, the neo-socialists argued, this did not thereby make them the "fathers" of the Popular Front. The Popular Front formula was defined by "the alliance of the proletariat and the middle classes, by the common will to defend democracy, by the rallying of a majority vast and ample enough to speak for the nation and take charge it"—all positions first articulated by neo-socialism.²⁰⁷ By embracing democracy, the nation, and the middle classes, the Communists were only applying, "in their manner, the directives that [the neo-socialists] proposed to French socialism in July 1933."²⁰⁸ The social program of Maurice Thorez, a neo-socialist quipped, was "none other than that of the *Neos*."²⁰⁹ The neo-socialists thus claimed credit for the Popular Front's popular-democratic line, and they took it as vindication of their past. Moreover, they had reason to believe that people would prefer the original to the Communist copy, and they presented themselves accordingly as the coalition's natural leaders. Their only fault since 1933 was "to have always been right a year in advance."²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Parti Socialiste de France "Pourquoi nous manifestons le 14 Juillet" *Paris-Demain* July 13 1935.

²⁰⁷ "Le Front Populaire est-il capable de gouverner?" *Paris-Deman* January 18 1936.

²⁰⁸ Marcel Déat "Les communistes et nous" *Paris-Demain* May 25 1935.

²⁰⁹ Léo Huret "De la manifestation du 14 Juillet au programme constructif et à l'action gouvernementale" *Paris-Demain* July 6 1935.

²¹⁰ Marcel Déat "Préparons-nous" *Paris-Demain* June 15 1935.

Despite years of opprobrium, it seemed that the neo-socialists were now having their day in the sun:

Foolish, if not devious, men tried to stifle our movement by accusing us of who knows what sort of latent fascism! When we spoke of the middle classes, we were accused of "lowering the flag of socialism to the level of the middles classes." When we said that socialism must not separate itself from the nation and that the *patrie* was not the monopoly of a handful of parasites, we were accused of nationalism. Redress has been slow, but on these two problems, it is enough to consider today the watchwords of the Popular Front to notice that our revenge exceeds our expectations.²¹¹

The neo-socialists missed few opportunities to remind their audience that it was their formulas that had become those of the Popular Front, and gloated at the irony that these were now taken up by Socialists and Communists who only two years earlier had slandered neo-socialism as a kind of "neo-fascism."²¹² In the neo-socialist imagination, they had been right all along, and it was the rest of the left that had finally rallied to them. On the eve of the July 14 1935 Popular Front demonstration, the PSdF observed "with satisfaction" that their slogans of July 1933 were "every day more clearly receiving the adhesion of working class opinion."²¹³ A month earlier, when the Flandin government fell and exploratory talks were held to form a government of the left, Déat wondered if the "political winter" of the last three years had finally ended.²¹⁴ With the Popular Front uniting the left on a familiar popular-democratic discursive terrain, the neo-socialists could reasonably hope to play an important role in what came next.

²¹¹ "Par un large exposé public de l'action de l'Union socialiste Marcel Déat a ouvert la campagne électorale" *Paris-Demain* April 4 1936.

²¹² Henri Siriez "En écoutant Marcel Déat, en relisant Pierre Renaudel" *Paris-Demain* April 11 1936.

²¹³ Parti Socialiste de France "Pourquoi nous manifestons le 14 Juillet" *Paris-Demain* July 13 1935.

²¹⁴ Marcel Déat "Premiers signes de renouveau" *Paris-Demain* June 1 1935.

c. Marginalization and Decomposition

On May 3 1936 the Popular Front won a historic electoral victory, winning 57 percent of the vote and 386 seats in the Chamber, up from the 354 won by the left in 1932.²¹⁵ On June 4, Léon Blum took office as Prime Minister of a Popular Front government, the first Socialist-led government in France's history. Yet not all parties to the Popular Front benefitted equally from this triumph of left unity. The neo-socialists entered the electoral campaign optimistic about their chances, expecting that their imagined vindication by the Popular Front's rhetorical line would translate into electoral success. They also seemed to assume that the results of the election would reproduce those of 1932, when the Radicals finished ahead of the Socialists and were positioned as the leading party of a potential left-wing governing majority—on condition that the Socialists overcame their anti-participationist attitude. Déat, for example, saw the 1936 elections through the lens of 1932, anticipating the central question once again being socialist—"neo" and "archo"—ministerial participation in a Radical-led government.²¹⁶ This was, of course, a familiar frame for the neo-socialists, inscribed in them as a sort of strategic reflex. Neo-socialism had been forged, after all, in the crucible of the factional conflict over Socialist ministerial participation provoked by the 1932 elections, and the neo-socialists never ceased to decry what they believed had been a missed opportunity to form a constructive government of the left. Déat and his comrades counted on 1936 being a redux of 1932, but this time with the neo-socialists available to play a critical mediating role between the Radicals and Socialists.

The elections, however, did not live up to the neo-socialists' expectations. A proposal to run designated Popular Front candidates in every constituency—which likely would have

²¹⁵ The 354 seats won in 1932 technically gave the left a parliamentary majority, but the anti-participationist attitude of the SFIO prevented the constitution of a left-wing government.

²¹⁶ Marcel Déat "Demain, il faudra gouverner" *Paris-Demain* April 18 1936.

benefited the USR—was rejected by the other coalition parties.²¹⁷ Instead, each party ran its own candidates in the first round of voting, with the understanding that they would desist in favor of the best-placed Popular Front candidate in the second round. The neo-socialists thus had to fight for their position within the coalition. The first round results were inauspicious. For example, in what was widely condemned as a violation of the Popular Front spirit, the incumbent Déat stubbornly refused to withdraw his candidacy despite finishing behind the Communist challenger in his Paris district.²¹⁸ Still, on the eve of the second round Déat predicted that the USR would increase its representation from 45 deputies to about 50. The Communists, he thought, would also win about 50 to 60 seats, with the Socialists and Radicals on equal footing with over 100 seats each.²¹⁹

The neo-socialists were not alone in more or less predicting a repeat of 1932. The Communists, too, expected—and indeed hoped for—the Popular Front to bring the Radicals to power with ministerial and parliamentary support from their junior coalition partners. But when the second round results came in, they heralded not only a victory for the left, but a shifting balance of power within it (Figure 8). The SFIO overcame the Radicals as the premier party of the left, increasing their total from 97 to 146 seats while the Radicals lost 43 to go down to 116. The Popular Front was especially profitable for the Communists, who went from only having 10 deputies to having 72. In contrast, the USR did much worse than expected, losing 19 seats to go down from 45 to 26—proportionally a bigger loss than that suffered by the Radicals. So although the elections were a resounding victory for the Popular Front, only the Socialists and

²¹⁷ "A propos de 'discipline électorale'" *Paris-Demain* April 18 1936.

²¹⁸ Déat excused his decision to maintain his candidacy by citing the lack of any reactionary threat in his district. Déat's sour grapes petulance is summed up by the title of his articles "Le Rassemblement populaire n'a rien à voir dans l'élection du 20e" [The *Rassmblement Populaire* has nothing to do with the election in the 20th] *Paris-Demain* May 2 1936.

²¹⁹ Marcel Déat "Vers les difficultés" *Paris-Demain* May 2 1936.

Communists increased their score from 1932, often at the expense of the Radicals and the USR. But while the Radicals at least remained the second party of the Popular Front, the USR had unambiguously been reduced to a marginal component within the coalition. Moreover, this marginalization was not limited to the electoral arena. For example, soon after the constitution of the Popular Front government in June, the USR was already complaining to the SFIO about not being invited to a joint Popular Front meeting.²²⁰ Indeed, indicative of the USR's descent to marginality is the fact that most historical accounts of the French Popular Front rarely, if ever, even mention the USR, despite it being a founding member of the coalition.

Figure 8. Results of the 1936 legislative elections for the left

Party	Seats before elections	Seats after elections	Net difference
SFIO	97	146	+49
PCF	10	72	+62
PUP and dissidents	11	10	-1
USR	45	26	-19
Independents	21	9	-12
Radicals	158	115	-43

The Parti d'Unité Proletarienne (PUP) was a party of Communist dissidents. It would integrate into the SFIO in January 1937.

Not only did the USR in general do poorly relative to others in the Popular Front, the USR candidates most closely identified with neo-socialism—i.e. those who had been in the PSdF—did particularly poorly. For example, even prominent neo-socialist leaders such as Déat, Montagnon, and Alexandre Varenne lost their re-election bids.²²¹ Of the 37 incumbent USR deputies running for re-election, only 22 returned to the Chamber. Among those USR incumbents with origins in the PSdF, the numbers were worse: just 10 out of 20 won re-election.

²²⁰ It seems that the Seine federation of the SFIO had simply forgotten to invite the USR! "Une lettre de l'USR de la Seine à la Fédération SFIO et sa réponse" *Le Front* June 27 1936.

²²¹ Déat and Montagnon both lost to a Communist challenger, whereas Varenne lost to the right-wing Parti Agraire.

The same numbers for those who came to the USR from the reformist Parti Socialiste Français and Parti Républicain-Socialiste were, respectively, 7 out of 11 and 5 out of 6. The weight of the original neo-socialists within the USR parliamentary group was consequently reduced, with only 10 out of the USR's 25 elected deputies tracing their past to the PSdF. The neo-socialists' electoral disaster was such that Paul Faure, their old nemesis within the SFIO, was able to gloat that neo-socialism's "liquidation" was complete.²²² When Blum formed his government, only 3 out of 36 cabinet portfolios went to the USR despite the Communists refraining from participating in the government. Of these, only Paul Ramadier, who did not have a reputation as a neo-socialist ideologue, had been a member of the PSdF. For the neo-socialists, then, what had initially seemed to be a propitious vindication of their doctrinal line ended with their further marginalization.

The USR's disappointing results were the consequence of deeper problems for neo-socialism. The PSdF's merger into the USR was already an index of the neo-socialists' failure to build a mass movement. Even the middle classes, whom the neo-socialists attempted to cultivate as their distinctive clientele, largely kept their distance and remained attached to their historic representatives in the Parti Radical, whose economic liberalism better resonated with their values than the planist interventionism of the neo-socialists (Ruhmann 1989). The merger with other independent socialists, moreover, diluted the specifically neo-socialist element in the USR, which effectively became a party of reformist parliamentary notables with few organizational resources and no popular base outside a handful of localities. The USR's decision to participate in the centrist Sarraut government only a few months before the 1936 elections only reinforced the image of the party as one composed of impatient ministerialists with little regard for doctrinal principles. The congenital participationism of the neo-socialists and the USR, as it turns out, was

²²² Paul Faure "La réaction et le fascisme sont écrasés!" *Le Populaire* May 4 1936.

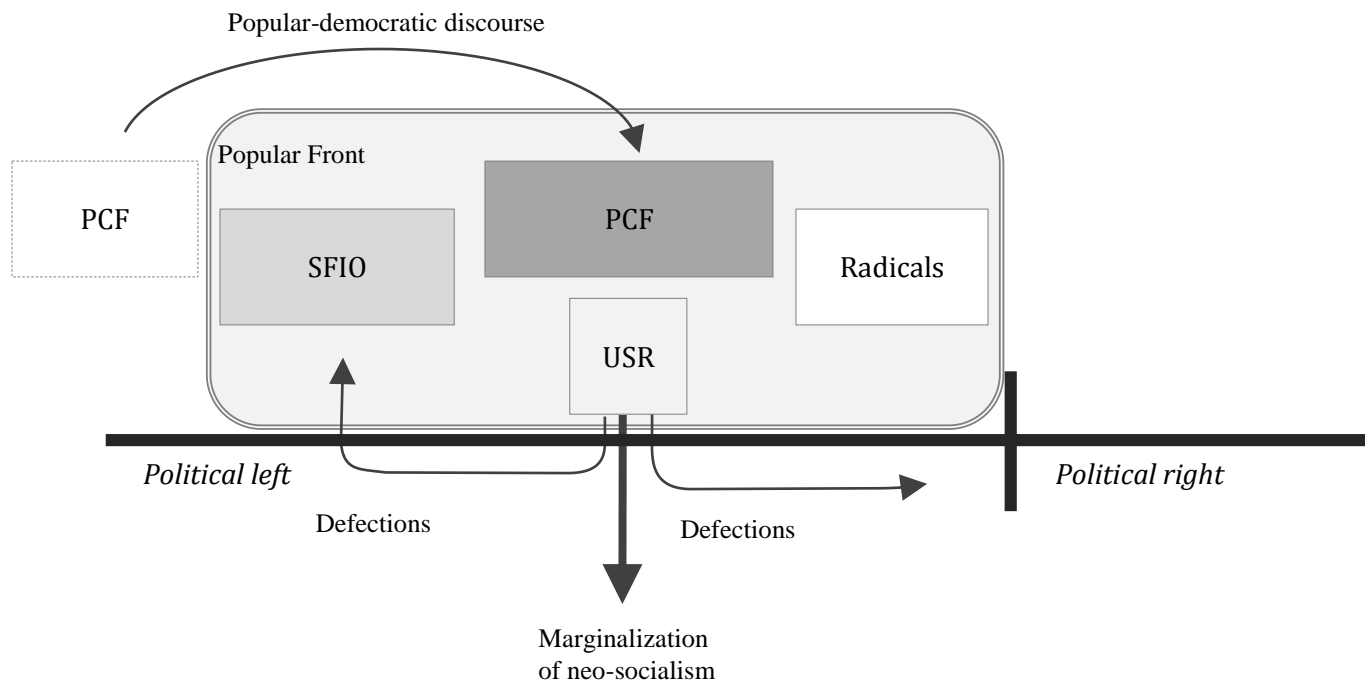
out of step with the mood of the electorate in 1936, which favored the consistently oppositional Socialists and Communists over those who had compromised themselves as parties of government.

The fundamental problem for the neo-socialists, however, was their inability to secure a distinctive identity for themselves within the Popular Front. As Bourdieu argues, marks of distinction "produce existence in a universe where to exist is to be different" (Bourdieu [1992] 1996: 157). Politics being precisely such a universe, it was the neo-socialists' increasing difficulty in differentiating themselves from the other parties of the Popular Front that condemned them to a marginal political existence. So, for example, neo-socialist pretensions to speak for the middle classes ran up against the latter's continued loyalty to the Radicals, the traditional party of the democratic and republican plebs. Additionally, the USSR's reformist and ministerialist bent did little to mark it off from the party of government *par excellence*. As for the SFIO, the constitution of the Popular Front coalition finally marked the party's acceptance of the principle of ministerial participation, thus removing the issue that was at the origin of the 1933 neo-socialist schism. The unexpected victory of the Socialists in the 1936 elections rendered the question of participation even more moot as they passed directly to constituting a Popular Front government under their leadership.

Most significant, however, was the stunning tactical turn of the PCF in muting the language of class struggle and adopting a popular-democratic line. Though the neo-socialists initially welcomed this as a vindication of their past, it in fact benefitted the Communists at the expense of the neo-socialists. As discussed earlier, the PCF had outflanked the SFIO to its right and thereby occupied the discursive space between the Socialists and the Radicals that the neo-socialists had historically claimed for themselves. But by rhetorically embracing democracy, the

nation, and the middle classes, the Communists did not simply take the neo-socialists' lead. Rather, they effectively usurped the neo-socialists' position in the field, thus depriving the neo-socialists of any distinctive *raison d'être* within the Popular Front (Figure 9). Without a strong claim to discursive distinction, the USR had little power within the coalition. Organizationally the weakest party of the Popular Front, it was easily upstaged by the PCF, which had a mass base. Moreover, the initiative—both institutional and discursive—for the Popular Front had come from the PCF, not the neo-socialists, and as such it was the Communists who accumulated the symbolic profits of the Popular Front mystique. Contrary to neo-socialist hopes, then, it was the Communists who emerged as the hegemonic standard-bearers of the Popular Front's popular-democratic brand of socialism. Ironically, it was precisely because the stronger and more dynamic Communists appropriated central elements of neo-socialist discourse that Déat and his comrades found themselves marginalized within the Popular Front. The Popular Front thus did not so much represent a vindication of neo-socialism as it did its displacement.

Figure 9. Displacement of the neo-socialists within the Popular Front, 1935-1936



The marginalization of neo-socialism was both symptomatic of, and further reinforced, its fragmentation and decomposition as a distinct doctrinal position within the political field. As early as July 1935, when the Popular Front took shape, the neo-socialists began suffering defections. For example, Adéodat Compère-Morel, Paul Perrin, and Louis Perceau—all members of the PSdF central committee—no longer saw the need to remain in the party with the Popular Front finally bringing unity to the left along the lines they had previously advocated.²²³ In some cases, defectors returned to the SFIO, now that it had accepted its responsibility to govern. Such was the case for Louis Vallon, one of the more prominent neo-socialist intellectuals, who rejoined the Socialists in February 1936. Other leaders, such as Henry Hauck and Emile Cresp, reintegrated after the Socialists came to power in June. For some neo-socialists of the first hour,

²²³ Marcel Déat "Gros problèmes et lourdes tâches" *La Vie Socialiste* July 13 1935.

then, the success of the Popular Front had effectively obviated the need to maintain a distinctive neo-socialist identity.

Defections also ran in the other direction. Disappointed with the June 1936 election results, some—such as Paul Marion, Alfred Fabre-Luce, and François Gaucher—left the USR to join Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français (PPF), a recently formed national-populist party of Communist dissidents that would soon turn toward fascism. For those who came to neo-socialism during its equivocal *fascisant* phase in 1934 and were associated with politically ambiguous outlets like *L'Homme Nouveau*, neo-socialism's return to parliamentary politics with the creation of the USR and its integration into the Popular Front were disappointing developments, and they looked elsewhere to recapture what they saw as its lost youthful *élan* (Burrin [1986] 2003: 272).²²⁴

The Popular Front thus provoked an identity crisis for neo-socialism. Its independent existence had already been compromised with the merger of the PSdF into the USR. And although Déat remained secretary-general of the USR, after the disastrous showing in the elections the significance of neo-socialism within the party, and the Popular Front more generally, was only further diminished. As neo-socialism struggled to maintain its distinctive identity within the shifting conjuncture of the Popular Front, it began fraying at the edges. For those who remained committed to the democratic left, the Popular Front essentially rendered neo-socialism redundant. For those non-conformists who rejected the traditional left, neo-socialism's absorption into the Popular Front had rendered the former irrelevant. Even among those neo-socialists who remained within the USR, neo-socialism became a much less salient feature of their political identity. Thus after July 1935, there was a precipitous drop in references

²²⁴ For discussion of the internal debates within the USR regarding its attitude toward the Popular Front, see Marcel Déat "Notre position" *Le Front* May 23 1936 and "Au Conseil fédéral de la Seine Marcel Déat et Montagnon exposent les difficultés de la situation politique" *Le Front* May 23 1936.

to "neo-socialism" or "neo-socialist" in the PSdF and USR press, and uses of the label as a self-identifying marker virtually stopped.²²⁵ In being reduced to a minor parliamentary support for the Popular Front, the neo-socialists had also lost their political identity.

In a revealing September 1935 article in *L'Homme Nouveau*, Georges Roditi foresaw this crisis just as the PSdF was preparing to dissolve itself into the USR. Speaking for the non-conformist wing of the party, the article was a bitter attack on Déat and the neo-socialist leadership. To Roditi, the formation of the USR and its incorporation into the Popular Front amounted to the "liquidation of neo-socialism." He accused the PSdF of betraying its revolutionary calling and derisively remarked that the neo-socialists had now merely "discovered radicalism." The party had "distanced itself...from its original socialism and 'fascism'" and had become just another independent socialist party with ministerialist pretensions situated between the SFIO and the Radicals. In fact, he argued, the PSdF had never lived up to its promise and its commitment to neo-socialist doctrine had been inconsistent, and he accused it of settling instead for a "purely tactical" conception of politics. The party had failed to break with the tradition of the Second International and had never drawn the full consequences of its slogan of "Order, Authority, Nation." One could thus say, Roditi wrote, that "there had never been constituted within the Parti Socialiste de France a neo-socialist doctrine, that it had never known whether a given idea or attitude was or was not neo-socialist."²²⁶ Roditi's article was a polemic meant to claim the mantle of authentic neo-socialism for *L'Homme Nouveau*, but in doing so he had perceptively identified the arc of official neo-socialism: from its brief heyday in 1934, it had begun descending into a state of terminal decomposition by the end of 1935.

²²⁵ The main organs of the PSdF were *La Vie Socialiste*, which ran until July 1935, and *Paris-Demain*, which continued publication until May 1936. The USR's main paper was *Le Front*, which ran until December 1938. Mentions of "neo-socialism" and "neo-socialist" did not completely disappear after July 1935, but they tended to apply to the past or to others, such as Adrien Marquet's breakaway Parti Néosocialiste de France in Bordeaux.

²²⁶ Georges Roditi "Mort ou naissance du néo-socialisme?" *L'Homme Nouveau* September 1 1935.

Conclusion

Alain Bergnouioux has written that there is "not much sense" in speaking of a neo-socialism after 1934 (Bergnouioux 1977: 406). Though one may quibble with that periodization, it is clear that one year into the existence of the Popular Front, neo-socialism had virtually ceased to exist as a distinctive political identity. Marginalized by the Popular Front dynamic, the neo-socialist leadership began to fragment, and those who persisted in the USR not only saw the influence of neo-socialism diminish, they themselves gradually abandoned the label. Though Déat remained head of the USR and though he and his collaborators would continue to comment on political affairs through the Popular Front's demise in 1938, they had been dispossessed of any real power and were essentially reduced to political irrelevance. Though frequently critical of the Popular Front, they were also consigned by the USR's official support for it. Because the Popular Front had effectively monopolized the left political space, to break with the Popular Front would have meant breaking with the left and being thrust into a political no man's land. Under these conditions, Déat and others had little choice but to fall into the background and wait for a more propitious conjuncture to re-assert their ambitions. When they finally did re-enter the political mainstage in the late 1930s, however, it would be on a basis other than neo-socialism.

The evolution of neo-socialism during the Popular Front period calls into question the presumption of a straight line between neo-socialism and the fascism of the RNP. The 1930s were not characterized by the gradual accentuation of neo-socialism's supposedly fascist tendencies. Rather, this period witnessed the marginalization and decomposition of neo-socialism as an ideological and political entity. This, moreover, followed its rallying to the republican and democratic anti-fascism of the Popular Front. Even the equivocal *fascisant* phase of neo-socialism that preceded the Popular Front was an adaptation to the political conjuncture,

not the expression of some neo-socialist essence. Given the vicissitudes of the neo-socialists' commitments in the 1930s, one must conclude that neo-socialist ideology as such has little explanatory value in accounting for their subsequent alignment with Nazi fascism. Through a situational and relational analysis, I have attempted to show that the logic of the neo-socialists' position-takings was driven not by any inherent ideational features of neo-socialism, but by the state of the political field. But if anything, it was precisely the failure of neo-socialism to implant itself politically, and not its progressive maturation, that made Déat and his comrades "available" for their fascist adventure.

Part III.

The Fascist Spiral: The RNP and the Occupation

Several years of mounting European tensions finally came to a head with the German invasion of Poland on September 1 1939. Two days later, France and the United Kingdom declared war against Germany. The war began in earnest in May 1940 with the German offensive through the Ardennes Forest, and by the beginning of June the overwhelmed and outmaneuvered French forces were forced to evacuate the continent via Dunkirk. With French defensive lines collapsing, the Wehrmacht marched into Paris on June 14. On June 16 Paul Reynaud was replaced as head of government by Philippe Pétain, who immediately sought out armistice conditions rather than continue the fight from the colonies. The Armistice of June 22 1940 divided France into a German occupied Northern zone, including Paris and the entire Atlantic coast, and a rump "free" zone in the South over which the French government retained control. On July 10, the exiled National Assembly met in the spa town of Vichy and voted to grant constitutional powers to Philippe Pétain, burying the Third Republic and inaugurating the authoritarian *État Français* [French State]. Thus began the combined dramas of the German Occupation and Vichy France.

It was in occupied Paris that Déat founded the Rassemblement National Populaire [National Popular Rally] (RNP) in February 1941. Though it would evolve and radicalize over time, from its inception the RNP conformed to the image of a fascist party. Its initial leadership included not only Déat, but also Eugène Deloncle, who had previously headed the far-right terrorist organization known as La Cagoule [The Hood]. Even, or rather especially, after the October 1941 split between Déat and Deloncle, the RNP sought to remake France along national-socialist lines, and mimicked the organizational and stylistic elements of Nazism. Indeed, even among those French historians who have tended to minimize the existence of a native French fascism, the RNP is among the few organizations whose fascist credentials are uncontested (e.g. Milza 1987, Rémond 1966).¹

The RNP went on to become one of the two most important collaborationist parties in occupied France.² Historians typically differentiate the diverse modalities of collaboration that existed in both the Northern and "free" zones. Thus Stanley Hoffmann (1968) has distinguished between what he calls "collaboration with Germany" and "collaborationism with the Nazis." Likewise Bertram Gordon (1980, 1993), taking up an opposition circulating during the Occupation itself, distinguishes the "collaborator" from the "collaborationist." Many versions of this distinction exist, but what they all point to is the difference between a pragmatic political, economic, or administrative collaboration mainly oriented toward safeguarding what were thought to be French interests within the framework of Franco-German interstate relations, and an ideological collaboration with Nazism that sought to remake France in the mold of the Axis

¹ For a particularly objectionable recent rehash—from the point of view of the "consensus" French historiography—of the tired old debate on the existence or not of a French fascism, see Berstein and Winock (2014). Following Dobry's (2003, 2005) critique of the "classificatory logic", I am less interested in fixing an essentialized definition of fascism and applying it to the RNP than I am in tracing the actual position-takings and alignments of the RNP within the political field. Nonetheless, I use the term "fascist" loosely in describing the RNP because such a designation remains largely uncontested. This folk usage of a term like "fascism" might seem problematic, but as will become clear what matters to my argument is ultimately the RNP's increasing alignment with, and mimicry of, Nazism.

² The other being Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français [French Popular Party] (PPF).

powers and was committed to the Nazi project of a *Neuordnung Europas* [European New Order]. While the Vichy regime has become synonymous with collaboration in the former sense, occupied Paris was the hotbed of the collaborationist phenomenon.³ In their zeal to bring about a national-socialist revolution in France under the aegis of Nazi European hegemony, the Parisian collaborationists were hostile not only to the old Third Republic, but to Vichy as well. Indeed, Parisian collaborationists frequently castigated Vichy for what they considered to be its social conservatism and *attentisme*, and pressed the Pétain regime to go ever further in committing frankly and wholeheartedly to collaboration. Thus, even within the sordid history of French collaboration, the collaborationists were in the vanguard. It was leadership of this vanguard to which the RNP aspired.

The fact that Déat and some other leaders of the RNP had been neo-socialists in the interwar period has led many commentators to emphasize ideological continuities connecting neo-socialism to the fascism of the RNP. The strong form of this argument has been made most forcefully by Sternhell ([1983] 1986), for whom there was no essential difference between neo-socialist and RNP discourse. Sternhell is in the minority on this point, but even his critics have tended to treat the RNP as a kind of refracted neo-socialism, and have consequently also privileged the affinities between the two. The RNP did in fact seek to present a profile of coherence and consistency by drawing on Déat's neo-socialist past. Yet what is even more striking are the discontinuities. Even compared to the equivocal *fascisant* neo-socialism of 1934,

³ As Robert Paxton (1972) has shown in his landmark history of the Vichy regime, this distinction often breaks down in practice. He shows, for example, that Vichy collaborated willingly with Nazi Germany. Moreover, Vichy did not limit itself to state collaboration, but used the Occupation to launch its own conservative revolution. Finally, the Vichy regime became radicalized as the war went on and incorporated collaborationist elements. Nonetheless, the distinction remains valid, both because it still indicates an important difference in degree in their commitment to collaboration, and because historical actors themselves recognized it.

the RNP expressed a violence and nastiness that would make it unmistakably fascist by most definitions.

In other words, the RNP was fascist in a way that went well beyond what anybody could plausibly claim about neo-socialism. Its doctrine was explicitly anti-Semitic, anti-Bolshevik, and-Masonic, and anti-parliamentary, and it openly called for the construction of a "totalitarian civilization" (Déat 1942). References to "blood" and "race" became common in RNP discourse, and the party advocated measures of "physiological, economic, and political protection" against "inassimilable or deleterious racial elements" (RNP 1943: 30-31). The RNP aligned itself completely with the Hitlerian project, and Déat urged Frenchmen to go "beyond collaboration" by participating in the Nazis' "European revolution."⁴

The RNP not only sounded like a fascist party, it increasingly looked like one too. Over the course of the Occupation, it adopted many of the stylistic trappings of fascism, such as military-style uniforms, the Nazi salute, and coordinated militia displays. The party also erected a leadership cult around Déat, who was hailed as the absolute *Chef* of the movement. Even the party insignia resembled a swastika. Not only was the RNP fascist in a generic sense, it specifically emulated Nazism.

By the time the tide of the war turned in favor of the Allies, the RNP's identification with Nazism was total. It took its place loyally behind Nazi Germany in what Enzo Traverso (2016) has recently called the "European Civil War". The RNP encouraged its members to volunteer to fight against the Soviets on the Eastern Front, and urged them at home to join the notorious Milice in order to put down the Resistance and resist the Allied invasion. In the past, Déat had repeatedly warned of the prospect of civil war, the prevention of which had been central to his conception of neo-socialism. He now welcomed such a prospect: "France will, if necessary, be

⁴ Marcel Déat "Au delà de la collaboration" *L'Œuvre* January 7 1942.

covered with concentration camps and the execution squads will operate without pause. The birth of a new regime is accomplished with forceps and pain" (Déat quoted in Azéma 1984: 138). As the Allies made their way across Normandy, Déat wrote:

Allow me to affirm that I do not feel neutral at all in this *de facto* non-belligerence to which I am reduced. After four years of a political combat, inseparable from military events, I am as little disposed as possible to reduce the French reality to an infinitely flat two dimensional space. If I had to interpret the legal situation of my country, in June '44, as some will try to do, I would immediately request the honor to fight in the uniform of the Waffen SS and I would leave here my ministerial responsibilities...Will I comport myself as a neutral with regard to the [German] soldiers who protect our soil and with whom, in this formidable and solemn adventure of History, I feel full and total solidarity?...I am not surprised, nor am I indignant nor even impatient. Because events are marching irresistibly and they will sweep away in the coming days the vestiges of *attentisme*. It is in the absolute logic of the situation that France hardens in its turn. The ordeal has only begun and it will be harsher than we imagine.⁵

The RNP collapsed with the Liberation of France, but Déat would stand with Nazi Germany until the bitter end of the war, fleeing to Sigmaringen in September 1944 with a motley crew of ultra-collaborationists, convinced against all odds that he would return triumphantly to France on the back of a resurgent Wehrmacht.

Much of what gave the RNP the unmistakable resonance of fascism was in fact new to Déat and other neo-socialists who joined the RNP. As I have shown in previous chapters, throughout most of its history, neo-socialism had been firmly oriented against a perceived fascist menace, most obviously during its emergence in 1933 and during the Popular Front. As such, the virulent fascism to which Déat and his comrades succumbed should still come as a surprise to observers, no matter what underlying continuities between neo-socialist and RNP discourse one identifies. After all, Déat had been a member of the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels

⁵ Marcel Déat "Je ne suis pas neutre" *L'Œuvre* June 18 1944.

Antifascistes [Vigilance Committee of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals] (CVIA) only several years before he threw in his lot with the Axis powers.

A couple more specific points bear mentioning too. One index of Déat's transformation is his attitude toward "totalitarianism." In its emulation of Nazism, the RNP came to explicitly embrace the notion of a "totalitarian" France. Yet as late as 1939, Déat and his allies had repudiated "totalitarianism," and repeatedly disavowed the fascist states as models for France to follow. In December 1935, Déat wrote that France, due to its individualist political culture, "was not and [would] never be a totalitarian State, a sort of dogmatic Moloch before which we would have nothing to do but bow down in a severe, collective, and exhilarating discipline."⁶ Such statements were common in the neo-socialist press throughout the years, even in the politically equivocal *L'Homme Nouveau*, with the neo-socialists regularly condemning the "totalitarian spirit."

Another index marking the RNP's rupture from its neo-socialist past is its adoption of racial and anti-Semitic discourse during the Occupation. While some RNP leaders had made stray anti-Semitic comments in the pre-war years, on the whole there is little evidence to suggest that anti-Semitism was a significant factor in pushing neo-socialists and others into the RNP. In fact, many RNP leaders had previously been active in organizations whose mission it was to combat anti-Semitism and racism. For example, Déat, Maurice Levillain, Georges Dumoulin, and Ludovic Zoretti—all members of the RNP permanent commission in 1943—had participated frequently in the activities of the Ligue Internationale Contre l'Antisémitisme [International League Against Anti-Semitism] (LICA). Paul Perrin, a former neo-socialist and RNP leader, had even sat on the LICA central committee. As early as April 1933, Déat spoke out specifically against Nazi anti-Semitism. In November 1935, Déat denounced the Nuremberg Race Laws and

⁶ Marcel Déat "Pourquoi nous avons refusé la confiance à M. Laval" *Paris Demain* December 14 1935.

declared that "there was nothing more completely foreign to French thought, to French reality, and to the history" of France than the scientifically dubious anti-Semitism that had drawn "an entire people" into a "kind of savage dynamism" (Déat quoted in Epstein 2008: 198). Indeed, according to Simon Epstein, Déat was one of the French politicians who "protested the most against the anti-Semitism and racism of the 1930s" (Epstein 2008: 199).⁷ Anti-Semitism thus does not explain Déat and his allies' collaborationist engagements. However, its presence within RNP discourse does register the discontinuous nature of their fascist transformation under the Occupation.

The puzzle of the neo-socialists is thus not just how neo-socialism could possibly entail fascism, but more specifically how a group of anti-fascists could come to identify with Nazism. Even if we allow that certain continuous strands in their thinking shaped the contours of their collaborationism, this reversal in their orientation toward Nazism and fascism remains to be explained, and this alone should throw into doubt what I have called the continuity thesis. Moreover, there was enough that was new within RNP discourse that it makes little sense to reduce it to neo-socialism, or even select features of it. In his critique of explanatory strategies privileging ideological affinities, Ivan Ermakoff argues that such accounts are typically predicated on the notion that "conjunctures precipitate latent dispositions" (Ermakoff 2008: 176). In my case, the disjuncture between the commitments—both discursive and practical—of neo-socialism and the RNP suggests that the Occupation did not simply provide an opportunity for prior ideological dispositions—"subterranean" or otherwise (Burrin [1986] 2003)—to come to the fore, per the continuity thesis. Rather, it set the context from which new fascist commitments

⁷ For biographical profiles highlighting the former anti-racist activities of other RNP leaders, see Epstein (2008: 196-221).

emerged.⁸ Finally, at the level of personnel, the continuity thesis is further belied by the fact that not all neo-socialists joined the RNP, and not all RNP leaders had been neo-socialists. What, then, explains the transformation of these erstwhile anti-fascists into fascists?

Despite the clear reversal in their sympathy for the fascist regimes, the leaders of the RNP cultivated an illusion of continuity between past and present. Their fascist engagement during the Occupation was therefore not a "conversion" in the classical sense, in that it did not entail an explicit renunciation of past belief (Nock 1933). The "idealist/intellectualist bias" is thus also inappropriate in accounting for the RNP's fascism. There was no precise moment of fascist ideological conversion which then subsequently determined the concrete position-takings of Déat and his comrades. In fact, the issue of pinpointing when exactly Déat can be said to have become a fascist is something of a red herring, presuming as it does an essentialist definition of fascism. Rather than indulging in this "classificatory logic," as Dobry (2003, 2005) has called it, I argue that it is more productive to look at the actual process by which Déat and others came gradually to identify with Nazism within the specific relational context of the Occupation. Just as it did with his neo-socialism of the 1930s, this kind of situational analysis reveals that Déat's fascism was continually reworked in conjunction with a rapidly shifting political field. It was through a contingent and path-dependent process that he went from being an anti-fascist pacifist in 1939 to a full-throated Nazi sympathizer in 1942. In short, Déat and his comrades in the RNP did not become collaborationists because they were already convinced fascists; rather, these former anti-fascists came to identify with Nazism in and through their collaborationist engagements as their position in the political field became more and more aligned with, and dependent on, Nazi power.

⁸ Compare this to Burrin's claim that the defeat "crystallized an ensemble of fascistization" that the pre-war years had only revealed in "rudiments" (Burrin [1986] 2003: 371).

Chapter 5.

The Making of the RNP: Pacifism, Collaboration, and the "Totalitarian" Embrace

Neo-Socialism and the RNP

In previous chapters, I have tried to show that neo-socialism did not necessarily entail fascism. Neo-socialist discourse was iteratively reworked as the political conjuncture shifted, only to fade away during the Popular Front period. As such, it makes little analytical sense to posit a straight line between neo-socialism and the fascism of the RNP, as if the later were simply the culmination of tendencies inherent in the former. Yet the coupled fallacies of the "continuity thesis" and the "intellectualist/idealist bias" have been a persistent, if often implicit, presence in historical accounts of Déat's political transformation. Indeed, the tendency has been to foreground the neo-socialist roots of the RNP, with the presumption that it was neo-socialism itself that determined the fascist engagements of Déat and his lieutenants.

To be fair, extant accounts have not invented this continuity out of whole cloth, but have only reproduced the self-image of the RNP leadership. Déat, for example, presents a largely consistent trajectory in his memoirs, written in exile immediately after World War II (Déat

1989).⁹ In its published materials, the RNP also stressed its connection to the neo-socialism of the 1930s. As one RNP pamphlet put it: "When one considers generally the political action of Marcel Déat, one realizes that he, for more than twenty years, has supported the same combat." Déat had always been a revolutionary and a socialist. The structural reforms that he had "so many times underlined since the armistice" were the same ones he had advocated "over the course of his first electoral campaigns." The measures outlined in the RNP's January 1943 "Plan d'Action Gouvernementale" were "for the most part already indicated" in *Perspectives socialistes*, published in 1930. The latter had shown how to "realize a genuine socialism by socializing capitalist profit and power." It was, the RNP claimed, principles similar to these that, "three years later, Adolf Hitler started to apply." At the same time, Déat founded "the Neo-Socialist movement, in which historians will doubtless one day see the first French attempt at the organization of the social and economic machine according to the new principles aroused by the Revolutions of the XXth century." For ten years, Déat had fought tirelessly against capitalism and Bolshevism. In 1943, the "major objectives [had] not changed": "to institute a National Socialism; to put the economy in order; to put up a definitive barrage against the power of trusts and the communist menace; to bring the French people to European cooperation." One fact was "characteristic": "in the principal writings or discourses that punctuate the political career of Marcel Déat, one finds the same preoccupations, the same appeals, often the same words." Whether it was his attachment to socialism, his call for a "National Revolution," or his agitation in favor of structural political reforms, Déat's political commitments supposedly "always followed a fine straight line" (RNP 1943: 23-26).

What are we to make of such statements? There is no doubt that the RNP reached back into the past of some of its leaders, particularly Déat, to present an image of consistency. In

⁹ Of course, the myth of a coherent self is a conceit typical of autobiographical writing (Smith and Watson 2001).

doing so, it revived the language of neo-socialism, or at least elements of it, and deployed it within a new political context. Déat and other erstwhile neo-socialists continued to draw on the categories of the past to make sense of their political situation. Even though neo-socialism had become less salient to their political identities, they never explicitly renounced it, and it continued to inform their political frame of reference. In that sense the fascism of the RNP did not entail a classic "conversion"—i.e. they did not define themselves against the past but rather repurposed it. That neo-socialism remained a discursive resource for the RNP, however, does not mean that it determined the RNP's fascist commitments. Playing up its neo-socialist heritage was a way for the RNP to legitimate itself as an authentically French movement, particularly under the fraught conditions of foreign occupation. Yet this was essentially a matter of self-presentation. The existence of a certain linguistic continuity between neo-socialism and the RNP does not necessarily imply a continuity in meaning. Nor does it necessarily suggest a causal relationship between prior neo-socialist convictions and a pro-Nazi engagement with the RNP.

At the personnel level, the connection between neo-socialism and the RNP is in fact more tenuous than is usually supposed. Of course, Déat represents the strongest such link, and his significance should not be diminished. The leading intellectual and political figure of neo-socialism, Déat became the absolute chieftain of the RNP, a party which existed largely as a vehicle for his ambitions and which increasingly developed a leadership cult around him. But beyond Déat, the leading neo-socialists were mostly only marginally, if at all, involved in the RNP. Barthélémy Montagnon, for example, took no leadership role within the RNP despite having participated in a preparatory meeting for its creation in January 1941.¹⁰ Montagnon himself denied ever having been a member of the RNP (Montagnon 1969). Recent research by Gilles Morin suggests, however, that he likely was a member, and that in any case he was at least

¹⁰ Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* January 24 1941.

a fellow-traveller, participating in various initiatives by the RNP and its auxiliary organizations. Still, he was discreet enough in his engagement that he was acquitted in the post-war purge trials, and even managed to re-join the SFIO.¹¹

Adrien Marquet was also present for the creation of the RNP in 1941, but he played an even lesser role in the organization than Montagnon.¹² Marquet's personal ambitions had frequently led him to cut an independent path, like when he broke away from the PSdF to found his own local neo-socialist party in the Gironde after chafing under even the minimal discipline demanded by the PSdF. Favorable to Franco-German collaboration, Marquet became Minister of Interior in the first Vichy government. Sacked in September 1940, Marquet subsequently concentrated on administering his mayoral fiefdom in Bordeaux, and turned down an opportunity to join Laval's 1942 government, judging the offered post to be a demotion from his previous office (Brana and Dusseau 2001).¹³ Marquet was clearly a Nazi sympathizer, and has been described by Lucien Rebatet in his memoirs as "the most collaborationist mayor of France" (Rebatet 1976: 161). Furthermore, Marquet had regular contact with German embassy officials and the SS, and seems to have done little in the first years of the Occupation to protect Bordelais Jews from deportation or to mitigate German retaliation against *résistants*. Still, Marquet never joined the RNP, which allowed him to maintain a lower profile precisely as the turning of the war's tide pushed desperate ultra-collaborationists toward a more robust identification with Nazi interests. Indeed, consummate opportunist that he had always been, Marquet eventually began to use his influence to save several dozen prisoners from execution and deportation—but only when

¹¹ Barthélémy Montagnon has often been confused with his brother, Paul, who headed the RNP's paramilitary wing, the Légion Nationale Populaire, and sat on the party's permanent commission. Paul Montagnon, however, had not been a neo-socialist. The confusion is likely due to the fact that Barthélémy was a more or less prominent political figure in the 1930s, whereas Paul was not. On Barthélémy Montagnon, see (Le Maitron 2016).

¹² Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* January 24 1941.

¹³ Marquet was offered the Ministry of Labor. Laval kept the Ministry of Interior for himself.

the German defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 virtually assured an Allied victory (Brana and Dusseau 2001).

Of the three figures who with their speeches at the 1933 SFIO Congress were considered to be the founders of the neo-socialist movement, only Déat became a prominent leader of the RNP. As noted earlier, only eight of the nineteen members of the PSdF's executive bureau whose political trajectories I was able to reconstruct were associated in some way with the RNP (Figure 5). This number includes Marquet and Montagnon. It also includes Léon Thoyot, a neo-socialist lawyer who briefly headed the Amiens chapter of the RNP but quickly turned against collaboration and aided the persecuted Communist deputy of Amiens (Le Maitron 2016). Of the rest, few beyond Déat played a prominent role in the RNP organization.

Even among the more conspicuously doctrinaire neo-socialists, outcomes varied. Max Bonnafous, who had written a strident preface to the volume collecting the 1933 speeches of Déat, Marquet, and Montagnon, became Marquet's chief of staff in 1940, then prefect in Constantine and Marseille, and finally Minister of Agriculture and Supplies in Pierre Laval's second Vichy government in 1942. Bonnafous was thus aligned with Vichy's policy of collaboration, but he did not join the RNP in its Nazification. In fact, just as the RNP and the Vichy regime were becoming more radicalized, Bonnafous stepped down from the government, and his case in the post-war purge trials was eventually dismissed due to services rendered to the Resistance.

But if Bonnafous was nonetheless politically compromised by the Occupation, such was not the case with Claude Bonnier, Henry Hauck, and Louis Vallon. All three had been neo-socialists of the first hour and participated actively in the political and intellectual life of the PSdF and USR. Among the more ideologically inclined neo-socialists, they had also expressed

many of neo-socialism's most equivocal tendencies. Yet all three ended up in the Resistance. Bonnier had been close to Déat, serving as his chief of staff in the Ministry of Aviation in 1936. An engineer in charge of the PSdF's "technical teams," he stressed the austere and technocratic dimensions of neo-socialism. He blamed an egoistic "search for comfort" and a "moral slackening" for what he saw as the corruption of democracy.¹⁴ Well into 1936, Bonnier was still echoing some of the themes from neo-socialism's anti-parliamentary heyday in 1934. For example, he called the existence of political parties in a democracy an "anachronism," and advocated empowering experts who would not "constantly have to prostitute their conscience" for the sake of re-election.¹⁵ Bonnier expressed anguish at seeing France outdone by neighboring regimes when it came to the realization of meaningful social reforms, and betrayed a qualified admiration for the "vitality" of those regimes.¹⁶

But despite a clear ambivalence toward the parliamentary regime, Bonnier would not follow Déat into collaboration. Instead, he joined Charles de Gaulle's Free French Forces following the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942. After making his way to London, he was flown clandestinely into Southwest France, where he helped to organize Resistance operations, including the sabotage of rail lines. Betrayed by an informant, he was captured by the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) in February 1944 and committed suicide by ingesting a cyanide pill sewn into his pants before he could be interrogated (Lapeyre-Mensignac et al. 1994).

Hauck had been a leading figure among the SFIO participationists and was especially close to Renaudel. Still, after the schism he shared in neo-socialism's equivocations. So, for

¹⁴ Claude Bonnier "Contre le relâchement moral: Rapport de Bonnier au Congrès au nom des Commissions des Plans" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

¹⁵ Claude Bonnier "Ou en sommes-nous? Pour une démocratie intelligente" *Le Front* September 17 1936.

¹⁶ Claude Bonnier "Peut-on, doit-on continuer ainsi?" *Le Front* October 15 1936.

example, he became a regular contributor to *L'Homme Nouveau*, whose non-conformist and *fascisant* twist on neo-socialism has been discussed above. In the PSdF, he was in charge of the party's "action teams," whose responsibilities included providing security at meetings and hawking propaganda, but which have been seen by some commentators as the germ of a fascistic paramilitary force (e.g. Grossman 1975: 21).¹⁷

Vallon was likewise a frequent contributor to *L'Homme Nouveau*. An engineer trained at the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique, Vallon also shared Bonnier's attraction to an austere and elitist conception of socialism. "Our Socialism repudiates dialectical facility and prizes effort," he wrote, "it wants to communicate to all men and especially to elites coming from the people, the will to action and sacrifice necessary for the harsh struggle that will be the construction of socialism." To the "intelligent" socialist critics skilled at explaining the world, Vallon preferred "competent people" imbued with a "sense of service and devotion to the collectivity."¹⁸ Vallon also represented the PSdF within the Groupe du 9 Juillet, a planist initiative whose questionable inclusion of industrial technocrats and right-wing nationalists led it to be repudiated by much of the left. The resulting Plan du 9 Juillet was at the forefront of the neo-socialists' 1934 efforts to position themselves as a movement for national renewal transcending traditional political divides. At a public meeting promoting the Plan, Vallon argued that Left-Right distinctions had been rendered obsolete by the evolution of the economy and called for the corporatist reorganization of production—an idea historically associated with the reactionary right. In defending the neo-

¹⁷ Some statements by Déat in early 1934 give credence to this interpretation. For example, he drew parallels between the "action teams" and the organization of the Nazi party, and raised the possibility that they would eventually "make up for certain foreseeable deficiencies in the regular forces of the state." In an infamous incident, Marquet and members of the Gironde "action teams" arrived at a spring 1934 party congress dressed in grey uniforms. This, however, provoked vigorous protests within the PSdF, and Hauck himself disavowed any fascist intentions (Goodman 1973: 209-213). Nonetheless, Hauck did not rule out the use of defensive violence, and the "action teams" were to clearly conceived as a fighting force. Henry Hauck "Formez vos équipes d'actions!" *La Vie Socialiste* February 24 1934.

¹⁸ Louis Vallon "Misère de la dialectique" *L'Homme Nouveau* November 1 1934.

socialists' participation in the controversial initiative, Vallon expressed as well as anybody the equivocal character of neo-socialism at that time. Right-wing youths "no longer want[ed] to be the guard dogs of bank vaults," he said, not any more than the neo-socialists "desire[d] to become the bodyguards of old politicians of the supposed left whom a healthy and prompt popular justice will enchain, on the same boat headed to the penal colony, to the financiers and fiddlers that they have protected and aided for so many years."¹⁹

Despite their complicity in the more dubious aspects of neo-socialism, Hauck and Vallon rejected collaboration and rallied to de Gaulle. Hauck, who was in London at the time of the French defeat, offered his services to the General one day after the famous June 18 1940 radio address declaring the continuation of the war. Occupying various labor related posts in the Free France government-in-exile, Hauck was also a democratizing force within it, fighting for republican institutions against the reactionary elements of de Gaulle's entourage (Le Maitron 2016). As for Vallon, he immediately linked up with the interior Resistance after returning to France from a German prisoner of war camp in 1941. He was active in the Socialist-dominated Libération-Nord network before fleeing to London in 1942 when an infiltrator compromised his safety.²⁰ There he became director of the non-military section of the Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action [Central Bureau of Intelligence and Operations], the Free French intelligence service. He subsequently moved into a military role, eventually founding and commanding France's first parachutist commando unit, and was wounded in combat in Eastern France. In late 1944, Vallon was named Deputy Director of de Gaulle's cabinet (Le Maitron 2016).

¹⁹ "Le Plan du 9 juillet. Conférence de Louis Vallon à Belleville Saint-Fargeau" *Paris-Demain* November 24 1943.

²⁰ Among the leaders of Libération-Nord was André Philip, a planist Socialist who had been the primary popularizer of Henri de Man in France.

Bonnier was still a member of the USR at the outbreak of war in 1939, but such was not the case for Hauck and Vallon. They had quit in 1936 to rejoin the SFIO (see Chapter 4), and the consequent severing of their personal allegiance to Déat partly explains why they did not follow him into the RNP. But this factor should not be overstated. The case of Paul Perrin is instructive, particularly as a comparison to that of Hauck and Vallon. Like them, Perrin was on the executive bureau of the PSdF, and like them he left the party during the Popular Front era. Yet unlike them, he rallied to Déat and the RNP during the Occupation. What makes this especially noteworthy is that he had in fact been among the internal critics of the PSdF's equivocal turn in 1934. In February 1934, he warned the PSdF against indulging in anti-Semitic and xenophobic tendencies.²¹ Indeed, sitting on the central committee of the LICA, he was one of the more outspoken critics of anti-Semitism in France through the end of the 1930s (Epstein 2008: 205-207). He was also quick to condemn the neo-socialists' associations with right-wing figures over the course of 1934, as well as its attempts to woo veterans' organizations.²² When a controversy erupted over statements made by Montagnon in the Chamber of Deputies, Perrin found himself ranged against Hauck, Vallon, and other party leaders. Montagnon had stated that there was "in the Hitlerian movement something curious and profound," and generally exhibited an indulgent attitude towards the Nazi regime in the interest of Franco-German rapprochement. Perrin took the lead, at a 1935 PSdF federal congress for the Paris region, in denouncing Montagnon's statements and reproached him for having defended reactionary positions. According to Perrin, there was nothing "curious" or "profound" in the "explosion of social hatreds" by a regime characterized by violence. To enter into an entente with the Nazi regime, moreover, was to betray their comrades in the German SPD. Following Perrin's intervention, it was Hauck who

²¹ "Le IIème Conseil Central du Parti Socialiste de France: Dimanche 25 février 1934" *La Vie Socialiste* March 3 1934. For an overview of his

²² "Congrès National de Montrouge" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

rose to defend Montagnon, arguing for a "fruitful collaboration" with a Hitlerian Germany whose popular roots had to be recognized.²³ In general, Perrin's political profile was that of a pragmatic socialist with little patience for the doctrinal provocations of neo-socialism. As Perrin reiterated at the February 1935 PSdF Congress, which capped a year of equivocations and dubious associations, he had not quit the SFIO to rally to a "new doctrine," but had done so only because its "tactics" ran counter to the interests of socialism and the working class.²⁴

The variable fates of the neo-socialists should throw into doubt the notion that it was neo-socialism itself that was the determinative factor in their political evolution. In fact, less than half of the neo-socialist leadership ended up in the RNP, and even then their commitment levels varied. And while some of the least doctrinaire neo-socialists nonetheless rallied to the RNP, some of the most ardent true believers joined the Resistance. Looked at from the other side, the relationship between neo-socialism and the fascism of the RNP also becomes less obvious. Of the fifteen members of the RNP's permanent commission in 1943, only seven had been neo-socialists, and even among those few had been leading voices (Figure 10).²⁵ The rest came from diverse backgrounds: five from the SFIO, one from the center-right Alliance Démocratique, one from the Confédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants [National Confederation of Combat Veterans], and one from the fascist PPF.

²³ "Congrès fédéraux: Région parisienne" *La Vie Socialiste* January 26 1935.

²⁴ "Congrès National de Montrouge" *La Vie Socialiste* February 9 1935.

²⁵ Besides Déat, Lafaye, and Levillain, the names of the other former neo-socialists in the RNP permanent commission had rarely, if ever, been mentioned in the neo-socialist press.

Figure 10. Pre-WWII political affiliations of the 1943 RNP permanent commission

Name	Pre-War Affiliation
Marcel Déat	USR
Georges Albertini	SFIO
Henri Barbé	PPF
René Benedetti	USR
Michel Brille	Alliance Démocratique
François Desphelippon	SFIO
Georges Dumoulin	SFIO
Emile Favier	USR
Jacques Guionnet	USR
Gabriel Lafaye	USR
Maurice Levillain	USR
Paul Montagnon	USR
Georges Rivollet	Confédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants
Roland Silly	SFIO
Ludovic Zoretti	SFIO

It is therefore true, as many have pointed out, that the RNP drew heavily from the left for its leadership, and that in particular it was the natural home for those collaborationists whose past had been in the socialist movement, much as the PPF was for ex-Communists.²⁶ But the homogeneity of these origins should not be overstated. Those who came to the RNP from the SFIO had not, for the most part, been sympathetic to the neo-socialists, but rather tended to come from the party's revolutionary left that the neo-socialists had spent much of the 1930s pillorying. Francis Desphelippon and Georges Dumoulin, for example, had been affiliated with the left-wing

²⁶ In their study of the RNP in the Indre-et-Loire and Loiret departments, Yves Durand and David Bohbot (1973) emphasize the socialist and neo-socialist origins of the party's grassroots base. But even their data suggests that former socialists and neo-socialists only constituted a plurality of local party membership. Moreover, many party members joined not out of conviction, but out of constraint or interest. Other studies have suggested that most of the RNP's membership consisted of political newcomers. In any case, there was a disjuncture between the RNP leadership, which drew almost exclusively from the left, and the rank and file, which was more heterogeneous. Marc Sadoun (1982) has argued that this disparity, and the fact that only a tiny fraction of the socialist membership base actually joined the RNP, suggests that ideological affinity was not a determinant factor in explaining the collaborationist politics of some former socialists.

La Bataille Socialiste, the neo-socialists' factional rivals when they were still in the SFIO (see Chapter 2). In fact, Dumoulin was a critic of neo-socialism and planism more generally, and as such had been a frequent target of neo-socialist polemics.²⁷ Georges Albertini and Ludovic Zoretti came from Redressement, a faction formed in 1938 uniting the left planists of Révolution Constructive and the remnants of the ultra-left Gauche Révolutionnaire [Revolutionary Left] around pacifist positions.²⁸ Neither Révolution Constructive nor Gauche Révolutionnaire had been kind to Déat and his comrades in the years prior (see Chapter 4). Finally, Roland Silly, who headed the RNP's youth organization in addition to sitting on the permanent commission, had been aligned in the SFIO with Paul Faure, the guardian of socialist orthodoxy and historic *bête noire* of the neo-socialists.

The far left provenance of the RNP is even more pronounced at the party's secondary leadership level. Within the bureaus of the different RNP auxiliary organizations and among the regional leadership, former Socialists, Communists, Trotskyists, and *pivertistes*²⁹ were just as common, if not more so, than former neo-socialists. This was especially true of the Jeunesses National-Populaires [National Popular Youth] (JNP), whose secretariat contained no neo-socialists but did contain a Trotskyist (Albert Mancasola) and two *pivertistes* (Michel Courage,

²⁷ e.g. "Chronique du planisme" *Paris-Demain* February 16 1935; "On liquide l'unité d'action" *Paris-Demain* February 23 1935; "Petits bruits...du grand Paris" *Paris-Demain* September 14 1935.

²⁸ Led by Marceau Pivert, Gauche Révolutionnaire was an offshoot of La Bataille Socialiste that split from the latter in 1935 around the question of revolutionary defeatism. The ultra-left faction was critical of the Popular Front's popular-democratic orientation and urged Blum to use the 1936 electoral victory to launch a revolutionary socialist transformation (following the victory, Pivert famously wrote that "Everything is Possible," to which the Communists, faithful to the limited mission of the Popular Front, responded: "No! Everything is not Possible!" Marceau Pivert "Tout est possible" *Le Populaire* May 27 1936; "La lutte pour le pain" *L'Humanité* June 13 1936). After frequent clashes with the party leadership over what it saw as Socialist capitulation to capitalist interests and its betrayal of the class struggle, Pivert and most of Gauche Révolutionnaire left the SFIO to form a new party, the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan [Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party] (PSOP). Those who remained in the SFIO joined Redressement. On the left-wing of the SFIO, see Hohl (2004).

²⁹ Followers of Marceau Pivert, leader of the Gauche Révolutionnaire in the SFIO and, later, founder of the PSOP. The *pivertistes* were close allies to the Trotskyists.

Roland Goguillot).³⁰ Likewise the Union de l'Enseignement [Union of Education], which defended secular education against a clerical and reactionary Vichy, was led by a Socialist (Pierre Vailland) and a Communist (Victorien Barne). The top brass of the RNP's rural organization, the Centre Paysan [Peasants' Center], also counted a Trotskyist (Jean Desnots) and a Socialist (Julien Dobert). The only erstwhile neo-socialists holding leadership positions within any of the RNP auxiliary organizations in September 1943 were Gabriel Lafaye and René Mesnard in the Centre Syndicaliste de Propagande [Syndicalist Center of Propaganda] (CSP), the RNP's workers' interest group, and Emile Favier and Edmond Sizaire in the Centre Social Franco-Européen, the RNP's social relief organization.³¹

So not only did most neo-socialist leaders not end up in the RNP, most RNP leaders were never neo-socialists. Of course, Déat's role as absolute chief of the RNP meant that the party's official ideology drew from the language of his neo-socialist past. But a commitment to neo-socialist principles in itself does not seem to have been a determinative factor in explaining fascist engagement within the ranks of the RNP. The RNP did draw primarily from the left, but the militants whom it attracted came from diverse and often opposing traditions on the left. Yet one thing did unify them: their attitude toward war and peace in the immediate pre-war period. It was this, and not neo-socialism *per se*, that was at the origin of the RNP's fascist adventure.

³⁰ Roland Goguillot would later become known as Roland Gaucher, and would become one of the founders of the present day Front National in 1972. Gaucher discusses the Trotskyist and *pivertiste* milieu in the JNP in Gaucher and Randa (2002).

³¹ "L'organisation générale du R.N.P." *Bulletin des cadres* September 1943.

The Party of Peace

The years immediately following the Popular Front's 1936 victory were relatively quiet ones for the neo-socialists. Despite its poor electoral showing, the USR stuck with the Popular Front coalition through its demise in 1938. It was also represented in every cabinet between 1936 and the end of the Third Republic in 1940. Yet it remained a marginal formation unable to put its stamp on events, a fact confirmed by the almost total absence of the USR in historical accounts of the Popular Front era. Those who had been most associated with neo-socialism saw their political activity especially diminished. For example, although Déat continued to beat the dead horse of planism (Comité du Plan 1936) and published a book critical of the Popular Front's economic policy (Déat 1937), he largely receded into the political background following his 1936 electoral defeat.³² He continued on as head of the USR, but he returned to teaching between 1936 and 1939 as a philosophy professor at the prestigious *lycées* Louis-le-Grand and Fénelon, and reconnected with the scholarly milieu of his past (Déat 1938).³³ The neo-socialists had effectively been crowded out of the political field, and were thrust temporarily into the political wilderness. The Communists' success at the expense of the neo-socialists led to a resurgence in anti-Communist sentiment by Déat and his allies³⁴, but the reality of the Popular Front conjuncture was such that they could not completely break from the Popular Front without consigning themselves to total oblivion. As discussed in Chapter 4, neo-socialism quickly lost its coherence as it became trapped as a bit player in the Popular Front, and it faded away as a

³² Horn (1996, 2001) argues that the moment of planism in Europe had passed by 1935, especially after the POB/BWP's decision to participate in the non-planist Van Zeeland government. In France, too, the fervor around planism had mostly died down with the formation of the Popular Front.

³³ Déat seems to have eyed a future return to the Chamber all along, but his return to academia was convincing enough that his former mentor, Célestin Bouglé, held out hope that he would one day finally finish his dissertation (Lefranc 1980a: 160).

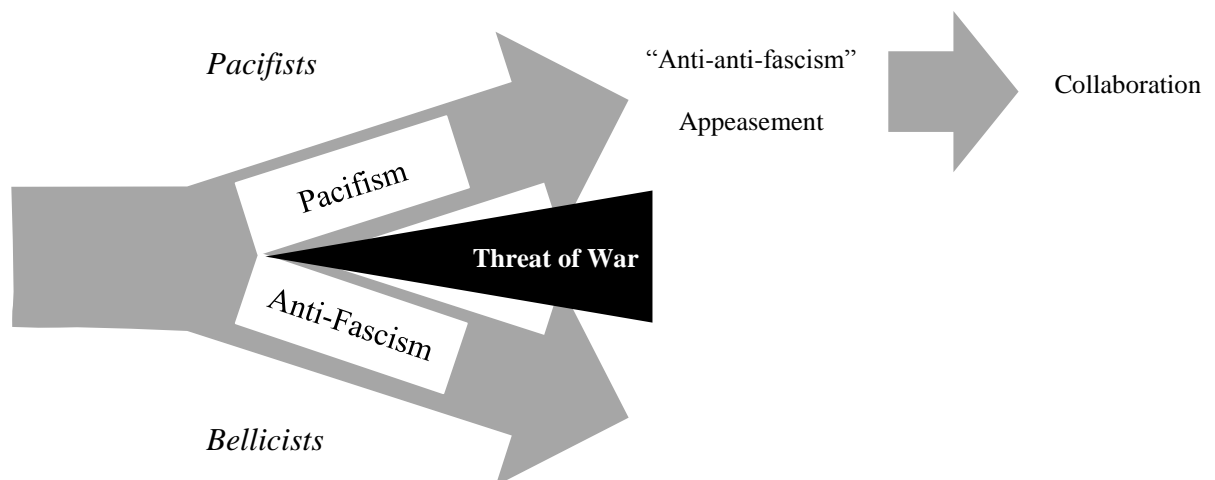
³⁴ Déat had boasted of his 1932 victory over Jacques Duclos, the Communist who had unseated Léon Blum in 1928 in the same Paris district. In 1936, however, Déat was himself unseated by a much lesser-known Communist. Almost immediately, a bitter Déat turned up his anti-Communist rhetoric.

distinct political doctrine and movement. When Déat and his allies sought to re-enter the political stage, it was on a basis other than neo-socialism.

Déat never ceased his journalistic activities, but his focus shifted more and more toward international affairs. Indeed, his political comeback came with the publication of the sensational "Mourir pour Dantzig?" [Why Die for Danzig?] on May 4 1939 in *L'Œuvre*. The article, which André Brissaud has called "the most explosive published in the world press" between 1919 and 1939 (Brissaud 1965: 93), was a perfervid screed against French obligations under the Franco-Polish Alliance to defend the Free City of Danzig against German demands for annexation, and it thrust Déat into a leading role within the pacifist and pro-appeasement movement at a time when Nazi designs on Eastern Europe were ramping up international tensions. A series of international crises including the Saar plebiscite, the remilitarization of the Rhineland, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia had already raised the specter of another European war by the mid-1930s. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and German and Italian intervention in it, only added fuel to the fire, and by the time of the Anschluss and the Sudeten Crisis in 1938, the question of war and peace came to dominate all others. With the dissolution of the Popular Front in 1938, the political conjuncture defined by it gave way decisively to one whose coordinates now revolved around the looming threat of war. The alliances and rivalries of the Popular Front era lost their hold as the salient division in French politics increasingly became that between pacifist appeasement and bellicose anti-fascism in the face of German aggression. Having been marginalized by the Popular Front, its eclipse provided an opportunity for the remaining neo-socialists to once again assert their political relevance, though this time not *qua* neo-socialists, but as the vanguard of the peace party.

The dissolution of the Popular Front and the prospect of war led to a profound reclassification of the French political field, scrambling traditional political loyalties. Indeed, the division between pacifists and bellicists ran orthogonally through the left and the right. On the left, anti-fascism and pacifism became disarticulated whereas previously they had gone hand in hand, and pacifism came to reconstitute itself as a kind of "anti-anti-fascism" (Figure 11). For example, the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes [Vigilance Committee of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals] (CVIA), which had been formed by leftist intellectuals in the aftermath of the February 6 1934 riots, was from its inception equally committed to anti-militarism as it was to anti-fascism. In fact, for the CVIA the two were inextricably linked: domestic fascism would imperil peace in Europe, while an outbreak of war would inevitably bring about domestic fascism. War, according to the CVIA, was "the triumph of fascism" (Racine-Furlaud 1977). With the evolution of the international situation, however, the articulation of anti-militarism and anti-fascism became more untenable. Thus in 1936 Communist-aligned intellectuals left the CVIA over its non-interventionist stance over the Spanish Civil War, and the CVIA suffered another split between realists and pacifists in 1938 following the Munich Agreement.

Figure 11. The disarticulation of pacifism and anti-fascism on the French left, 1938-1939



The same dynamic characterized the pacifist movement. The Ligue Internationale des Combattants de la Paix [International League of Combatants for Peace] (LICP) had also linked pacifism and anti-fascism in its propaganda. Yet as tensions mounted, there was a similar split between those for whom pacifism was an absolute value and those for whom anti-fascism held primacy (Ingram 1991). The pacifists in the LICP increasingly limited their anti-fascism to the domestic context and argued for appeasement abroad. This brought them into alignment with pacifists on the right who, for different reasons and sometimes out of sympathy for the fascist regimes, also favored a policy of appeasement. Indeed, although the LICP had traditionally been associated with left-wing circles, the integral pacifists began to question the salience of the left-right distinction, claiming that the danger of war came more from the anti-fascist left than the nationalist right. This sentiment was expressed particularly clearly by Félicien Challaye—LICP president and, later, a fellow-traveller of the RNP—who wrote in 1939 that, "If one had to choose, it would be better to save the peace with the right than to throw oneself into war with the left or the extreme left" (quoted in Ingram 1991: 238).

The disarticulation of pacifism and anti-fascism split the socialist left too. The question of intervention in the Spanish Civil War had already led to dissension within the Popular Front, with the Communists in particular lobbying for robust aid to the Spanish republicans and others arguing against, lest such aid spark a continental war. The Blum government begrudgingly settled on a policy of non-intervention, but as Nazi expansionism continued apace it launched a campaign of national re-armament. Within the SFIO, a gulf widened between Blum and Paul Faure, with things coming to a head after the Munich Agreement. The *blumistes*, though anti-militarist in principle, argued that the unique threat posed by Nazism necessitated a posture of

firm resistance. The *paul-fauristes*, on the other hand, tended to minimize the special nature of Nazism, and instead saw any potential war between fascist and democratic states as an inter-imperialist conflict in which the socialists' only stake was to prevent a continental bloodbath (Sadoun 1982). The SFIO thus became divided between anti- and pro-appeasement factions, with the *paul-fauristes* driven by their pacifist convictions to accept peace at any cost. On occasion of the Sudeten Crisis, for example, Faure wrote that preventing war was "obviously what is most urgent," that it was a "sacred task" and a "human duty" to seek out a sustainable European peace—meaning, of course, that Nazi claims on Czechoslovakia had to be accommodated.³⁵

The division between *paul-fauristes* and *blumistes*, *munichois* and *anti-munichois*, scrambled previous solidarities and enmities. Old fault lines in the party were superseded by the conflict between pacifists and bellicists. Blum and Faure had for almost twenty years stood together as the twin pillars of socialist unity, but they now opposed one another bitterly. On the party left, Zyromski and La Bataille Socialiste stood with Blum, whereas Marceau Pivert and Gauche Révolutionnaire had split from the former on revolutionary defeatist grounds. The left-wing pacifist Redressement faction was now aligned with the *paul-fauristes*, despite its members having been harshly critical of Faure's leadership in the past. The same was true of those on the party right who once chafed under Faure's dogmatic Guesdism, but were now united with him in advocating appeasement. The split in opinion within the SFIO was just one instance of a broader realignment in the French political field. As political debate came to be consumed by the question of war, socialist unity disintegrated and the pacifist wing of the SFIO drew closer to other pacifists, regardless of their political background. Thus the *paul-fauristes* and Déat's circle, once mortal enemies, became allies and participated in common anti-war initiatives. Julien

³⁵ Paul Faure "Où va l'Europe" *Le Populaire* September 3 1938.

Peschadour, for example, echoed Déat's "Mourir Pour Danzig?" in *Le Pays Socialiste*³⁶ when he appealed to French socialism's pacifist tradition and declared: "War must not break out over Danzig."³⁷ As the situation grew more desperate, SFIO pacifists even began extending their hand to pacifists on right. Indeed, Marc Sadoun points out that by 1939, Socialist pacifism had lost all specificity and was absorbed into a heterogeneous pro-appeasement bloc that was single-mindedly bent on preventing a war against Germany (Sadoun 1982: 13).

The scrambling of political alliances occasioned by the aggravating international situation proved fortuitous for Déat's political ambitions. Neo-socialism as such was no longer on the table, but Déat and his allies staked their comeback on the opening terrain of pacifism. The USR, like the SFIO, became split between anti-fascist bellicists and "anti-anti-fascist" pacifists.³⁸ As with many World War I veterans, Déat's experience of the trenches left him with a lifelong aversion to war. Moreover, as a critic of the Treaty of Versailles, he had also been a partisan of European integration generally, and Franco-German rapprochement—prior to, but also after, Hitler's ascent to power—more specifically. In fact, Déat had long held pacifist inclinations, and he consistently favored conciliatory solutions to international crises. While this aspect of his politics, which was hardly outside the socialist mainstream at the time, remained secondary until the late 1930s, it entered the foreground just as the changing international situation rendered his pacifist positions increasingly minoritarian.

Déat and his allies stepped forward as leading voices of the pacifist camp, not just within the USR, but within the political field at large. Their pacifist engagements were not, however, a

³⁶ *Le Pays Socialiste* was the factional organ of the *paul-fauristes*. The *blumistes*, who were hitherto content to play a mediating role in factional disputes, started their own organ, *Agir pour la paix, pour le socialisme*.

³⁷ Julien Peschadour "Quand la raison chancelle" *Le Pays Socialiste* July 21 1939.

³⁸ "La politique générale de l'Union Socialiste en quelques discours. Angoulême 27-29 mai" *Tribune de France* June 2 1939. Police accounts of USR activities in 1938 and 1939 are full of references to intra-party tensions, particularly between Déat and Paul-Boncour and Maurice Viollette. One report spoke of unhappiness within some quarters of the USR of Déat's "authoritarian" attitude in the party. Archives Nationales 20010216/0097.

direct extension of their earlier neo-socialism, but were characterized by the search for a new common ground within a politically heterogeneous anti-war coalition. In this sense Déat and other erstwhile neo-socialists rode the political reclassification that was underway. Thus just as they began to distance themselves from those neo-socialists who now argued for a firm posture vis-à-vis Nazi Germany, they put aside old animosities and made common cause with the once-hated *paul-fauristes*.³⁹ In August 1939, Déat emerged as a leader of the Comité de Liaison Contre la Guerre [Liaison Committee Against the War], an anti-war parliamentary committee that included socialist and conservative deputies united in their resolve to oppose any war with Germany. Even after the declaration of war in September, Déat continued to coordinate his action with other pacifists from across the political spectrum.⁴⁰

The main organ of Déat's pacifist circle in 1939 was the short-lived *Tribune de France*. Its contributors included original neo-socialists like Bonnafous, Montagnon, and Gabriel Lafaye, as well as more marginal neo-socialists like Roditi, but it also included contributors who had nothing to do with neo-socialism. Thus among its frequent contributors were the CGT syndicalists Raymond Froideval and René Belin, the socialist Alexandre Rauzy, the combat veterans' leader Henri Pichot, and the Radical anti-fascist intellectual René Château, who would ultimately go on to join Déat in the RNP. Despite the heavy presence of neo-socialists within the pages of *Tribune de France*, the paper was dominated by foreign affairs, and its unifying line was pro-appeasement. Montagnon summed up its prevailing attitude when he wrote that war was worse than fascism because the former "contained within it all the injuries of fascism, plus the

³⁹ The *paul-fauristes* claimed to oppose the coming war on orthodox revolutionary socialist grounds. But in an attempt to assimilate the *paul-fauristes* to the neo-socialists' reformist views, Roditi argued that in truth they wanted peace precisely because they had ceased being revolutionary. Roditi saw this as a positive development, as it was "dangerous to justify a politics of peace and conciliation with fascism by the argument of a revolutionary tradition." Georges Roditi "Hommes et tendances" *Tribune de France* February 24 1939.

⁴⁰ Déat was not, however, a defeatist. After war was declared, he made an effort to go fight on the front, which he was barred from doing as a sitting deputy.

procession of moral and physical miseries which one cannot think about without shuddering."⁴¹ For Déat, war trumped everything, and preventing it was an urgent priority. "One must negotiate," he wrote, for if "war breaks out despite everything, Europe is lost, civilization is lost, socialism and freedom are lost." There could be no construction "on the ruins of the West," no revolution "on piles of cadavers," no future "beyond the monstrous massacre."⁴² It was thus not neo-socialism *per se* that led Déat and his collaborators in *Tribune de France* to pacifism, but rather the growing primacy of their pacifism that led them to seek out new alliances beyond their previous political commitments. In short, on the eve of war, it was the search for a peaceful coexistence with Germany, and not neo-socialism, that dominated the political perspective of Déat and his allies.

Simon Epstein (2008) has argued that attitudes toward Franco-German relations, and particularly appeasement, were better predictors of support for collaboration during the German Occupation than were visions of France's domestic order. Thus those with fascist or authoritarian tendencies could end up in the Resistance if they were anti-German, whereas anti-fascists could be driven to support collaboration with Nazi Germany out of a desire for Franco-German reconciliation. Epstein's argument is borne out on the socialist side by the fact that of the 90 SFIO deputies who voted to grant constitutional powers to Pétain, thus clearing the way for the Vichy regime, 64 were *paul-fauristes* (out of 99 total *paul-fauristes* deputies), whereas only 5 *blumistes* (out of 28) voted the same.⁴³ In general, those socialists who chose a politics of collaboration tended to come from *paul-fauriste* and other pacifist circles (Sadoun 1982: 41).

⁴¹ Barthélémy Montagnon "Lettre à Madame X..." *Tribune de France* February 2 1939. This sentiment was also prevalent in the pacifist wing of the labor movement. For example, at the 1938 CGT congress, the pacifist syndicalist Jean Mathé declared: "Rather servitude than war because from servitude one comes out and from war one does not come back" (quoted in Sadoun 1982: 5).

⁴² Marcel Déat "Et maintenant, négociations..." *Tribune de France* March 10 1939.

⁴³ Ivan Ermakoff (2008: 171) argues that when one takes into account those parliamentarians who were neither *blumistes* nor *paul-fauristes*, the connection between pre-war pacifism and voting "yes" on July 10 1940 becomes

Epstein's thesis holds for the neo-socialists and the RNP as well. For example, both among the founding cohort of neo-socialism and within the leadership of the USSR, those who were *anti-munichois*—i.e. opposed the 1938 Munich Agreement effectively giving a free hand to Hitler in Czechoslovakia—tended to remain on the right side of history.⁴⁴ As for the RNP, I've already noted that neo-socialists only made up a fraction of the leadership, and that even those leaders who came directly from the SFIO came from currents that were historically unsympathetic to Déat. But whereas the political origins of the RNP leadership were heterogeneous, the thing that did unite them was their pacifist and pro-appeasement engagements immediately prior to the outbreak of war. Indeed, it was this more than some "subterranean" fascination with Nazism (Burrin [1986] 2003) that put Déat and the rest of the future RNP leadership down the road to collaboration. What Château—never a neo-socialist—wrote of his own path to collaborationism was true more generally of other RNP leaders:

My crime, it is to be a pacifist. Such it was, always, and such it will remain. I therefore, in all the unions in which I was active, "bleated" for peace, tirelessly. And all my vicissitudes come from that. After 1919, I was among those who denounced the harshness of the treaties, who condemned the occupation of the Ruhr, who asked for mercy for a vanquished Germany, and who, above all, demanded disarmament...In 1938, I, by the same love of peace was a "*munichois*"...But it was in 1940 that my pacifism, they say, pushed too far in its consequences (Abel 1947: 31).⁴⁵

less obvious. That is to say, Ermakoff finds that there is no statistically significant difference between the *fauristes* and those who belonged to neither faction. The difference between the *blumistes* and both the *fauristes* and the others, however, is statistically significant. In general, Ermakoff argues that "there was no necessary ideological connection between a committed pacifist stance in 1938-40 and a rejection of democracy (Ermakoff 2008: 173). This is true, but it is also true that those who became collaborationists were overwhelmingly in the pacifist camp before the war. For my argument here, the latter is what matters.

⁴⁴ This includes Vallon and Hauck, who were original neo-socialists but had re-joined the SFIO, and Joesph Paul-Boncour, Maurice Viollette, and Maxence Bibié, who were not among the founders of neo-socialism, but were leaders in the post-merger USSR and had embraced some of the tenets of neo-socialism.

⁴⁵ The quote is from Château's memoir, written under the pseudonym Jean-Pierre Abel, of his time in captivity following the liberation of France.

If the pro-appeasement positions of future RNP leaders were not driven by a latent sympathy for fascism, they did lead to a certain indulgence toward the Nazi regime. Even so, this was still largely overdetermined by pacifist imperatives. So, for example, Déat began giving credence to the notion of *lebensraum* justifying Germany's eastward expansion.⁴⁶ But missing were the racial overtones that the concept had in Nazi ideology. Downplaying the ideological basis of Nazi aggression, Déat instead saw Germany's designs on Eastern Europe as a natural consequence of its weakened economic position. Needing export markets and primary materials, Germany's expansionist push was, above all, dictated by its need to restore balance to the German market.⁴⁷ The explanation for German aggression was therefore not to be found "at the level of ideologies" nor at the level of "prestige and nationalist or imperialist passion," but "exactly at the level of the stomach."⁴⁸ According to Zoretti, Hitler was engaged in a "struggle for independence, for national and economic emancipation."⁴⁹ Thus if Déat and other future RNP leaders had not necessarily been pro-Nazi in 1939, in the interest of peace they were inclined to acknowledge the legitimacy of German grievances and to sacrifice Eastern Europe to Nazi hegemony.

Their pacifism also became articulated to an increasingly hysterical anti-communism. Although relations with the Communists had always been uneasy, they were elevated to public enemy number one by the pacifist and pro-appeasement left, who accused the PCF of doing Moscow's bidding by provoking a war in order to divert German expansionism westward. Indeed, it was principally as an anti-communist candidate that Déat returned to the Chamber in an April 1939 by-election. Some pacifists even came to adopt a "better Hitler than Stalin" attitude. Thus

⁴⁶ E.g. Marcel Déat "La conquête de l'espace vitale" *Tribune de France* June 23 1939.

⁴⁷ Marcel Déat "Défendre la France, défendre la paix" *Tribune de France* March 31 1939.

⁴⁸ Marcel Déat "Être prêts à tout, même négocié" *Tribune de France* April 21 1939.

⁴⁹ Ludovic Zoretti "Au jour le jour" *Redressement* April 1939.

Zoretti claimed that to defeat Hitler would mean nothing if the Nazi regime disappeared only to leave the Stalinist regime "standing and menacing." "Any regime" would be "preferable to the Stalinist revolutionary regime."⁵⁰ Another future RNP leader expressed his preference in October 1939 for having as France's immediate neighbor a "national-socialism armed with its barbarian morals" over "Asiatic leaders contemptuous of all of the freedom and integrity of the laboring classes of [the] Western countries."⁵¹ Anti-communism was nothing new for Déat and his future collaborators in the RNP, but through their pacifist commitments it stepped forward as an essential feature of their politics. This fear of the Bolshevization of Europe would become a central justification for their later pro-Nazi engagements.

Pacifist convictions thus pushed Déat and others to reject anti-fascism and support finding a *modus vivendi* with the Nazis. At least on the eve of the Occupation, however, they did not for all that express any particular affinity for the regime, nor did they yet seek to emulate Nazism in France. Their desire for Franco-German rapprochement was rooted in old criticisms of the Treaty of Versailles, the unfairness of which had been a near-unanimous article of faith on the left. And if Déat saw legitimate German grievances over their economic situation and the inequities of Versailles, he also thought that addressing these would undermine the allure of Nazism. Indeed, it was precisely to remove the underlying causes of Nazi aggression that Déat became a vocal partisan of European integration—not, as it would later be, to deliver Europe to Nazi hegemony. Only by constructing an equitable European market in which a dignified Germany could satisfy its needs could democratic countries "tear away from our adversaries this dynamism that is carrying them away toward supreme folly."⁵² Contra Burrin, then, Déat's appeasement was driven not by a fascination with Nazi power, but the opposite: he was worried

⁵⁰ Ludovic Zoretti "Un danger réel" *Redressement* November 1939.

⁵¹ Georges Dumoulin "Notre son de cloche est clair" *Syndicats* October 5 1939.

⁵² Marcel Déat "Être prêts à tout, même à négocier" *Tribune de France* April 21 1939.

that the totalitarian economies were failing, and that this was why they were turning toward expansionist solutions. Déat was not "dazzled" by Nazism's successes, as Burrin claims, but fearful of its weaknesses.⁵³ The current European order was unsustainable not because it injured German pride, but because in doing so it engendered Nazism and brought Europe closer to war.

Even as he argued for appeasement, Déat was clear that Nazism as such held little attraction to him. He was sympathetic to the fascist countries' rejection of economic liberalism, but he insisted that this did not entail an abandonment of political liberalism.⁵⁴ Indeed, he regularly denounced "totalitarian" Germany and Italy. If Déat bemoaned democratic complacency in constructing a new European order, it was because he refused to "definitively transfer the spirit of progress, the revolutionary spirit, the most formidable dynamism, to the camp of lean, autarkic, and dictatorial peoples."⁵⁵ Better for the democracies to build a new Europe *with* Germany lest the Nazis build it *against* democracy. In other words, Déat did not so much want the democratic camp to mimic the *élan* of the fascist camp, as he wanted the former to rob the latter of it.

During the so-called "Phoney War,"⁵⁶ Déat and his comrades hoped for a German invasion of the Soviet Union, seeing in an Eastern conflict a chance for France to escape the war. But even as they rooted for such an eventuality, they did not demonstrate their solidarity with Nazism *per se*. In fact, an immediate obstacle to a Germano-Soviet war was the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and following the conclusion of the pact Déat tended to conflate "Bolshevism" with "Hitlerism." The point was to effect a schism between "Bolshevized

⁵³ "A travers la France socialiste et républicaine. En Seine-et-Oise, Marcel Déat et Raymond Patenôte exposent à Saint Chéron la politique du Parti" *Le Front* February 26 1937.

⁵⁴ Marcel Déat "Défense de l'Occident" *Tribune de France* August 4 1939.

⁵⁵ Marcel Déat "A l'Ouest le béton, à l'Est le caoutchouc" *Tribune de France* May 5 1939.

⁵⁶ The "Phoney War" refers to the relatively quiet period between France's declaration of war in September 1939 and the first major German military operations in May 1940.

Hitlerism" and a Germany that remained faithful to the "essential norms of the West."⁵⁷ What Déat hoped for was the reversal of "a certain Germany"—i.e. not Nazi—against Bolshevism.⁵⁸ Déat's anti-communism had led him to identify the Soviets over the Germans as the number one peril to a stable European peace. But this did not entail solidarity with Nazism. Rather, it necessitated a Germany that was "redressed, transformed in its political form" to serve as a cover for France and England. This "salutary upheaval" within the Reich, however, could only happen if the democracies cultivated its conditions of possibility by engaging with Germany.⁵⁹

Just as Déat was not resigned to the permanence of the Nazi regime in Germany, he likewise did not envision Nazi emulation at home—at least not in 1939. He intensified his criticisms of France's economic and political institutions and called for a thoroughgoing national renewal, but its nature was to be found in France's domestic traditions:

We do not have to allow the osmosis and invasion of Soviet, Hitlerian, or fascist procedures. We have to define our style of life, our formulas of action, to make our adjustment, our renewal, our revolution, if the word does not provoke fear.⁶⁰

Déat wanted a "coordinated and conscious" economy as in the "totalitarian" countries, but without compromising political freedom. The point was not to "accentuate [France's] development in the Hitlerian, fascist, or Soviet sense," but to move toward a "disciplined organization" while safeguarding France's "individualism," "humanism," and "democratism."⁶¹ On both the domestic and international front, "Neither Hitler nor Stalin" was to be "the watchword of public salvation in France."⁶²

⁵⁷ *Journal de Guerre* November 14 1939.

⁵⁸ *Journal de Guerre* December 3 1939.

⁵⁹ *Journal de Guerre* November 14 1939.

⁶⁰ Marcel Déat "L'Europe va prendre le tournant" *Tribune de France* July 21 1939.

⁶¹ Déat did suggest that France could play a mediating role between Germany and England, i.e. between the "totalitarian world" and the "liberal world." Marcel Déat "Défense de l'Occident" *Tribune de France* August 4 1939.

⁶² Marcel Déat "A l'Ouest le béton, à l'Est le caoutchouc" *Tribune de France* May 5 1939.

The notion that Déat had been won over to fascism by 1939 is thus greatly overstated. He condemned the "totalitarian" character of Nazism and continued to affirm his faith in democratic principles, if not the exact form democracy took in France.⁶³ It was despite these democratic commitments, and not because of fascist affinities, that he favored a policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Germany. The key factor was not that he had been drawn into the orbit of fascism, but that he and other future leaders of the RNP had become caught up in a major political reclassification around the question of war and peace. It was their pacifism that led them to appeasement, and as Nazi intransigence turned public opinion against further concessions, their desperation to prevent a war only intensified their indulgence of German claims. The drive for appeasement dissolved traditional political barriers and brought former foes together in a shared determination to pursue an increasingly impossible Franco-German rapprochement. Through their pacifist engagements, Déat and other appeasers of the left thus found themselves effectively unmoored from the political left, and their "anti-anti-fascist" stance opened the door to surprising new alliances. In short, it was the peace camp, not neo-socialism, that was the vector through which the future leaders of the RNP found themselves ready, on the eve of the Occupation, for the prospect of a frank collaboration with Germany. And if they were not yet Nazi sympathizers, they were, for the sake of saving the peace, accommodated to the necessity of finding a *modus vivendi* with Nazism within a European framework.

⁶³ Dylan Riley (2010) argues that fascism and democracy are not mutually exclusive since the latter refers to the source of sovereignty and not a particular institutional structure. In his view, fascism is best understood as a kind of authoritarian democracy. I am sympathetic to this view, but in the political discourse of the 1930s "democracy" was widely counter-posed to "fascism," so I follow this usage here.

Vichy 1940

The partisans of peace were weak and isolated, and the outbreak of war in September 1939 only reinforced their marginality. Even so, it would be months before the "Phoney War" ended and major combat operations began, and in the meantime the pacifists held out hope that a Westward German offensive might never materialize. For this reason, they welcomed the Russo-Finnish War and advocated arming Finland, hoping that Soviet weakness would provoke a Russo-German war that would divert German aggression eastward (Burrin [1986] 2003: 347). Ironically, the partisans of peace had become ardent bellicists out of their desire to prevent a Western war. They would get their wish of a Russo-German war with Operation Barbarossa—but only after France had been conquered and occupied.

The Battle of France began on May 10 and was already over by the end of June. Amidst the chaos and confusion of the rapid German advance, the French government fled first to Bordeaux, where a group of anti-war deputies including Marquet and future RNP leaders Gabriel Lafaye and René Château cajoled it out of fleeing to North Africa, from whence it could continue the fight (Burrin [1986] 2003: 359). With the replacement of Paul Reynaud by Pétain on June 16, the path of military resistance had effectively been foreclosed. Pétain immediately sought out a cessation of hostilities, and on June 22 signed the Armistice that divided France into an occupied Northern zone and a "free" Southern zone. With Bordeaux falling within the occupied zone, the government relocated to Vichy on July 1.

The military debacle provoked a pervasive "mood of self-flagellation" as the defeat was widely blamed on the deficiencies of the Third Republic (Paxton 1972: 21). In the reigning atmosphere of confusion and despair, a consensus emerged across the political spectrum that a change in foreign policy should be accompanied by regime change at home. This feeling

crystallized on July 10 when the National Assembly, i.e. the combined Senate and Chamber of Deputies, voted overwhelmingly to bury the republican regime and endow Pétain with the power to promulgate a new constitution.⁶⁴ The final vote was 569 to 80, with 21 abstentions, in favor of granting constitutional powers to Pétain. All 20 USR deputies present voted "yes" to the measure, as did 87 SFIO deputies, compared to only 29 Socialists who voted "no" (Ermakoff 2008: 35). Thus the Vichy regime, which had been conceived on an authoritarian basis, came into being with widespread political legitimacy, even from large swaths of the pre-war left.

As Paxton writes, "projects for new French institutions swarmed around Vichy in July 1940" (Paxton 1972: 29). This was propitious terrain for Déat, who made his way to Vichy for the July 10 vote. Although Déat had in many ways been the consummate Third Republic parliamentarian, his past agitation in favor of renewing French political institutions positioned him well to take advantage of the new mood. More specifically, at a time when those who were accused of having divided the nation and of having fomented a disastrous war were disqualified from the political field, Déat's past calls for national reconciliation, his anti-communism, and his accommodationist "anti-anti-fascism" meant that he could plausibly expect a role in Vichy's National Revolution (Bergounioux 1978: 408).

The breakdown of the old regime did not, however, simply provide an opportunity for Déat to promote the projects he had pushed in the past.⁶⁵ Indeed, the nature of the initiatives he promoted while in Vichy were overdetermined by the particular situation out of which they emerged. What Ermakoff writes about the surprising confluence of attitudes on occasion of the

⁶⁴ Ermakoff (2008) treats the July 10 vote in detail. He argues that the vote did not simply register a pre-existing consensus around regime change, but rather that this consensus emerged out of the actual process surrounding the vote.

⁶⁵ c.f. Burrin ([1986] 2003: 371).

July 10 vote is instructive. The disparate supporters of the July 10 bill had not colluded in advance, nor had they already elaborated an ideological agenda which had only to be enacted:

These different groups realized that the defeat and the armistice provided them with an opportunity to oust their political opponents from the political scene and to boost their own political fortunes. They seized their chance, and as they strove to assert their dominance they simultaneously forged the ideological agenda which provided political meaning to their action. Their political project emerged in the context of both the showdowns immediately before the armistice and the National Assembly meetings (Ermakoff 2008: 174).

The same can be said more generally about Déat in Vichy. Déat's political ambitions had been repeatedly frustrated over the years, and the new conjuncture certainly represented an opportunity for him to finally realize them. But seizing the opportunity also meant adapting to the conjuncture. According to his memoirs, Déat had no intention at this time to "sacrifice the republican formula," but he was motivated by a desire to cement an alliance between all those who had "understood" the need for a rupture with the past (Déat 1989: 536). Déat's pacifist engagements had already brought him into close contact with right-wing elements, and indeed it was the heterogeneous coalition that had been the nucleus of the peace camp that now converged again around the need to elaborate the foundations of a new regime. In other words, what had started as a coalition with a specific purpose, i.e. to prevent a Franco-German war, now coalesced into a group whose common resentment against the old regime drew them together in a positive project of national renovation. This meant, however, that any such project emerging from this milieu necessarily had a synthetic quality, needing to appeal both to left- and right-wing sensibilities. Moreover, any project had to be adapted to the conservative ethos that dominated Vichy. After all, the National Revolution was launched under the sign of "Labor, Family, Fatherland," and Pétain's entourage came largely from the reactionary right. Vichy's traditionalism further meant that any project, however authoritarian, had to disavow any open

institutional alignment with the "totalitarian" countries and instead inscribe itself in an imagined native French political tradition.⁶⁶ In short, if Déat were to seek his future in Vichy, he would have to conform to the prevailing atmosphere.

This is reflected in the major projects with which Déat was associated during his time in Vichy. The first is the so-called "Bergery Declaration," named after Gaston Bergery, the former Radical deputy who drafted it. The declaration, which was circulated before the July 10 vote, was in support of granting Pétain constitutional powers, but it also offered an analysis of the causes of France's defeat, as well as an outline for future political renovation. Déat figured among the document's original signatories, and led the lobbying efforts in its favor (du Moulin de Labarthète 1946: 30). Parliamentary support for the declaration, which gathered 20 signatories and 77 backers by July 10, straddled both the left and the right, counting socialists like Charles Spinasse but also reactionaries like René Dommange and Xavier Vallat. Indeed, the nucleus of support came from the old Comité de Liaison Contre la Guerre (13 of 20 signatories of the declaration were members), which had previously united left- and right-wing deputies around a politics of appeasement (Burrin [1986] 2003: 367).

The declaration opened by blaming the defeat on the decadence and corruption of French politics, and denounced the degenerating effects of partisan divisions. The old regime had dragged France into a disastrous war; the necessary reconciliation and collaboration with a victorious Germany would thus require a change in regime. The new political order was to be "authoritarian," "national," and "social." Yet the precise nature of the new regime remained vague in the declaration, reflecting the heterogeneity of its support. It did, however, explicitly deny being a "more or less servile copy of national-socialism." France was to take its place in the universal movement toward a "national form of socialism," but the declaration, which counted

⁶⁶ I say "imagined" because the idea of completely bounded and self-sufficient national traditions is a myth.

New Deal America and the Soviet Union in this trend, affirmed a specifically French path:

"France will know how to draw from its substance a regime that will be reconciled with those of all continental Europe, but which will necessarily bear the mark of its own genius" (Burrin [1986] 2003: 365-366). This sentiment was echoed by Déat in the privacy of his journal, where he insisted that France not appear "to act under the pressure of the enemy by copying it, nor present to the enemy a camouflage of its own regime."⁶⁷

Déat's primary preoccupation during his time in Vichy was the abortive initiative for a *parti unique* [single party].⁶⁸ Following the July 10 vote, Pétain and Pierre Laval, Pétain's chief minister, encouraged Déat to draw up a proposal for the creation of a party that would be the exclusive instrument of the National Revolution.⁶⁹ Though this encouragement appears to have been disingenuous, Déat was nonetheless named secretary-general of the *parti unique*, and a steering committee was formed that included figures from both left and right (Burrin [1986] 2003: 377-382, Cointet 1973).⁷⁰

On July 27, Déat presented a report to Pétain summarizing the committee's work.⁷¹ The report was divided into three sections: the first on the necessity of a *parti unique*, the second establishing its doctrinal basis, and the third outlining its structure and organization. A *parti unique* was necessary because the abolition of the parliamentary regime by the July 10 vote

⁶⁷ Marcel Déat *Journal de Guerre* July 3 1940.

⁶⁸ There is no simple English translation for *parti unique*, which refers to the political party of a single-party state. I thus use the French going forward.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, only a few days prior to his arrival in Vichy, Déat still envisioned a multi-party system in France, though on a limited basis. The idea of a *parti unique* thus appears to have been suggested to him. Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* June 28 1940.

⁷⁰ The initial steering committee included Bergery, Antoine Cayrel (a former neo-socialist turned independent), Jean Montigny (of the conservative Gauche Démocratique), Louis Deschizeaux (USR), Michel Brille (of the center-right Alliance Démocratique), René Château (Radical), Charles Spinasse (SFIO), René Dommange (of the right-wing Fédération Républicaine), Armand Chouffet (SFIO), and Emmanuel Temple (Fédération Républicaine). The committee was later expanded to include representatives of the fascist PPF. An earlier organizing committee also included Paul Rives (SFIO), François Chasseigne (SFIO), André Delmas (secretary of the primary school teachers' union), Paul Saurin (Gauche Démocratique), Georges Scapini (a reactionary with whom the neo-socialists had made contact in 1934), and Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour (PPF). Brille, Château, and Rives would later join the RNP.

⁷¹ The report is reproduced by Cointet (1973) and Prost (1973).

required an intercessor to fill the void between the government and the people. Only such a party could guarantee the popular unanimity of the regime and inspire the profound and durable reconstruction the country needed. Moreover, a triumphant Germany was more likely to take French overtures toward collaboration seriously if there developed in France "a great party analogous to those that in Germany in Italy, in Spain, or elsewhere, were the instruments of national revolutions."⁷²

As for the party's doctrine, it was "adequately summarized" by Pétain's recent allocutions before the National Assembly. The report boiled it down thusly: "to make of France a national community, of which the peasantry would be the essential armature, in which the wage-earning elements would be completely integrated, where the family would become again the social cell *par excellence*, and where the State will take complete control over all large economic and financial forces."⁷³ The party's immediate program would provisionally include: a) the establishment of political, administrative, and military responsibilities for the defeat; b) the dissolution of Freemasonry and the regulation, including expulsion, of Jews within certain professions; c) the public organization of the press; d) the organization of economic life on syndical and corporatist lines; e) to ameliorate the conditions of rural life and encourage a return to the land; f) education reform, including the organization of youth through mandatory civil service and labor camps; g) administrative reform and the preparation of new corporative and local representative structures.

Although the party was conceived as a conduit for popular consultation, it was to avoid the "democratic errors of the past" by being hierarchically organized under the authority of the

⁷² Note that whereas Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had previously been cited together with New Deal America and the Soviet Union, the latter two are replaced as references with Francoist Spain.

⁷³ It is important to note here that, in line with Déat's arguments in *Perspectives socialistes*, "control" is meant more in the sense of regulation than direct ownership.

Chief of State (i.e. Pétain), with chiefs at every level exercising authority over their subordinates. All Frenchmen of "good will" were free to join the party, except for Jews and those too recently naturalized. The party would "constitute a militant elite, almost a militant order," and would draw especially on veterans and youth.

Superficially, the initiative for a *parti unique* may appear to be a straightforward copy of the totalitarian model. Yet, significantly, Déat and the committee continued to disavow any such emulation. The new order was to be inscribed within French tradition:

This order, where the individual is not crushed, where freedom is guaranteed and organized, not suppressed, where State control is not encumbered with direct and expensive management, where initiative is always safeguarded by an intelligent decentralization, in the administrative order as much as in the domain of private affairs, is based neither on the German system nor on any other. It answers to French conditions, it befits a preponderantly agricultural and artisanal country, it expresses a discipline that is consented to more than imposed, it answers to a healthy individualism, which is that of the person, relying on craft and familial life. France has no need to appeal to a different conception of the world than that which has nourished her history, she does not need to invent a novel religion, nor a new philosophy. It is not a paradox to claim that, in large measure, this revolution is a restoration, or more exactly a return of France to its true nature and destiny.

As Cointet (1973) has pointed out, the report was in fact a composite text, designed to be vague enough to satisfy the diverse political currents represented on the committee—including, crucially, the traditionalist right. Hence Pétain remained the supreme reference, and a privileged place was given to typically conservative themes like agrarianism, family, political devolution, anti-Freemasonry, and anti-Semitism.⁷⁴ Prost (1973) has further argued that this vagueness extended to the way in which the report related means and ends. The report was silent on the means and conditions of its realization, leading Prost to conclude that it was better defined by

⁷⁴ Though he stresses the composite nature of the text, in my view Cointet (1973) underplays the predominance of conservative themes.

what it rejected than by the concrete political project it put forward. Cointet concurs, noting that the report was "based on past grudges and on a vengeful present more than on concerted views of the future," and represented a "coalition of marginals" more than a coherent group (Cointet 1973: 16). In other words, the project for a *parti unique* amounted less to a full-throated call to transform France in the image of Nazism than to a vague bid for influence within the conservative and authoritarian framework of Vichy.

The committee continued its work through August, even considering uniform designs (Barthélémy 1978: 183), but it was quickly paralyzed by internecine conflict.⁷⁵ As Cointet puts it:

The disarray, the frenzied search for unanimism, the quasi-desperate hope for a pole of attraction and balance, led these men to silence the doctrinal and tactical differences that separated them. But the principal consequence was a redoubling of personal oppositions, engendered and aggravated by the voluntary forgetting of programs (Cointet 1973: 16).

The project also met with hostility from Pétain's inner circle, who remained suspicious of parliamentarians in general and Déat in particular. Pétain himself had been cool to the idea of political parties, even a *parti unique*, which he regarded as too divisive. The Vichy regime's preferred formula was that of a providential leader paternalistically overseeing natural communities of authority. The initiative for a *parti unique* was effectively neutralized when, at his inner circle's behest, Pétain ordered the committee to send its members across the "free" zone in the manner of *missi dominici* to gauge interest in the project (Burrin [1986] 2003: 381-382, Gordon 1980: 47).⁷⁶ Though the committee went on with its mission, its members seem to have understood that the project had just been unceremoniously sidelined.⁷⁷ The project was

⁷⁵ Déat discusses the internal strife in his journal. See Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* July 26-August 18 1940.

⁷⁶ For an account of this episode from a member of Pétain's inner circle, see du Moulin de Labarhète (1947: 31-32).

⁷⁷ Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* August 1 1940.

definitively dead and buried when on August 29 Pétain fused the different veterans' associations to create the Légion Française des Combattants [French Legion of Combattants], which took over—though on a much limited basis—some of the responsibilities of the aborted *parti unique*. The demise of the project and, more generally, the dominance of traditionally reactionary circles in Vichy,⁷⁸ particularly after Pétain reshuffled the cabinet in September to exclude parliamentarians from the old regime,⁷⁹ led Déat to abandon his hopes of implanting himself in the "free" zone, and he left shortly thereafter to seek his political fortunes in occupied Paris instead.

Déat's time in Vichy, from July to September 1940, was significant because it consummated a process of unmooring from the political left that began in the immediate pre-war period. The upending of the political field by the war and defeat left Déat a free agent, no longer beholden to a disaggregated left and open to new alliances. Yet Déat was still more concerned at this time with finding a *modus vivendi* with a victorious Germany than with emulating Nazism. It was in Vichy that he sought to make his mark, and so long as Vichy remained the outlet of his ambitions, he was willing to accommodate himself to its conservative ethos. Indeed, even when the project for a *parti unique* faltered, he still nourished hopes of becoming a government minister.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Déat was still spurned by the reactionary clique that dominated the Vichy regime, and he had little choice but to make the fateful move to the occupied zone if he wanted to pursue his political activity. One wonders, as Burrin suggests, whether with his

⁷⁸ Déat was already unhappy with the composition of the Vichy government in July, complaining that it drew too heavily from the conservative and reactionary right. Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* July 11 1940.

⁷⁹ Among these was Adrien Marquet, who had continued on as Minister of Interior after the July 10 vote. Though his actions were not linked to Déat's, Marquet also sought "levers of influence" in Vichy and encouraged its evolution in a "revolutionary" direction (Burrin [1986] 2003: 383-384).

⁸⁰ See Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* August 29 1940.

"temperament and his personality," Déat would "probably have known a much less extreme evolution" had he become a minister in the summer of 1940 (Burrin [1986] 2003: 455).

The RNP, First Version

Bertram Gordon has written of Déat's early entourage that the "dissident groups who followed [him] under the occupation were outsiders during the interwar years who saw in the changed conditions of 1940 and 1941 a chance to take the center of the political stage" (Gordon 1980: 129). With the stage blocked in Vichy, Déat and others who chafed under its rightist direction sought their opportunity in Paris, but now under the specific conditions of direct foreign occupation. Indeed, Déat turned violently against the Vichy government, launching a press campaign denouncing its reactionary character—though sparing the persons of Pétain and Laval—in his daily column in *L'Œuvre*, whose political directorship he took over. The definitive break came on December 14 1940 when Déat was arrested on orders from Vichy, a day after Laval himself was sacked by Pétain in what was interpreted as a repudiation of the policy of Franco-German collaboration of which Laval had been the architect.⁸¹ The German Embassy intervened immediately to free Déat. Henceforth Déat's fate would be tied to Laval and the Occupation authorities, and it was under their patronage that he founded the RNP shortly after his arrest and release.

In the occupied zone, virtually all political activity had to be approved by the Occupation authorities, meaning that by moving to Paris Déat became dependent on German backing to realize his ambitions. For example, immediately following his arrest and release, Déat expected

⁸¹ Laval was replaced with Pierre-Étienne Flandin, whose government was no less committed to the principle of collaboration. Nonetheless, Laval had been the face of collaboration, having set up the famous meeting between Pétain and Hitler at Montoire, and the Germans were initially displeased by his sudden termination (Paxton 1972).

Laval and himself to be returned triumphantly to Vichy under German pressure.⁸² And although this never materialized, for the rest of the Occupation Déat consistently looked to the German authorities to carry him to power. Déat's main sponsor throughout this period was the German Embassy, particularly *de facto* ambassador Otto Abetz and his deputy Ernst Achenbach.⁸³ Indeed, Déat's journal is replete with contacts with Abetz and Achenbach, both of whom continually nourished his ambitions. As Burrin writes, "Abetz and Achenbach kept Déat's hopes boosted by conjuring up the image of a Hitler who was interested in his movement and by talk of the famous struggle between different tendencies within the Nazi regime, a struggle in which it was important to take part in order to orientate the future" (Burrin 1996: 382). In truth, however, Hitler was indifferent, and even hostile, to the Parisian collaborationists. In fact, German priority at the outset of the Occupation was to keep France pacified, not to sponsor a fascist revolution. The Occupation authorities cultivated various collaborationist movements insofar as they could be used to extract concessions from Vichy, but they also played them off each other in order to prevent the emergence of a unified national movement (Gordon 1980: 66; Paxton 1972). This was not just German policy, but Abetz's too. In a July 30 1940 memo, Abetz wrote:

The interest of Germany demands on one hand the maintenance of France in a state of internal weakness, and on the other, its distancing from foreign powers who are enemies of the Reich...Everything must be undertaken on the German side to bring about the internal disunion and weakening of France. The Reich thus has no interest in supporting the true popular or national forces in France. To the contrary, we must support the forces likely to create discord: these will sometimes be elements from the left, sometimes elements from the right (Abetz quoted in Cointet 1998: 200).

Because of his own political sensibilities (he had been in the SPD before joining the NSDAP), and because the French left had historically been in favor of Franco-German rapprochement and

⁸² Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* December 14-15 1940.

⁸³ Because a peace treaty had yet to be signed, Abetz could not serve officially as Ambassador.

was less likely to seek nationalist revenge, Abetz was particularly keen on drawing the pro-appeasement left within the orbit of collaboration. Déat and the other former socialists—neo or otherwise—of the RNP were thus perfect candidates for Abetz's manipulation.⁸⁴ But they were not the exclusive beneficiaries of German patronage, and the RNP's fortunes were as much hampered as they were promoted during the course of the Occupation. Déat's outsized ambition, however, rendered him especially credulous, and his capacity for self-delusion only grew with every hint of encouragement from Abetz and Achenbach.⁸⁵ By disingenuously holding out the prospect of his promotion to power, the Occupation authorities thus cultivated Déat's dependence on them under false pretenses, and Déat himself, predisposed as he was to do so, dutifully played along by seeking constantly to ingratiate himself to them.

This was the backdrop for the creation of the RNP in January 1941 under the tutelage of Laval and Abetz.⁸⁶ The RNP's immediate purpose was to return Laval to power. In Laval, Déat saw a fellow partisan of robust collaboration and his best hope for an eventual accession to power. More generally, the RNP was founded to pressure Vichy and to convince the Germans of the popularity of collaboration. An initial preparatory meeting in January included a mix of neo-socialists (Déat, Marquet, Montagnon, Lafaye), CGT syndicalists, representatives from veterans' associations, assorted deputies from left and right, and—under German insistence—leaders of the Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire [Revolutionary Social Movement] (MSR)—a recently formed movement whose origins were in the far-right terrorist organization known as La Cagoule. The presence of the MSR seems to have put off socialists, who largely declined Déat's

⁸⁴ On Abetz's role in Occupied France, see Lambauer (2001) and Mauthner (2016), as well as Abetz's memoirs (Abetz 1953).

⁸⁵ Though disappointed that Abetz could not guarantee him a monopoly on collaborationism, Déat was nonetheless optimistic about his long-term prospects: "As I understood it, the Germans are engaged in some political gardening, to see if anything will grow. And Abetz appears to believe that one day all this might be federated and joined together" (Déat quoted in Burrin 1996: 376). The quote is from Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* January 3 1941.

⁸⁶ For Laval and Abetz's role in the creation of the RNP, see Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* December 31 1940, January 3-19 1941.

invitation to attend the preparatory meeting, and led many of the neo-socialists, syndicalists, and parliamentarians to quickly take their distance.⁸⁷ By its official launch in February, the RNP's executive committee was composed of Déat, Eugène Deloncle (the leader of the pre-war Cagoule and the MSR), Jean Fontenoy (a far-right journalist who had been in the fascist PPF before co-founding the MSR), Jean Vanor (an obscure lieutenant to Deloncle), and Jean Goy (the head of the center-right veterans' association, the UNC), with Déat as titular head of the movement.⁸⁸

Illustration 19. First public meeting of the RNP, February 1941

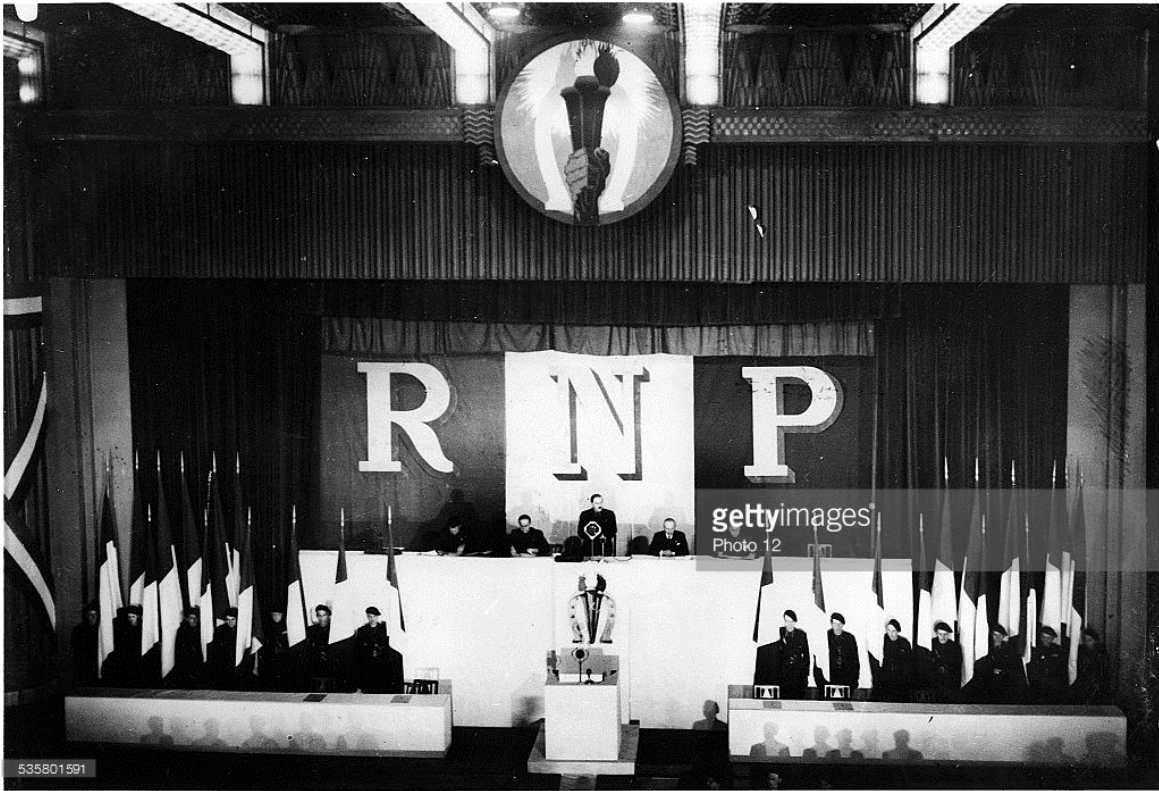


Jean Goy (speaking on left) and Déat (seated on right).

⁸⁷ Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* January 24 1941, February 5 1941. See also Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale. For secondary sources, see Burrin (1996: 377; [1986] 2003: 426).

⁸⁸ Initially, Pierre Cathala (a confidant of Laval) and Albert Perrot (an official in the CGT) were included in the executive committee, but they both withdrew their participation. Burrin speculates that Cathala withdrew because Laval had been told by Abetz not to expect an immediate return to government (Burrin 1996: 377).

Illustration 20. RNP meeting, May 1941



The RNP's mission was to rally the masses "with the aim of assuring the renewal of the country, the defense of the empire, and to institute a policy of Franco-German collaboration intended to enable France's participation in the establishment of a new European order." Its action program also called for the construction of a strong state whose authority would be "founded on the technical capacity of power," and which would be supported by a "national and popular movement" that excluded "all occult influence of an international character." The RNP further advocated the "restoration of moral, familial, professional, national, and European values," and called for the "purification and protection of the race" through the "physical and

moral regeneration of the population." In terms of the economy, the RNP favored a directed economy organized on a corporatist basis.⁸⁹

The peculiar context of the Occupation, i.e. the need to curry favor with German authorities, can already be seen in the inclusion of a "Europeanist" discourse alongside that of national regeneration, and in the token embrace of racist discourse.⁹⁰ Moreover, Déat sang the praises of Hitler's benevolence and began reading *Mein Kampf* for inspiration.⁹¹ Burrin has argued, however, that Déat was at this time still only "authoritarian" as opposed to "totalitarian" (Burrin 1996: 393; [1986] 2003: 433-434). While the analytical value of this distinction is questionable, what is true is that Déat had yet to self-consciously embrace the term "totalitarian," as he later would, and did not yet press for a total alignment with Nazi Germany. The RNP was committed to a robust collaboration with Germany and it envisioned a thoroughgoing political transformation in France, but Déat still saw it primarily as an instrument for defending French national interests and expressing popular aspirations, and not yet as a militarized vanguard in a European Nazi revolution.⁹²

In fact, the RNP's discourse as a whole lacked coherence at this time, reflecting a congenital division within the organization between Déat and the MSR faction. The MSR, which retained organizational autonomy despite its incorporation into the RNP, occupied three of five seats on the executive committee. Although Déat nominally led the organization, the MSR controlled the RNP's secretariat, propaganda, and security services. The internal conflict was one

⁸⁹ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

⁹⁰ In fact, the RNP was a direct beneficiary of anti-Semitism: its various offices were requisitioned via the "aryanization" of Jewish businesses and apartments (Cointet 1998: 233).

⁹¹ Déat wrote: "We are, all things considered, extremely lucky to be dealing with a conqueror who is a great man...Extremely lucky that, having led Germany to victory, he conceives hegemony to be a higher responsibility and now considers his essential mission to be the reconstruction of Europe. For, after all, things might have gone very differently" (Déat quoted in Burrin 1996: 392). The quote is from Marcel Déat "Aspects d'un grand destin" *L'Œuvre* April 20 1941. On evidence that Déat was reading *Mein Kampf*, see Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* June 23 1941.

⁹² See Marcel Déat "Structure et fonction du Parti" *L'Œuvre* December 23 1940, *L'Œuvre* February 23 1941.

of both style and substance, resulting in a dysfunctional early existence for the RNP. Déat sought a popular mass movement and continued to speak in a republican register, however authoritarian, whereas Deloncle, true to his background in a clandestine reactionary terrorist organization, had a more conspiratorial view of politics that drew heavily on right-wing themes. From the RNP's inception, the MSR dominated the organization and continually maneuvered to sideline Déat.⁹³ For example, the MSR launched a campaign within the RNP seeking to discredit Déat by portraying him as a defender of Jews, Freemason, and parliamentarians.⁹⁴ The last straw was an assassination attempt against Laval and Déat on August 27 1941 during a review of French volunteers leaving to fight with the Germans on the Eastern Front. Though the perpetrator claimed to be acting in the name of the Resistance, Déat suspected the hand of Deloncle and the MSR, who attempted a hostile takeover of the RNP while Déat was recovering in the hospital.⁹⁵ In October, however, Déat managed to engineer a purge of the MSR from the RNP with the blessing of the German Embassy, who blamed Deloncle's attitude for the inauspicious beginnings of the movement (Burrin [1986] 2003: 429). Although about two thirds of the RNP membership, as well as most of those who had come from the right, followed Deloncle and the MSR out of the organization, the schism left Déat the unquestioned leader of the RNP.⁹⁶

⁹³ In Gaucher's recollection, Déat frequented the offices of *L'Œuvre* more often than those of the RNP at this time (Gaucher and Randa 2002).

⁹⁴ Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale. See also Cointet (1998: 242-243).

⁹⁵ See Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* August 27-September 30 1941.

⁹⁶ The figure of two thirds comes from Georges Albertini, in his unpublished history of the RNP deposited at the Institut d'Histoire Sociale. The exact membership of the RNP remains contested. The figure of 500,000 announced at its June 1941 congress is without doubt a gross overestimate. The SD was already skeptical of the RNP's April count of 200,000, estimating several thousand members instead. A more realistic estimate, according to Burrin, would be about 10-15,000 in the summer of 1941 (Burrin [1986] 2003: 429).

Collaborationist Convergence and the RNP's "Totalitarian" Phase

The schism presented an opportunity for Déat to remake the RNP on a basis more suitable to his own political sensibilities. Although he continued to insist on transcending old political divisions,⁹⁷ the departure of the MSR opened the door for former socialists, neo-socialists, and others from the pre-war left to join the RNP, which they promptly did. For example, the collaborationist group France-Europe, formed largely of old socialists, syndicalists, and parliamentarians, decided in December 1941 to integrate *en masse* into the RNP. Similarly, although the syndicalists of the Centre Syndicaliste de Propagande [Syndicalist Center of Propaganda] (CSP), an organization founded in April 1941 to defend the interests of collaborationist trade-unionists, had been aligned with Déat since early 1941, its members were promoted to leadership roles within the RNP after the October schism.⁹⁸ The leftist composition of the RNP leadership was further reinforced when Georges Albertini, a former Socialist with the CSP who became Déat's right-hand man and secretary-general of the RNP after the MSR schism, contrived to expel Jean Goy and other remaining pre-war reactionaries in May 1942.⁹⁹ It was thus only after October 1941 that the identity of the RNP as the party of left-wing collaborationism crystallized. Whereas the far-right gangsters of the MSR dominated the early life of the RNP, by 1943 the fifteen-member permanent commission of the reorganized RNP counted five ex-SFIO and seven ex-USR, and most leaders of its various auxiliary organizations likewise came from socialist, neo-socialist, syndicalist or other leftist circles.

⁹⁷ For example, in 1942 Déat argued that the RNP did not care about the social or political origins of its members, and that it would ideally draw from both former Communists and Croix-de-Feu. Marcel Déat "Vers le parti unique" *Le National-Populaire* June 6 1942.

⁹⁸ The CSP was an outgrowth of the team that directed the syndicalist collaborationist journal, *L'Atelier*. While the CSP was initially autonomous, it became a formal auxiliary of the RNP shortly after its creation (Burrin 1996: 388-389).

⁹⁹ Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale. On Albertini, see Rigoulot (2012).

The influx of former socialists and neo-socialists into the leadership of the post-schism RNP might suggest that the party was simply an expression—albeit refracted—of pre-war neo-socialism and socialist currents sympathetic to it. In this view, the departure of the MSR merely freed Déat to openly express and apply a politics that he had always advocated. I have already indicated that such a view overstates the weight of neo-socialism in the RNP, and that the socialist and other leftist currents that converged on the RNP were in fact heterogeneous. But the biggest reason why the RNP cannot be reduced to neo-socialism is that the RNP in fact witnessed a profound transformation and radicalization over the course of the war, one that was determined by the specific dynamics of the Occupation. Insofar as we are interested in explaining the specifically fascist character of the RNP—i.e. its total solidarity with, and emulation of, Nazism—it is these dynamics, and not the neo-socialist heritage of its leadership, to which we must turn.

Burrin points to a paradox of the October 1941 schism:

on the one hand, an attempt to reconnect with former leftists, which resulted in the integration of groups that had until then preferred to remain aloof, and a resumption of talks with former parliamentary representatives; on the other, a radicalization of ideas which resulted in the RNP falling into line with the Nazi model and plunging into virtually unlimited collaboration (Burrin 1996: 393-394).

That the reorganization of the RNP coincided with a perceptible shift in how Franco-German collaboration was conceived was acknowledged by Déat in the moment: "We can affirm that the period of 'collaboration' of the first type is over, and that the other is beginning, which will be revolutionary and international."¹⁰⁰ The post-schism RNP thus did not represent a return to earlier commitments, but rather a turn to something new. Moreover, the RNP continued to radicalize even after the schism. For example, by 1943 Déat was arguing that the "European

¹⁰⁰ Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* January 2 1942.

Revolution" led by the Nazis was passing from a moderate "Girondin" phase to a radical "Montagnard" phase, and that French collaborationists had to act accordingly (Gordon 1980: 290).¹⁰¹ By 1944, only those who were "fanatically European and fanatically national-socialist" remained in the RNP, and at party meetings the "old beards of the USR" had been replaced by "tense, feverish, young faces."¹⁰² From its creation in 1941 to its dissolution with the liberation of France in 1944, then, the RNP changed in significant ways. The story of the RNP is that of its escalating identification with the Nazi cause. But its radical pro-Nazi positions were not simple extensions of earlier commitments; rather, they were novel developments that emerged over the course of the Occupation. The fundamental irony of the RNP was that just as the former socialists and neo-socialists came into its fold, the logic of the situation began carrying the party ever further away from the political traditions of the left that had once anchored its leadership.

What is striking in examining the RNP's Nazification is the degree to which the party's specificity was gradually effaced and replaced by a discursive convergence with competing collaborationist movements whose political origins were vastly different. That is, the weight of the RNP's socialist and neo-socialist heritage became less felt over time, and by the final years of the Occupation, the RNP's politics were virtually indistinguishable from its competitors in the PPF,¹⁰³ the Parti Franciste,¹⁰⁴ or the Milice Française¹⁰⁵—all of which had more established

¹⁰¹ "Girondins" and "Montagnards" refer to rival factions during the French Revolution. Déat's references to "Girondins" and "Montagnards" can be found in "Guerre politique ou guerre militaire?" *L'Œuvre* June 7 1943 and "L'épreuve décisive" *L'Œuvre* July 31-August 1 1943.

¹⁰² Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹⁰³ The PPF was created by the ex-Communist Jacques Doriot in 1936. Its turn to fascism pre-dated the war, and as the largest and most important collaborationist party during the Occupation, it became the RNP's principal rival. It tended to be more violent and radical than the RNP.

¹⁰⁴ The Francistes were founded in 1933 by Marcel Bucard, whose political past had been in the royalist right. They explicitly inspired by Italian Fascism from their beginning, and participated in the February 6 1934 riots. During the Occupation, they became the third most important collaborationist party, behind the PPF and the RNP.

¹⁰⁵ The Milice was a paramilitary force created in 1943 by the Vichy regime in the "free" zone to fight against the Resistance. Led by Joseph Darnand, who had been a member of various far-right parties in the 1930s, the Milice was extended to the occupied Northern zone when Darnand was named Secretary of the Interior in 1944. By the end

fascist pedigrees. This is an assessment shared by the wartime British Foreign Office. In a classified 1944 intelligence report on the French political landscape, the Foreign Office said of the different collaborationist parties:

It is hard to say what reason many of them have for an individual existence. So much of the outlook, at least of the leading parties, is common ground to all of them; so many of the superficial distinctions turn out on investigation to be merely differences of emphasis that it is not possible to account on doctrinal grounds alone for their failure to achieve union.¹⁰⁶

Burrin similarly observes that the diversity of collaborationism decreased, particularly after 1942, as the different movements drew closer to the Nazis (Burrin 1996: 359-360). Gordon makes the same point about Déat specifically: "Despite his Republican proclivities, his basic political positions increasingly approximated those of his collaborationist rivals as the war progressed" (Gordon 1980: 112). Gordon further argues of the RNP:

What started out as a protest against the royalism, clericalism, and business-oriented corporatism of Vichy was forced by the logic of the occupation situation to look to the Germans for help. In so doing, it adopted positions on the major issues of the day virtually identical to those taken by the other movements that from the beginning of, and in some cases even prior to, the war had been more openly fascist (Gordon 1980: 128).

Indeed, by June 1944 Albertini was telling cadres that there was "no divergence to signal" anymore between the RNP and its main collaborationist rivals in the PPF, whose fascism dated back to 1936.¹⁰⁷ In July, after instructing RNP members to join the Milice, whose members largely came from the pre-war far-right, Albertini wrote: "We know that they have, like us, far

of the Occupation, American intelligence considered the Milice the most formidable pro-fascist organization in France (Gordon 1980: 168).

¹⁰⁶ About the PPF, the *France Basic Handbook*, as the report was called, noted that among the distinction between it and its rivals were "less in the field of political theory than in the vigour of its propaganda and the maturity of its technique." British Foreign Office, *France Basic Handbook Part III (Revised Edition)*, pp. 141-143.

¹⁰⁷ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

outstripped their old political positions, such that they are no longer men of the right."¹⁰⁸ The implication, of course, was that the leaders of the RNP had themselves ceased to be men of the left.

Whether it was the ex-socialists of the RNP, the ex-Communists of the PPF, the pre-war fascists of the Parti Franciste, or assorted figures from the 1930s radical right, there was an emerging confluence around a vague but increasingly zealous emulation of Nazism. Though the different collaborationist movements were founded with varying political sensibilities and clienteles, by the end of the Occupation these mattered less and less. Joint action between the movements became more common over the course of the war, and Déat's signature began appearing next to that of inveterate reactionaries and longtime fascist sympathizers like Lucien Rebatet, Abel Bonnard, and Alphone de Châteaubriant.¹⁰⁹ The radicalization of the RNP thus coincided with the loss of its specific identity and its convergence with the broad stream of collaborationism. This suggests that the increasing Nazification of the RNP was driven not by something specific to its political history, but rather by a dynamic of radicalization and homogenization that affected all collaborationist parties equally.

¹⁰⁸ Georges Albertini "La mobilisation de la Milice" *Bulletin des cadres* July 1944.

¹⁰⁹ Examples of joint action include the Front Révolutionnaire National (see below), the 1943 "Plan de redressement national français" [Plan of French National Renewal] (Gordon 1980: 287-288) and the July 1944 "Déclaration commune sur la situation politique" [Common Declaration on the Political Situation] (Burrin [2986] 2003: 448).

Illustration 21. PPF meeting, February 1942



Illustration 22. PPF congress, 1943



Jacques Doriot (left of center, in glasses) and others giving the Nazi salute.

Illustration 23. Franciste meeting, September 1942



The speaker is Paul Guiraud. Marcel Bucard (eyes closed) is seated to Guiraud's left.

Illustration 24. Franciste meeting, July 1943



Burrin perceptively characterizes Déat's politics at the end of the Occupation as a "collaborationist fascism" driven by a desire for recognition from the Nazis that only intensified with every frustrated bid for power (Burrin [1986] 2003: 459). This is apparent in Déat's journal, in which he frequently displayed his anxiety for France to conform to the "Hitlerian vision."¹¹⁰ A constant theme of RNP apologetics was that France had to be proactive in giving proof of its loyalty and goodwill in order to keep in the good graces of a vengeful Germany.¹¹¹ But whereas Burrin attributes this to a kind of psychological "fixation" with Hitler's embrace (Burrin [1986] 2003: 457),¹¹² I argue that Déat and the RNP's intensifying identification with Nazism is better explained by the conditions of the political field under the Occupation. The field of Parisian collaborationism was obviously a highly heteronomous one, in that almost all political activity was controlled by the Occupation authorities.¹¹³ The various collaborationist parties were only allowed to operate at the authorities' discretion, and their aspirations to power were necessarily dependent on German benediction. Under such conditions, competition between the different collaborationist movements took the form not of a game of distinction, but rather of a race to conform to what they imagined the Nazis wanted: namely, a French version of themselves. Indeed, the Parisian collaborationists took Nazi propaganda about a "European Revolution" seriously, and sought to ingratiate themselves by becoming the revolution's French representatives.¹¹⁴ Throughout the Occupation, the different collaborationist movements exchanged claims and counter-claims about who was the most faithful partner in the Nazi project for a European New Order, but in doing so they came to resemble one another more and more.

¹¹⁰ Marcel Déat *Journal de guerre* November 24 1942.

¹¹¹ See for example "'Guerre et Révolution: Discours de Déat" *Le National-Populaire* December 12 1942.

¹¹² In this Burrin echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's (1949) homophobic account of collaboration, in which he emphasizes the supposedly feminine, masochistic, and homosexual character of collaborators who sought to charm the Germans.

¹¹³ On heteronomy and fields, see Bourdieu (1993, 1996, 2013), Sapiro (2002, 2007, 2010, 2011), and Steinmetz (2008, 2009, 2010). For an analysis of how the heteronomous conditions of the German Occupation in France affected the literary field, see Sapiro (2014).

¹¹⁴ On "New Europe" ideology among French collaborationists, see Bruneteau (2003).

Within these terms, the RNP's adoption of an unconditional Nazi posture can thus be understood as the product of a kind of accumulation of symbolic capital within the heteronomous field of occupied Paris, wherein political fortune was seen to be conditional on remaking oneself in a Nazi image. Competing with other collaborationist forces, Déat and the RNP were caught in a spiral of radicalization, seeming only to redouble their alignment with Nazism with every potential political setback.

In the early days of the Occupation, collaboration was usually justified in terms of the national interest, the assumption being that this was still distinct from that of the occupier. As the war progressed, however, collaborationists increasingly justified themselves on European grounds, claiming that French and Nazi interests in fact coincided (Burrin 1996: 384). What was true of collaborationists generally was also true of the RNP specifically. Albertini noted that in 1942-1943, the "notion of Europe progressively passed into the foreground before that of the Nation," and that "the idea of a European National-Socialism necessary for the salvation of continental civilization emerged progressively" within the RNP.¹¹⁵ Like other collaborationists, the RNP became increasingly invested in a German victory in the war, and it subordinated everything to this effort.¹¹⁶

This entailed a total alignment with Nazi Germany. Déat argued in 1942 that to "win everything, you have to give everything and ask for nothing,"¹¹⁷ and he urged Frenchmen to make "European gestures" in a show of goodwill to the Nazis.¹¹⁸ In early 1943, after the Germans extended the Occupation to the "free zone" following the Allied invasion of North

¹¹⁵ Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹¹⁶ Ironically, this happened right as the tide of the war was turning against Germany with its defeat at Stalingrad. By this point most collaborationists were too implicated with collaboration to turn back, so they supported the German war effort even more fanatically. This required prodigious amounts of self-delusion regarding the conduct of the war, which is apparent in the case of Déat, who continued to believe in a German victory until the very end.

¹¹⁷ Marcel Déat "Nous n'avons rien à marchander" *L'Œuvre* January 2 1942.

¹¹⁸ "Les dernières chances françaises: Une conférence de Marcel Déat aux Ambassadeurs" *Le National-Populaire* October 31 1942.

Africa, René Benedetti, a former neo-socialist, wrote: "Our solidarity is total, let us affirm clearly, with fighting and revolutionary Germany and its allies, with young Europe struggling today on the marches of the East, at sea and in Africa, ready, tomorrow, for the edification of the new world."¹¹⁹ According to Déat, the French were "perhaps dying as Frenchmen," but they would be "reborn as Europeans." What was now needed, he argued, as a "French Section of the Revolutionary European International."¹²⁰

To a certain degree the RNP's Europeanism was an extension of its leaders' pre-war internationalism and their attitudes toward Franco-German rapprochement. However, whereas these had previously been attached to their pacifist commitments, their commitment to collaboration now led them to shed their pacifism for bellicism. Indeed, one of the biggest discontinuities between neo-socialism and the RNP is that while the neo-socialists had denounced what they took to be the crusading spirit of anti-fascism, the RNP came to completely embrace the military crusade for a Nazi Europe.

The first step came with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. This event gave collaborationism its ideological vocation, and indeed it was only after this that the various collaborationist currents, united in their anti-communism, threw themselves fully into the struggle to demonstrate their "European" *bona fides* by supporting the Nazi war effort. Thus in July 1941, shortly after the launch of Operation Barbarossa, the different collaborationist movements jointly created the Légion des Volontaires Français Contre le Bolchevisme [Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism] (LVF) to fight with the Germans on the Eastern Front. The LVF quickly became a site of intra-collaborationist competition, with the different movements maneuvering to capture it for their own benefit. Déat seems initially to have been

¹¹⁹ René Benedetti "Solidarité totale" *Le National-Populaire* February 6 1943.

¹²⁰ Marcel Déat "Notre espérance est révolutionnaire" *Le National-Populaire* January 9 1943.

cool to the idea of the LVF, but had little choice but to associate himself with the venture. However, the PPF's growing dominance within the LVF, plus Deloncle's efforts to use it to increase his profile and thus marginalize Déat within the pre-schism RNP, pressed Déat to take a more active interest in the volunteer force (Cointet 1998: 236-245). Henceforth Déat and the RNP descended into an ever more rabid bellicism and their support for the German war effort grew in inverse proportion to German battlefield success. Thus the RNP pushed for France joining the Anti-Comintern Pact. They also advocated turning France into "a vast workshop" for the German army,¹²¹ and backed the hugely unpopular policy of requisitioning of French labor to work in German factories.¹²² Things escalated particularly with the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942, after which the RNP demanded that the Phalange Africaine, a volunteer force created in the image of the LVF to fight the Allied advance, become the nexus of a new revolutionary army to re-conquer France's colonies.¹²³ Expressing the RNP viewpoint, Albertini began arguing that Frenchmen could not just hope for a German victory, but had to fight alongside the Axis powers. Moreover, traitors to the European cause had to be punished severely: "It is terror that must be put on the agenda," Albertini wrote, and "blood must flow in France."¹²⁴ After the Normandy invasion in June 1944, Déat joined other collaborationists in advocating the use of the LVF against Allied forces.¹²⁵ By then, the logic of the Occupation had led the RNP to completely renounce the pacifism of its leadership's past. "I am not neutral," Déat declared as the RNP encouraged its members to join the Milice and the Waffen-SS in order to fight the Resistance and the Allies.¹²⁶ A week after D-Day, Albertini told RNP militants in Paris:

¹²¹ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

¹²² E.g. Marcel Déat "Relève et mobilisation" *L'Œuvre* April 23 1943.

¹²³ "Résolution du Conseil central du RNP en date du 23 novembre 1942" *Le National-Populaire* December 5 1942.

¹²⁴ Georges Albertini "La patrie en danger" *Le National-Populaire* November 28 1942.

¹²⁵ This was blocked by Laval (Gordon 1980: 265).

¹²⁶ Marcel Déat "Je ne suis pas neutre" *L'Œuvre* June 18 1944.

"In a moment when the war of nerves has been set off, and when the Germany army must face a difficult ordeal, all propaganda of peace is a propaganda of treason."¹²⁷

Illustration 25. LVF recruitment poster



"The Grand Crusade"

¹²⁷ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

Illustration 26. Second anniversary of LVF, August 1943



Déat is standing left of center, holding papers.

The logic of the Occupation also effected a transformation in the RNP's attitude toward anti-Semitism and racist discourse. Before the war, the leaders of the RNP had for the most part not shown any overt signs of anti-Semitism, and indeed many had been involved in campaigns against it. With the beginning of the Occupation, however, Déat and the RNP embraced a token anti-Semitism, one that nonetheless opened the door to assimilation and had not yet taken a racial form. Still, Déat was frequently attacked for being "philo-Semitic" by other collaborationists with more established anti-Semitic credentials. The Gestapo-financed Institut d'Étude des Questions Juives [Institute of Study for Jewish Questions] was a particularly hostile critic of what it deemed to be an insufficiently anti-Semitic RNP (Burrin [198] 2003: 451-452; Gordon

1980: 105, 202).¹²⁸ Following these attacks, the anti-Semitism of the RNP became more virulent and systematic.¹²⁹ For example, the RNP began organizing public screenings of the notorious anti-Semitic propaganda film, *Jud Süß*.¹³⁰ Before a July 1942 council of the RNP, Albertini argued that although France was not yet anti-Semitic, it had to become so out of the nation's "vital interests."¹³¹ To that end the RNP increasingly introduced a frankly racist and anti-Semitic discourse of "blood" and "soil" in its propaganda, and eventually created an in-house Bureau of Jewish Questions.¹³² The "Jewish Question" was now considered to be a question of "national and racial independence and protection, that is, of the purity of the people itself." The French race could not continue to "exist biologically" if "all the debris of the ghettos of Europe, if an inassimilable race [were] welcomed," a race whose "blood [would] finish by creating in the spirit and flesh of children born of this interbreeding who knows what worry, what trepidation, and what disequilibrium that is not of our soil, our blood, nor our genius."¹³³ Starting in 1942, the RNP thus began calling for "prophylactic measures" and the "elimination of Jews" from the French national community and from Europe more broadly through a policy of forced relocation.¹³⁴ By the end of the Occupation, then, Déat and the RNP espoused a racialized anti-

¹²⁸ For an overview of these accusations, plus similar accusations of Déat's indulgence toward Freemasonry, see Cointet (1998: 271-281).

¹²⁹ Still, the RNP never went quite as far as the PPF in this direction. According to the British Foreign Office's assessment, the anti-Semitism of the PPF was "of the ruthless nature which denies the Jew the right to live; that of the RNP does not exclude the possibility of naturalising baptised Jews or at the worst finding them a national home in Siberia." British Foreign Office, *France Basic Handbook Part III (Revised Edition)*, p. 141.

¹³⁰ One such screening was the target of a bombing by the Resistance. "Un odieux attentat contre le RNP" *Le National-Populaire* September 5 1942.

¹³¹ "Le Conseil National des 11 et 12 Juillet 1942" *Le National-Populaire* July 18 1942.

¹³² "Bureau des Questions Juives" *Bulletin des cadres* March 1944.

¹³³ "Discours de Déat au Conseil National du 12 Juillet" *Le National-Populaire* July 25 1942. Déat argued that Frenchmen were a mixed race, but that they nonetheless remained "aryan." "Le Congrès National des JNP (3 et 4 Octobre 1942)" *Le National-Populaire* October 10 1942. The RNP's Commission on Jewish Questions proclaimed that "Jewish-Aryan interbreeding always entails...a dominantly Jewish physiological character." History supposedly proved "the constantly dangerous role of Jewish half-breeds." "Commission des questions juives" *Le National-Populaire* February 27 1943.

¹³⁴ C.F. Gourdon "Protégeons la race" *Le National-Populaire* June 20 1942. Louis Thomas "Le problème juif en 1942" *Le National-Populaire* October 17 1942. Stunningly, Gourdon argued that the visible humiliation of French

Semitism that became indistinguishable from that of more seasoned anti-Semites. Although Déat and others in the RNP occasionally insisted that Jews were not to be "thrown outside of humanity" (see Burrin [1986] 2003: 452), the virulence of their anti-Semitism, combined with their total alignment with Nazism, in practice left room for equivocation on this point.¹³⁵ Yet the point here is that Déat and the RNP did not become Nazi collaborators because they were already motivated by anti-Semitism, but rather the opposite: they only became anti-Semites because they were committed to collaboration, and were in competition with more seasoned racists and anti-Semites for Nazi recognition.

The RNP's anti-Semitism raises the question of its doctrine more generally. Here, too, the effects of convergence were stronger than any continuity with the past. In July 1942, Déat re-launched his campaign for a *parti unique*, this time under the auspices of the RNP. The RNP itself was rebranded as a proper party, as opposed to the "gathering" [*rassemblement*] it had previously been. With this came an effort to introduce doctrinal cohesion within the party.¹³⁶ No longer did it suffice to bring together men of "good will" as in the past; a "more intimate fusion of sentiments and convictions" was required.¹³⁷ The RNP offered itself as the nucleus of a future *parti unique*, but it hoped that the *parti unique* would unify the collaborationist camp. The RNP thus extended its hand to other parties, culminating in the short-lived Front Révolutionnaire National [National Revolutionary Front] (FRN), an alliance between the RNP, Francistes, MSR,

Jews forced to wear the yellow Star of David was proof of their culpability. After all, "no normal people would blush to wear the distinctive sign of its nationality."

¹³⁵ Louis Thomas, the RNP's expert on "Jewish questions," was for example much more equivocal than Déat, who protested that his anti-Semitism was not motivated by hatefulness, but was purely rational. "Discours de Déat au Conseil National du 12 Juillet" *Le National-Populaire* July 25 1942.

¹³⁶ Albertini recalls that July 1942 marked the beginning of doctrinal cohesion within the RNP. Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹³⁷ "Par le Socialisme, par le Parti Unique. Pour la France, pour l'Europe" *Le National-Populaire* July 18 1942.

Groupe Collaboration, and other smaller collaborationist movements that was conceived as a first step toward the creation of a unified *parti unique*.¹³⁸

Between July 18 and September 4 1942, Déat wrote a series of articles in *L'Œuvre* meant to be the doctrinal basis of both the RNP and the future *parti unique*. But instead of defining an original point of view, the articles outlined a generic vision that was pitched at finding a consensus among collaborationists: i.e. a strong and hierarchical state with a corporatist economy explicitly modeled on an imagined version of German "national socialism."¹³⁹ Telling in this regard is what Déat proposed as the central doctrinal tenets of the RNP and the *parti unique*: "anti-Gaullism," "anti-Bolshevism," "anti-parliamentarism," "anti-Masonry," "anti-clericalism," "anti-chauvinism," and "anti-Semitism" (Déat 1942: 103-133).¹⁴⁰ Doctrine was thus negatively defined around what were collaborationist platitudes, as if to avoid any potential disagreement with the other movements. That Déat only defined RNP doctrine negatively in itself already constituted a break with his past, given that a central component of neo-socialist discourse had precisely been to criticize traditional socialism and anti-fascism for knowing only what it opposed without proposing a constructive alternative. But more importantly, the broad way in which Déat defined the RNP's doctrine signaled his willingness to conform to wider collaborationist sentiment. If "anti-clericalism" and "anti-chauvinism" had roots in his past, the other doctrinal planks were mostly new to the conjuncture of the Occupation, and reflected a homogenizing imperative within the field of Parisian collaborationism. In other words, the things

¹³⁸ Though preliminary discussions were held in late 1942, the FRN was officially launched in February 1943, and only lasted a couple months before fizzling out. Its executive committee was composed of Dominique Judet, Alphonse de Châteaubriant, Lucien Rebatet, Henri Barbé, Georges Soulès, François Desphelippon, Paul Chack, and Dr. Rainsart. The PPF had been invited to join, but it refused, preferring to go it alone. Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹³⁹ I say "imagined" because Déat and others in the RNP consistently overstated the "socialist" character of Nazi Germany. Immediately after the war, Albertini lamented that the RNP had been too credulous of Nazi claims of socialism. Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹⁴⁰ The articles from *L'Œuvre* were collected in a volume and published as *Le Parti unique* (Déat 1942).

that were now considered central to doctrine were not rooted in the RNP's specificity, especially not in the neo-socialist past with which they signified a definitive rupture, but represented a harmonization with prevailing collaborationist thought. The negative terms in which RNP doctrine was defined was not only a sign of this convergence, but was also designed to facilitate it. The RNP was thus caught up in a dynamic wherein it was led to downplay its positive specificity and instead define itself by what it opposed, better for to align itself with the other collaborationist movements and, ultimately, with an imagined Nazism. By the end of 1942, the RNP sounded just like any other collaborationist group when it defined its mortal enemies as "Anglo-American plutocracy and...Bolshevism, inspired both by international Jewry."¹⁴¹

Another sign of the RNP's clear rupture with its socialist and neo-socialist heritage can be seen in its embrace of "totalitarianism." Déat's writings in the 1930s are filled with denunciations of "totalitarianism," and even in the early days of the Occupation he disavowed any "totalitarian" intentions. Yet starting in 1942, he openly assumed the label and made it a central feature of RNP doctrine. "It does not scare us," he wrote, "and we proclaim with tranquility that the Single Party may well be 'totalitarian'" (Déat 1942: 36). "The truth," he went on, was that the *parti unique* was "the necessary instrument of the totalitarian revolution, and that the European revolution [was] totalitarian, as the French revolution will be" (Déat 1942: 40). Clearly, this "totalitarian" turn entailed a break with the past. Déat recognized this, albeit obliquely, when he wrote:

Fascism, Hitlerism, totalitarianism, for twenty years, succeeded one another in the naive detestation of the French crowd. Simply because, very shrewdly, they were made into synonyms of social and political reaction. A belief so well entrenched in opinion that the great task is, even today, to separate Vichy reaction from National Socialist realities.

¹⁴¹ "Résolution du Conseil central du RNP en date du 28 novembre 1942" *Le National-Populaire* December 5 1942.

After blaming this misunderstanding on the connivance of "Jewish leaders," Déat lauded the idea of a "totalitarian regime" as one that would "put back together what has been separated" (Déat 1942: 45-46). "Totalitarianism" was "a conciliation, a reconciliation," and a "totalitarian regime" would finally inaugurate a "civilization of the 'total man'" (Déat 1942: 45, 48).

This embrace of "totalitarianism" indicated a complete acceptance of the fascist and Nazi models.¹⁴² For example, in July 1942 the RNP created a satellite organization, the Front Social du Travail [Social Labor Front] (FST), deliberately modeled on the Nazi *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*. The FST called for a "total solidarity between the worker, the technician, the boss; solidarity in the firm, solidarity in the corporation, solidarity in the professions," and further: "international solidarity."¹⁴³ Another example is the creation in April 1943 of the Cadets Marcel Déat, a youth organization for 10-16 year-olds modeled on the *Hitlerjugend* [Hitler Youth] (Lambert and Le Marec 1993: 75-78). Déat also began using organic metaphors to describe social hierarchies and the natural solidarity that bound them.¹⁴⁴ The primacy of the unitary interest of the State was increasingly affirmed too. Déat argued that the State had to "dominate the interests of classes" and "transcend from the beginning these antagonisms." The State must no longer be the "precarious outcome of temporary compromises," and could not be "ceaselessly called into question."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Indeed, Mussolini had been the first to refer to describe his regime as "totalitarian."

¹⁴³ The purpose of the FST was to organize workers and employers into a common organization and promote labor cooperation under the tutelage of the State, but in practice, the FST seems mainly to have fed information on Gaullist and Communist sympathizers to Occupation authorities. Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

¹⁴⁴ Criticizing "contractual, arbitrary, and chimerical" liberal conceptions of society, Déat argued that as in all organisms, there could well be "at the same time solidarity and hierarchy between the brain and the hand. The hand maybe has less prestige, but it is not less indispensable and its right must always be recognized." Marcel Déat "Contre le bolchevisme, construisons le Socialisme" *Le National-Populaire* June 20 1942.

¹⁴⁵ Compare this with Déat's *Perspectives socialistes*, in which he argued that the State did not transcend class antagonism but rather expressed the balance of class forces. "Discours de Déat au Conseil National du 12 Juillet" *Le National-Populaire* July 25 1942.

Illustration 27. Cadets Marcel Déat



The RNP's "totalitarian" turn was not a superficial semantic shift concealing an underlying continuity, but was widely recognized in the moment as a substantive change in party doctrine. Instructive in this regard is the polemic between Déat and Charles Spinasse, a former socialist who had been close to Déat in the early 1930s. Spinasse had been a cabinet member in Blum's 1936 Popular Front government, but in 1940 he rallied to Vichy and collaboration. Like Déat, he was disappointed with Vichy's reactionary climate and moved to occupied Paris, where he founded a pro-collaboration socialist newspaper, *Le Rouge et le Bleu*. Although he never

renounced the republican past or the legacy of the Popular Front, Spinasse was firmly in favor of a policy of collaboration, and was a fellow traveller of the RNP early on.¹⁴⁶ However, Déat's emulation of Nazism with the campaign for a *parti unique* proved too much for Spinasse. He warned against a "mimetism of the defeated that would have [France] borrow from Germany its present institutions much as Weimar Germany borrowed [France's]." Spinasse's position was in fact the same as Déat's had been immediately prior to the war—i.e. that although Nazism was perhaps appropriate to the "Prussian, Teutonic, and Romantic" German national spirit, it was "contrary to [French] thought and to [France's] national traditions."¹⁴⁷ But now Spinasse accused Déat of betraying French socialist tradition by embracing a permanent statist dictatorship and envisioning a disciplinary social order organized as if in a perpetual state of war.¹⁴⁸ Whereas in their pre-war pacifism they had opposed war on the grounds that it would lead to domestic fascism, Déat now appeared to welcome both. Spinasse thus publicly denounced the idea of a *parti unique*, and resolved to "stay away from a party destined to contain and to coalesce [*plasmer*] the French masses within a totalitarian State."¹⁴⁹ Spinasse's polemic against Déat was out of step with prevailing collaborationist opinion, and only served to isolate him as the Occupation authorities moved to shutter *Le Rouge et le Bleu* (Burrin [1986] 2003: 444; Gordon 1980: 112-113). However, it was an index of the degree to which Déat had moved away from his former positions toward an unqualified identification with Nazism.

Lastly, the RNP's convergence with other collaborationist movements around an emulation of Nazism can be seen at the stylistic and organizational level as well. Déat and the

¹⁴⁶ It is unclear if Spinasse was ever formally a member.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Spinasse "Contre tout mimétisme" *Le Rouge et le Bleu* July 4 1942.

¹⁴⁸ Spinasse accused Déat of presenting a mirror image of the Bolshevism that they had both combatted in 1920, during the Socialist-Communist schism. Charles Spinasse "La fuite en avant" *Le Rouge et le Bleu* August 1 1942.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Spinasse "Contre toute confusion" *Le Rouge et le Bleu* July 11 1942, "La fuite en avant" *Le Rouge et le Bleu* August 1 1942.

RNP were slower to adopt some of the aesthetic trappings of fascism than their collaborationist rivals. For example, Déat continued to wear suits early in the Occupation when other collaborationist leaders like Bucard who had long embraced fascism were already wearing military-style uniforms. According to Gaucher, however, Déat resigned himself to fascist iconography and political culture sometime after the schism with the MSR, though it had not been part of his political temperament (Gaucher and Randa 2002: 83). Thus beginning in 1942, the blue shirts of the RNP became ubiquitous at party gatherings at all levels, with Déat even sporting the party uniform, complete with red armband, at speaking engagements.¹⁵⁰ The RNP also adopted the Nazi salute, along with almost all other collaborationist groups, and the party insignia was changed to look more like a swastika.¹⁵¹ Aesthetically, then, the RNP came more and more to resemble a typical fascist party, and took its cues from the Nazis and other collaborationist groups with established fascist pedigrees.

¹⁵⁰ The wearing of uniforms among regular (i.e. non-paramilitary) party members appears to have been pioneered by the RNP's youth organization, the Jeunesses Nationales Populaires [National Popular Youths] (JNP). According to Lambert and Le Marec, the JNP began wearing uniforms in August 1942 (Lambert and Le Marec 1993: 71).

¹⁵¹ Lambert and Le Marec (1993: 71) claim that the swastika-like gamma insignia was first worn by the JNP. The Milice Nationale Populaire, the RNP's militia organization, adopted a stylized Aries sign as its logo. Though the RNP claimed that this logo was in fact a neo-socialist symbol, it pointed out that while the Aries sign resembled a lower-case gamma, the Nazi swastika resembled an upper-case gamma. The RNP celebrated this "fortuitous" encounter, which it called "as symbolic as it is beautiful." "Pourquoi le signe du bélier?" *Bulletin des cadres* September 1943.

Illustration 28. RNP posters showing the party insignia



The poster on the left shows the RNP's original insignia. The poster on the right shows the new one.

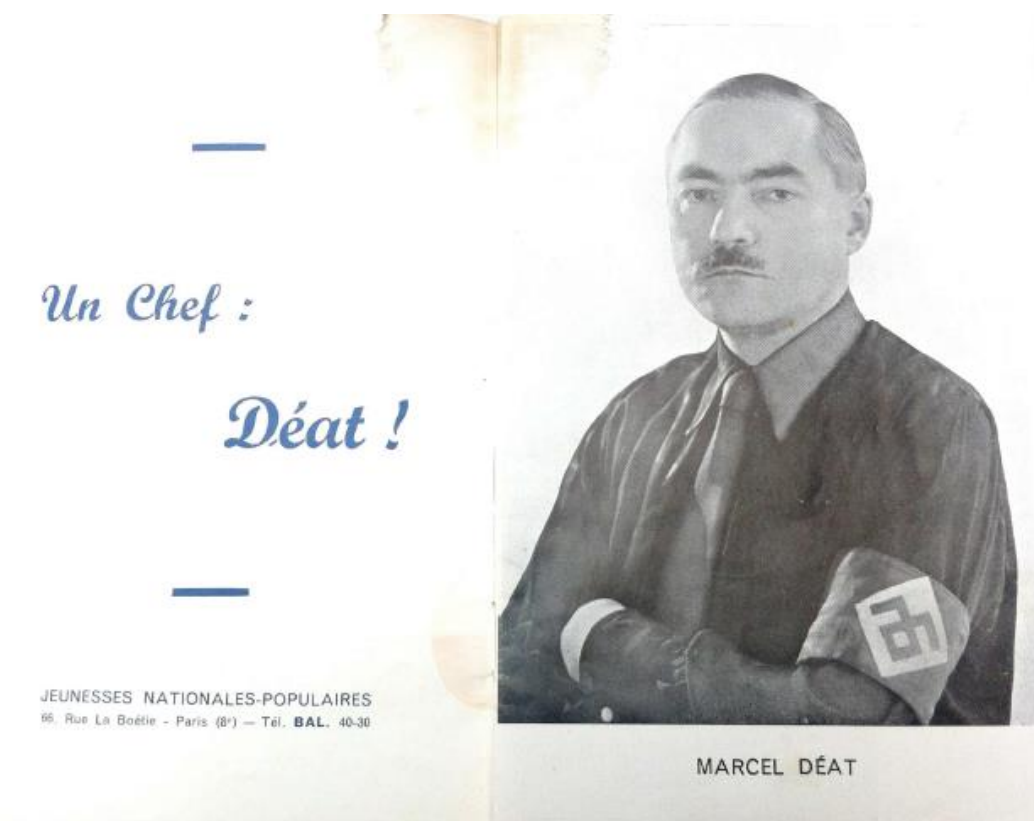
Another shift in the RNP's image came with its adoption of a leadership cult in a clear imitation of the Nazi *führerprinzip*. Again, this had been standard practice within the pre-war fascist right and among other leading collaborationist parties, but it was only after May 1942 that the RNP itself erected a cult of personality around Déat.¹⁵² Déat was now regularly hailed as "The Chief," and his authority within the RNP was considered absolute (e.g. RNP 1943). His portrait was prominently displayed at all major party gatherings, and instructions were circulated to party cadres on the proper way to exhibit photos of him.¹⁵³ Déat was said to personify the ideals of the RNP, and paeans to his intellectual prowess, political acumen, and martial

¹⁵² According to Albertini, this was done at the initiative of Pierre Célor, a former Communist. Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹⁵³ Jacques Guionnet "Une exposition Marcel Déat" *Bulletin des cadres* February 1944.

accomplishments became regular features of RNP propaganda.¹⁵⁴ Déat himself boasted that he was "as good with the machine gun as [he was] with the dialectic!"¹⁵⁵ This kind of personality cult, particularly its martial dimension, had been completely foreign to Déat and to neo-socialism before the Occupation, and represented an obvious attempt to mimic fascism at a time when doing so was thought to be the road to power.

Illustration 29. Marcel Déat in uniform



"One Chief: Déat!" The photo is of a JNP pamphlet (Silly and Alberitni 1943).

¹⁵⁴ René Benedetti "Marcel Déat, Notre Chef" *Le Nationa-Populaire* July 12 1942.

¹⁵⁵ Déat was in fact a highly decorated soldier from World War I. Prior to 1942, however, Déat almost never cited his military credentials for political legitimacy. "Discours de Déat au Conseil National du 12 Juillet" *Le Naitonal-Populaire* July 25 1942.

Illustration 30. RNP meeting, June 1943



Illustration 31. RNP meeting, May 1944



Déat is speaking at the podium, in front of a portrait of himself. Albertini (center) is seated directly in front.

There was also a progressive militarization of the RNP more generally as the war and Occupation went on. In July 1942, Albertini called on the party to become a "militant," "fighting," and "knightly order" ready to take power by force if necessary.¹⁵⁶ The RNP already had a militia on paper, but it only became central to party identity and organization in 1943. The spur for this transformation was the failed experiment of the FRN. Déat had wanted the FRN to form a unified militia, but the different member organizations insisted on maintaining their autonomy. The Francistes, in particular, already had an established paramilitary wing, and their disciplined show of force at a February 1943 rally for the FRN apparently gave off the impression that they dominated the FRN, despite the RNP being the larger organization. Bitter at being upstaged by the more dynamic and spectacular Francistes, it was after this event that, according to Albertini, the militarization of the RNP became "irresistible." Thus it was that the *Milice Nationale Populaire* [National Popular Militia] (MNP) was revived in May 1943. Decked out in the RNP's blue shirts, black ties, and red armbands, the new paramilitary formation organized mobilization exercises in which Déat participated, and obtained authorization for 250 firearms from the German authorities, with members encouraged to procure additional arms by their own means.¹⁵⁷ At its third party congress in July 1943, the RNP decided to copy the Francistes, whose own congress had recently concluded, by closing the proceedings with a thousands-strong paramilitary parade across the Latin Quarter with Déat at the head. Writing shortly after the Occupation, Albertini waxed nostalgic about this moment, which he considered to be the "apogee" of the RNP:

I directed the procession, surrounded by Guionnet and Desphelippon. And I saluted Marcel Déat, arm raised in the name of everyone with a fervor that I had never known...It was a poignant spectacle...There were here by the hundreds socialists, anarchists, anti-militarists of yesteryear, passing while proudly raising

¹⁵⁶ "Le Conseil National des 11 et 12 Juillet 1942" *Le National-Populaire* July 18 1942.

¹⁵⁷ Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale. Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

their heads, while striking the ground with their martial heel, chests bulging, covered in decorations that had never before been worn and yet had been won like the others.¹⁵⁸

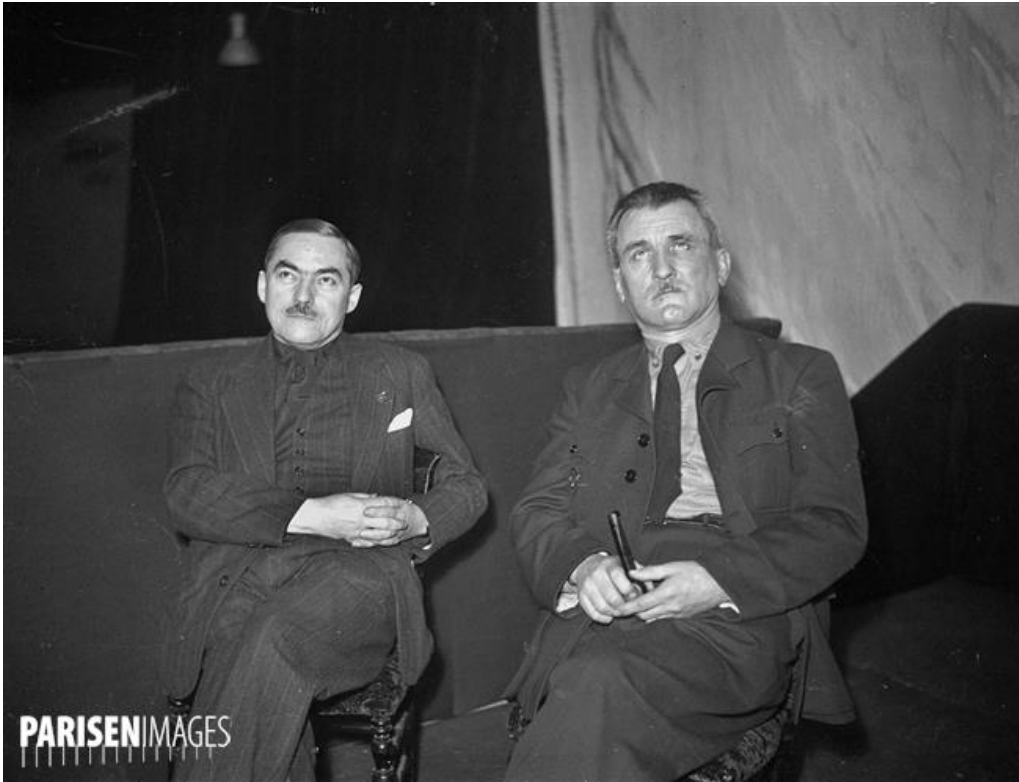
The need for paramilitary action thus became an increasingly dominant theme as the RNP sought to appropriate some of the *élan* displayed by competing collaborationist movements with more militant reputations. The party's growing emphasis on militia organization, however, provoked yet another episode of dissension within the world of left collaboration. This time it was René Château, a former Radical and a close associate of Déat within the RNP, who objected to the party's radicalization. In August 1942, *La France socialiste*, the newspaper run by Château and whose purpose was to rally former socialists to collaboration, began refusing the publication of RNP communiqués within its pages. Like Spinasse, Château remained attached to certain aspects of the left republican tradition, and was dismayed at the RNP's open embrace of "totalitarianism" despite his commitment to collaboration. Things came to a head on the militia question. Château publicly condemned the RNP's call to create militias as a betrayal of pacifist principles, leading to his immediate expulsion from the RNP in February 1943 and his subsequent arrest by the authorities.¹⁵⁹

This episode, like Déat's polemic with Spinasse, marked just how far the RNP had moved from the socialist and pacifist political origins of its leaders. By 1943, the RNP had undergone a process of radicalization and militarization that rendered it virtually identical to other collaborationist and fascist parties, with whom it was engaged in an anxious race to remake itself in a Nazified image.

¹⁵⁸ Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut d'Histoire Sociale.

¹⁵⁹ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011. See also Burrin ([1986] 2003: 444-445) and Gordon (1980: 113-114).

Illustration 32. Déat and Darnand, December 1943



Déat (left) with Joseph Darnand (right), the leader of the Milice Française.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the fascistization of the RNP was not the outcome of a logic internal to neo-socialism, but rather followed a logic that was specific to the conjuncture of the Occupation. I have suggested that the connection between neo-socialism and the RNP—at the levels of both discourse and personnel—is overstated, and that the more salient factor in bringing Déat and others on the left into the orbit of Franco-German collaboration was the reclassification of the political field effected by the question of war, peace, and appeasement. Once in the orbit of collaborationism, Déat and his comrades were caught in a spiral of radicalization as they competed with other collaborationist movements to ingratiate themselves with the occupier by remaking themselves in a Nazi image. The fascism of the RNP was thus the

expression of an evolution that characterized the field of collaborationism as a whole, and not an expression of its specificity as a movement with socialist and neo-socialist roots. The fascism of the RNP, in other words, was an emergent phenomenon whose origins lay not in its past, but in the particular situational context of the Occupation.

Conclusion.

The radicalization of the RNP only intensified as the party's political prospects became more and more hopeless. Déat, in particular, displayed a limitless capacity for self-deception over the course of the Occupation, with regard to Hitler's intentions for France, the course of the war, and the popularity of collaborationism. Indeed, his commitment to a "totalitarian" transformation of France deepened precisely as the chances for its success faded. The Allied invasion of North Africa and the Battle of Stalingrad turned the tide of the war at the end of 1942, and the anticipation of an Allied victory as well as the increasing severity of the Occupation began turning the French against collaboration. Yet the self-deception was in some sense the product of necessity. He had staked his future on Nazi hegemony in Europe, and he had already crossed the Rubicon, so to speak. Thus even after the unpopularity of collaborationism became clear, he had little choice but to either sink into political oblivion or double down on his commitment to a Nazified France. He chose the latter course. The RNP now regularly lamented the passivity of the "sheep-like crowd," and recast itself as a "lively and active minority."¹ Déat no longer pretended that the party expressed a national-popular consensus, but threatened to "save" France "despite itself."² RNP discourse took on a fatalistic tone as Déat and others

¹ "Une France sans Empire n'est plus la France" *Le National-Populaire* November 21 1942.

² Marcel Déat "Hitler à 54 ans" *Le National-Populaire* April 24 1943.

increasingly characterized French suffering at the hands of the occupier as punishment for the country's insolence in not rallying completely to the so-called "European Revolution." By 1944, Déat was saying the time had come for France "to make its revolution or disappear." This revolution, however, would now have to be made "in flames and blood."³

Déat, like others in the collaborationist hardcore, thus became utterly dependent on the German authorities. Throughout most of the Occupation, Déat had supported Laval, in whom he saw a champion of a robust Franco-German collaboration and a bulwark against Vichy's reactionary tendencies. By the end of 1943, however, Déat and the RNP grew impatient with what they saw as Laval's foot-dragging, and began appealing directly to the Germans to depose him.⁴ Indeed, it was at the insistence of the occupation authorities, and over the objections of Laval, that in May 1944 Déat was named Minister of Labor and National Solidarity in a radicalized Vichy government that included the arch-collaborationists Philippe Henriot and Joseph Darnand.⁵ As the military situation grew more desperate, Déat's commitment to Nazi victory became total. He celebrated the LVF and the Waffen-SS for incarnating the Nietzschean ideal of the "good European."⁶ In May 1944, he dissolved the RNP's militia organization and encouraged party members to join Darnand's infamous Milice in putting down the Resistance and repelling an Allied invasion of France.⁷ As Allied forces advanced on Paris in August 1944, Déat fled France under German protection and made his way—along with the remaining

³ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

⁴ See, for example, the "Plan de redressement national français," drafted by Déat, Darnand, Jean Luchaire, Georges Guilbaud, and Noël de Tissot (Burrin [1986] 2003: 446; Gordon 1980: 287-288). The RNP made another appeal to the Germans in May 1944, this time to replace Laval with Déat as head of government. Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011. In his immediate post-war recollections, Albertini lamented that the rupture with Laval did not come soon enough. Georges Albertini *Histoire du RNP*, Institut, d'Histoire Sociale.

⁵ In fact, Déat, who had long advocated for the return of the French government to occupied Paris, never returned to Vichy and insisted on fulfilling his functions from Paris. In an amusing irony of history, Déat justified his entry into this government in terms similar to how he justified SFIO participation in a bourgeois government in the early 1930s: a period of cabinet participation was a necessary precursor to the full conquest of power. Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

⁶ Préfecture de Police 77W1552 n.48011.

⁷ Georges Albertini "La mobilisation de la Milice" *Bulletin des cadres* July 1944.

collaborationist hardcore—to the German castle town of Sigmaringen, on route to which he was granted his first audience with Hitler.⁸ Despite the dire circumstances, Déat still believed that he would eventually be brought to power on the back of a resurgent Wehrmacht. Indeed, Déat maintained his position as Minister of Labor in a phantom "government-in-exile" led by de Brinon, and continued to intrigue against rival collaborationist factions in the picayune drama of Sigmaringen Castle.⁹ It was in Berlin that the much-diminished RNP¹⁰ held its final party congress in January 1945, just as Germany's last major offensive on Western Front was faltering. Not until April 1945 did Déat finally abandon his ambitions for a fascist revolution in France. On April 21, only days before Hitler would commit suicide in the *Führerbunker*, Déat fled before advancing Allied forces once again, eventually finding refuge in a convent near Turin in Northern Italy, where he remained a fugitive in exile (he was condemned to death *in absentia* by the French High Court of Justice in June 1945) until his death in 1955.

Déat's descent into a spiral of radicalization during the Occupation raises an obvious question: why, when faced with obstacles to his political projects, did he always press forward? Even as his lieutenants in the RNP balked at fleeing France in August 1944, Déat refused to believe the game was up. The question could be asked of the collaborationist hardcore more generally. Burrin has provided the elements of an answer when he suggests that collaborationist leaders were generally political outsiders whose "instinct to engage in a politico-ideological vendetta was compounded by their cast of mind, which was that of political professionals who

⁸ Déat was accompanied by Doriot, Darnand, Marion, and Fernand de Brinon. To Déat's disappointment, Hitler communicated his intention to install Doriot as the head of a new revolutionary government in France. On this meeting, see Cointet (1998: 329-330).

⁹ For accounts of Déat's activities in Germany see Cointet (1998: 320-344) and Déat (1989: 883-947).

¹⁰ Most of the RNP's leadership had stayed behind in Paris in August 1944. Albertini reproached Déat for abandoning the party in his decision to flee (Varenes 1948), but Gaucher has claimed that Déat fled with the prior accord of the RNP leadership (Gaucher and Randa 2002). Cointet (1998) has cast doubt on Albertini's account, which seems to have been oriented toward saving his own skin during the post-war purge trials. In any case, the RNP effectively collapsed after the Liberation of Paris, and was dissolved by de Gaulle's provisional government in September 1944.

would under no circumstances settle for retreat or abstention" (Burrin 1996: 381).¹¹ This was indeed the case for Déat. I have already described Déat's prodigious ambition in the introduction. This ambition was such that no step in his progressively depraved alignment with Nazism was too far. On this point the writer Jean Guéhenno proved prophetic. Writing in his diary after attending—out of curiosity only—the RNP's first public meeting in February 1941, Guéhenno remarked of Déat:

He still has the same Auvergne accent that he had twenty years ago at the École Normale, a kind of rustic force disciplined by the rhetoric one learns at the École. I dare not judge his faith, his sincerity. No doubt he has the sincerity common to his profession: he has been aspiring to power for twenty years, and he continues to do so. A politician must want to exercise power, he says to justify himself. He wants to be a leader and he'll be one in German if he can't be one in French; he'll be führer, if that's the language of the new Europe. What does the herd matter to him, as long as he's the shepherd. One real passion inspired him yesterday: hatred of the Vichy government, which did not make him a minister (Guéhenno 2014: 62).

Guéhenno's comments about Déat's schooling indicate another significant factor in Déat's trajectory during the Occupation. I also noted in the introduction that Déat's political ambitions were bound up with this earlier intellectual ambitions. Indeed, it was what I have called Déat's intellectualist disposition that turned every practical accommodation to the occupier driven by his ambition into a moral and philosophical solidarity that, committed to paper in his daily column in *L'Œuvre*, left him nowhere to go but forward in his radicalization. According to Montagnon,¹² writing after the war, it was this "need to write" that sealed Déat's fate:

Running a newspaper was his dearest wish. But one needs a daily editorial, one must say what one thinks about events. And inexorably, first with hesitation, then every day more clearly he commits himself. He senses resistance around him, he must overcome it, he cannot retreat. With his great talent, he fashions a

¹¹ This is also the view of Gordon (1993) and Hoffmann (1968).

¹² Though Montagnon had been in the orbit of the RNP, especially early on in the Occupation, his relative discretion earned him a clean record—and even reintegration into the SFIO—after the war.

doctrine. He must back up his earlier statements. He founds a party, the R.N.P. But the latter is secretly fought by more violent rivals. Will he be outflanked? No, he hardens his position, he does as far as Doriot...he is bound by his own dialectic. He writes a book: *Le Parti unique*. Every day, another link attaches him to the camp of those who will drag him in their downfall (Montagnon 1969: 139-140). Déat was thus a "prisoner of the daily editorial" and the "victim of his intellectual machinery," which left him no choice but to either "disavow and despise himself, or to persist and rush headlong into the absurd" (Brissaud 1965: 103). His predisposition to justify every change in his political circumstance in moral and theoretical terms committed Déat—to borrow a term Spinasse used in his 1942 polemic against Déat—to a "*fuite en avant*," or a flight forward, in which the problem of his (lack of) political power was consistently resolved by deepening his identification with Nazism and thus alienating himself ever more from his socialist past.¹³

In this study, I have traced the evolution of neo-socialism from its birth as a distinct doctrinal movement in the early 1930s to its appropriation by the RNP during the Nazi occupation to justify its politics of collaborationism. Throughout, I have argued against the essentialist and teleological logic of what I have called the continuity thesis, according to which the "totalitarian" fascism of the RNP can be explained by ideational features inherent to its leaders' earlier neo-socialism. I have especially focused on the trajectory of Marcel Déat, who was the undisputed leader of both neo-socialism and the RNP, and whose career is taken to incarnate the continuity between neo-socialism and fascism. I have tried to show that neo-socialism was not a fixed and self-identical doctrine, but that its meaning changed as it was reworked over time. I thus agree with Bastow's claim that the relation between the Déat of 1933 and that of 1941 is "not one of logical necessity, but of a process of argumentation through

¹³ Charles Spinasse "La fuite en avant" *Le Rouge et le Bleu* August 1 1942.

which a series of possible avenues was followed up, leaving other possible avenues ignored" (Bastow 2000: 47). But if these choices were not logically entailed by neo-socialism as such, neither were they purely random. I have argued that Déat's "process of argumentation" cannot be understood without reference to his penchant for argumentation and the principally intellectual way in which he related to politics. However, I have also suggested that the shifts in neo-socialist discourse cannot be understood if we remain limited to the ideational level in what I have called the "idealist/intellectualist bias." To make sense of these discursive shifts, I have instead relied on a situational analysis that relates these to the particular relational contexts to which they were a response. I thus suggested that the different steps in Déat's trajectory—socialist parliamentarian, neo-socialist, centrist "revolutionary," moderate planist, intransigent pacifist, Vichy pretender, and Nazi true believer—were conjunctural adaptations to changing political fortunes. At each step in his evolution, Déat's politics represented an adaptation to a particular state of the political field. Far from being driven by an inexorable logic tending towards fascism, Déat's thinking was always the situational product of a negotiation with circumstance. Only with the particular conditions of the Occupation did Déat seal his fascist fate. As trivial as it may seem, there is thus good reason to doubt that Déat would ever have become a committed fascist had the war played out differently—a hypothesis that would necessitate revisiting the historical judgment pronounced upon neo-socialism.

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