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ABSTRACT

Colonel François de La Rocque is best known as the leader of a militant French right wing league, the Croix de Feu. He has been widely branded a fascist and a traitor due to his prominent role in acts of political violence during the 1930's, most notably the riots of the 6th of February 1934. In 1936, the Croix de Feu was rearranged into the Parti Social Français (PSF), the largest single political party in France in the years just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. The PSF likely played a role in defining the ideology of the Vichy regime after the defeat of 1940, as evidenced by Marshal Pétain's adoption of the PSF's slogan as the motto of his regime. In 1942, La Rocque broke with Vichy over its collaboration with German occupier, and formed a resistance organization. I investigate La Rocque's actions during the Second World War, as well as efforts by his family and former followers to influence memory of his actions after his death in 1946. La Rocque's story provides an alternative narrative of the French resistance against the German occupation, one in which it was possible to be both loyal to Pétain and active in the Resistance. This paper seeks to complicate the monolithic popular image of the Resistance, and also to reframe debates over La Rocque's political career within the context of his complex wartime experience.

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Resistance from the Right

François de La Rocque and the Réseau Klan



Armband insignia of the movement Croix de Feu, circa 1930.

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A Tense Encounter¹

Sunday, January 9, 1944 saw the arrival of two new inmates at the German military's VIP prison at Schloss Itter in Austrian Tyrol. The first was Michel Clemenceau, son of the former French Prime Minister. The second was Lieutenant Colonel François de La Rocque, an old man visibly weakened by a long and solitary prison sentence. His fellow inmate and former Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, describes his first encounter with La Rocque in his prison journal:

How different he looked from 1936. The German prison camp had left its mark; hunger had shriveled him. He had been kept in isolation for months, in cells infested with vermin in Moulins and Fresnes and at Cherche-midi, without news of his wife or children. Then in the German camp at Eisenberg (in Czechoslovakia), he was put on a starvation diet, as were all the other French prisoners.²

¹ All translations of French-language text are mine. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Professors Nathanael Greene, Philip Pomper, and Judith Brown for their guidance throughout this project; and to the Davenport committee, the financial support of which made this work possible.

² Édouard Daladier, Jean Daladier, and Jean Daridan, *Prison journal, 1940-1945* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 252.

François de La Rocque was a decorated veteran of the First World War, and had been the leader from 1930 to 1937 of the militant veteran's organization known as the Croix de Feu. He was best known, however, for his politics. An authoritarian rightist, he was widely considered to be a fascist and had been a major player on the extreme right of French politics in the interwar period. His political party, the Parti Social Français, had become the largest party in France by the time of the German invasion. After the French defeat of 1940, he had moved his political base to Clermont-Ferrand, near Vichy, and become involved in the political life of the new regime ruled by Marshal Philippe Pétain. The nature and extent of his involvement in the Vichy government would not be fully known for many years after the Allied victory of 1945, and there was heavy speculation on where his loyalties lay.

At the time of La Rocque's arrival, the castle of Itter was serving as a prison for many French notables, including but not limited to Generals Maurice Gamelin and Maxime Weygand, Edouard Daladier, tennis star Jean Borotra, the trade unionist Léon Jouhaux, and former prime minister Paul Reynaud. The journals of several of La Rocque's fellow inmates tell of the controversy that arose shortly after his arrival at the prison. Paul Reynaud describes the event as follows:

[Michel Clemenceau] stated that he had seen the original of a letter from La Rocque to [Heinrich] Himmler asking him to be released and proposing to aid him in his battle against communism with [La Rocque's] 2 million followers.³

Clemenceau's accusation was a serious one. The question of whether or not there was a traitor among them immediately split the inmates into opposing camps, more or less corresponding to their personal politics. Clemenceau was reinforced by the testimony of a Mademoiselle Mabire, who claimed that although she had not seen the letter, Clemenceau had.⁴ Borotra rallied to La Rocque's defense, as did General Weygand. Both men had been affiliated with the political right in the prewar period, and their entrance into the dispute did little to convince La Rocque's detractors. Reynaud, for his part, implied his distrust for La Rocque and his right-wing friends on January 9th, noting that "three former collaborators of Pétain" sat together at a table, isolated from the rest. Those collaborators were, "Weygand, Borotra, and La Rocque."⁵

³ Paul Reynaud and Évelyne Demey. 1997. *Carnets de captivité: 1941-1945*, Pour une histoire du XXe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 309.

⁴ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 251.

⁵ Reynaud and Évelyne, 309.

The individuals present had their own opinions of La Rocque, influenced by personal animosities as well as La Rocque's controversial political activities and seemingly ambiguous loyalties. Daladier, for example, had been Prime Minister of the government that had resigned as the result of the rioting of the right-wing leagues on February 6, 1934. La Rocque and the Croix de Feu had been present at the infamous incident, considered by many observers to be an attempt at a fascist coup. La Rocque also had a history with the father of his accuser, Georges Clemenceau. La Rocque informed Daladier of an episode from "around 1898," when the elder Clemenceau had "violently attacked" La Rocque's father, a general of artillery, in parliament. In 1918, La Rocque claimed that the elder Clemenceau had "winced and refused" to decorate him on the field battle, implying that the parliamentarian's dislike for La Rocque's father had influenced his decision.⁶ Whether or not the events played out as reported, it can be seen that some (if not most) of the inmates at Schloss Itter had some bias with regard to the controversial colonel.

The drama came to a head with what Reynaud called a "coup de theatre" at dinnertime on Sunday, January 10th. Both his journal and Daladier's describe the meeting, at which La Rocque rose and demanded to defend himself "without mincing words" against Michel Clemenceau's accusations. La Rocque's letters were read aloud to the assembled notables, and turned out to consist of protests and demands for release. They did not contain the alleged unsavory deal with Himmler, and Clemenceau's claim was discredited. Daladier describes how, "a very emotional Borotra read aloud all the letters that La Roque (sic) had written to the Germans. There was disappointment on several faces around the table, ironic smiles on others."⁷ Clemenceau continued to claim that La Rocque's behavior had been suspicious at the camp at Eisenberg, from which both had recently arrived, but because he was unable to provide the promised written evidence there was little he could do.

General Weygand, who had also been present at the debate, provides a sympathetic view of La Rocque's position in a note written during his imprisonment. In the note, Weygand describes the proceedings as a "procès-verbal." The events of January 9th and 10th took on the character of a trial, with the charge of treason leveled against the old soldier and accused fascist François de La Rocque. Weygand recounts how Reynaud acted as one attorney, arguing the La Rocque had written his letters with a double meaning and had intended to offer collaboration to Himmler, while Daladier came to La Rocque's defense and dismissed the charge. Weygand also reports Daladier's conclusion that, "that this

⁶ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 256.

⁷ Ibid., 255.

was not the place nor the time to show disagreement between the French.”⁸ Daladier’s own account of the event reveals that he went on to say that, “it would be up to the people of France, and to them alone, to judge.”⁹

When the dust had settled, his fellow inmates had, in a sense, recognized that La Rocque had not offered his collaboration and that of his political party to the German occupiers. However, Reynaud was not convinced and neither was Léon Jouhaux, who Reynaud claims declared, “that this letter [to Himmler] has produced the same impression for me as it has for Clemenceau.”¹⁰ On the other hand, Daladier was sure that La Rocque was innocent of the charges, and Weygand appears also to have been convinced.¹¹

Daladier’s journal describes the events of January 9th and 10th as, “our little drawing room comedy,”¹² but it is easy to see that for La Rocque a great deal was at stake. Daladier’s final verdict on La Rocque was that his letters to the German authorities were, “the letters of a man who held passionately to his newspaper, [*Le Petit Journal*] his achievements, and the leadership of his party, and who, above all, wanted to see his image of Pétain redeemed through patriotic resurrection.”¹³ Itter in January 1944 was not the time or the place for the question of La Rocque’s loyalties to be laid to rest, and the job of debating his political role in the Vichy period after his death would fall to a series of personal associates, his family, and eventually to contemporary historians. His trial was moved to the court of public opinion, where it continues to be argued.

Daladier recounts La Rocque’s self defense at a dinner on January 10th, in which he informed the gathered notables of the events of his last day at Eisenberg. La Rocque recounted how “General de Gaulle’s brother, who was also a prisoner in the camp, had hugged him as he was leaving and assigned him several missions.” In response to this defense, Daladier himself responded “that if a de Gaulle, be he short or tall, skinny or fat, svelte or a hunchback, had put the stamp of a patriot on la Roque (sic), even those who were most difficult to satisfy would salute.”¹⁴ His words would prove to be prophetic, although it would not be until 1961 that General de Gaulle himself would recognize La Rocque’s status as a deportee and invest him with “the stamp of a patriot” officially. Meanwhile, by February

⁸ Jacques Weygand, *Weygand, mon père* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970) 403.

⁹ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 256.

¹⁰ Reynaud and Évelyne, 312.

¹¹ Weygand, 403.

¹² Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 255.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁴ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 255.

1944, some of his countrymen appear to have already passed judgment on La Rocque. Reynaud recounts that, “the Gaullist paper *Bir Hakeim* has published a list of people that the Gaullists request to have condemned to death. For the army: Weygand and La Rocque are at the head of a list of seven.”¹⁵ Certainly, not all Frenchmen would be as forgiving of La Rocque as Daladier had been.

My aim here is to explore the reality of François de La Rocque’s political activities during the period between the 1940 German conquest of France and his death in 1946. I also consider some of the dominant understandings of La Rocque’s loyalties and politics in that period. Competing narratives of La Rocque’s wartime activities began to emerge almost at the outbreak of the Second World War. The debate over whether he was to be understood as a Resistance hero or a collaborator and a traitor mirrors another, older debate over La Rocque’s loyalty to the French Republic.



François de La Rocque

I shall first discuss that earlier controversy and the interwar political activities of La Rocque and the *Croix de Feu* and PSF, and provide context for later controversies. I then describe La Rocque’s specific political program, and consider the similarities and differences between La Rocque’s published political views and the Vichy program (as well as his complex engagement with that regime). I then move to the period during which La Rocque broke with Vichy and became the leader of a resistance network, the *Réseau Klan*. Finally, I consider the controversy that arose over La Rocque’s wartime activities and efforts by his family and supporters to influence popular and historical memory of François de La Rocque and the PSF.

In light of La Rocque’s full political career, but with special focus on his wartime activities, I attempt to develop an understanding of La Rocque’s actions during the Vichy period and how the reputation he garnered during the interwar period influences the collective memory of his politics and his loyalty to France to this day.

¹⁵ Reynaud and Évelyne, 314.

I. A Leader and His Acts

The Gentleman

François de La Rocque was born Annet-Marie-Jean-François La Rocque de Sévérac on October 6, 1885.¹⁶ His father, Raymond, was a lieutenant colonel of artillery who would eventually reach the rank of general and command the defenses of the naval base at Lorient. La Rocque was a descendant of a long line of illustrious military officers and the scion of a proud noble family, holding (at least in theory) the hereditary title of Viscount of Chateaubriand.¹⁷

Of La Rocque's lineage, Maurice Thorez of the Parti Communiste Français would say in 1935:

We, great-grandsons of the sans-culottes of 1792, of the soldiers of Valmy, we deny to the aristocrats, to the descendants of the émigrés of Coblenz, to M. de la Rocque, president of the Croix de Feu, whose great grandfather was in the army of Condé and of the King of Prussia, we deny to them the right to speak in the name of our country!¹⁸

La Rocque's noble lineage and illustrious name brought to the minds of many on the left memories of a century of revolutionary struggle, and the royalist counter-revolutionary movement that had accompanied it. Thorez's point of view that La Rocque and other descendants of nobility ought not to have the right to speak for "our country" is not surprising. After all, Thorez the Communist spoke for a very different vision of France than his pedigreed counterpart. However, Thorez was not the only enemy of La Rocque's to invoke his noble background by way of criticism. In 1935, a former associate of La Rocque, Paul Chopine, published an exposé on the growing "Croix de Feu" [Cross of Fire] movement of which La Rocque was the leader, referring to La Rocque as "the count La Rocque," even as he compared his political aims to those of Adolf Hitler.¹⁹

After all, La Rocque's background did not merely endow him with an impressive battery of names. His parentage and his education instilled in him a set of values that would follow him through his life and political career. Of La Rocque's

¹⁶ Jacques Nobécourt, *Le colonel de La Rocque (1885-1946), ou, Les pièges du nationalisme chrétien*, Pour une histoire du XXe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ Paul Chopine and Jean Maurice Hermann, *...Six ans chez les Croix de feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), 19.

father, historian Philippe Rudaux has written that, “He was interested in social Catholicism and sought to orient the intelligence and the hearts of his many children [toward it].”²⁰ The catholic faith that La Rocque inherited from his parents would contribute to his political views throughout his long career as a public figure. La Rocque’s eventual formation of a “French Social Party” reflected the social doctrine of Catholicism espoused by his father Raymond and instilled in François from an early age.

In addition, La Rocque was raised to conceive of himself as a “gentleman,” a conception that informed him of his own place in society and that of individuals like him. La Rocque’s family line had included many soldiers and statesmen, including the 19th century soldier, politician and writer François René de Chateaubriand. Jacques Nobécourt, author of the only comprehensive biography of La Rocque, has argued that the François de La Rocque’s conception of his place in society “agreed to the letter” with that of his ancestor, who had written in his 1848 *Memoires d’outre tombe*:

I was born a gentleman. [...] If, in the beginning, I was the lord or the viscount de Chateaubriand, secondarily I am François de Chateaubriand, and I prefer my name to my title.²¹

The French meaning of “gentleman” refers specifically to one of noble blood, and for La Rocque that bloodline came with responsibility.

Nobility, while at the base of La Rocque’s political and social vision, was not of paramount importance to him. This is evidenced by the fact that La Rocque never referred to his title or his names in his writings, choosing to be known simply as François de La Rocque. La Rocque may have downplayed his lineage in his writings, but he emphasized the value of tradition and permanence, as well as the positive impact of his upbringing on his worldview. At the end of his life, La Rocque still held onto his basic ideas about the structure of society, derived from a variety of sources that he summarized in the introduction of his last book, *Au service de l’avenir*:

That which I have repeated for so long, an unforgettable father – my only teacher in all matters until my sixteenth year – instilled in me during my childhood and my adolescence; masters like Lyautey and Foch dictated and demonstrated to me; and years of work at

²⁰ Phillippe Rudaux, *Les Croix de Feu et le P.S.F* (Paris: Éditions France Empire, 1967), 31.

²¹ Nobécourt, 16.

Indigenous Affairs, as well as my modest and direct command of a suffering and victorious troop taught me the use of.²²

La Rocque's political and social ideas, then, originated in large part from the instruction he received from his father. However, they developed and took shape only through his years of military service. Through the experience of the command of soldiers in battle, La Rocque learned to put his vision of society into action, a vision rooted in both his noble background and his military training. La Rocque's experiences in the military both linked him to his illustrious and militarily accomplished ancestors, and allowed him to define himself and sharpen his worldview based on a vision of "the future". While he drew a sense of purpose from his privileged background, he would go on to define himself not by his blood, but by his actions.

A Military Man

La Rocque enrolled at St. Cyr military academy in 1905, and received high marks. Upon graduation, he joined the cavalry arm of the French army. In 1908, he sought to be assigned to North Africa, and received his wish despite his relative youth.²³ The cavalry suited La Rocque. It was a traditional arm of the military, one that would become obsolete shortly after the outbreak of World War I. In the years prior to the outbreak of the war, however, a serious debate existed between proponents of the cavalry and of the infantry. In 1912, La Rocque wrote that he favored the cavalry because, "no weapon is more traditionalist. The influence of past to create the esprit de corps."²⁴ La Rocque's realization of the importance of "the past" (and the traditions derived from it) was instrumental in his conception of society. The traditional role of both the gentleman and the cavalry officer would inform his ideas about his own rightful role in French society, and the role of tradition in shaping that society.

La Rocque was in Algeria during the Agadir crisis, which was resolved in 1911 with Germany's acceptance of the French protectorate over Morocco. He found himself on the front lines of France's expanding overseas empire, serving his country with distinction and receiving glowing reviews from his superiors who described him as, "truly an officer of the vanguard of the light cavalry, of the first rank."²⁵

²² François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir* (Paris: Société d'Édition et d'Abonnement, 1946), 12.

²³ Nobécourt, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

La Rocque's conception of himself was fine-tuned by his military service. He held his commander, General (and eventually Marshal) Lyautey, in very high regard. Lyautey's writings influenced La Rocque's thinking. In an article ("Le Rôle Social de L'Officier") Lyautey had put forward the role of the officer as a moral example for his troops, a leader in word and deed. The mission of the officer class, for Lyautey, was to be "agents of social action." This mission included the responsibility to be, "constantly close to their men, anxious to demonstrate their moral prestige, trust and confidence in listening and speaking."²⁶ The officer, for Lyautey as well as La Rocque, was a particular sort of gentleman with a certain societal function. It is simple to see how La Rocque would eventually extend those principles beyond the military and use them to develop a set of principles for leadership.

In 1931 Maurice Genay, président en titre of the Croix de Feu, described the new leader of the organization as "a soldier, brave soldier's son ... the ancient way; driven by a burning faith and spirit of sacrifice... He attached the highest sense of having an open mind, cultivated, orderly."²⁷ Genay's quotation reveals, in some sense, the combination of the noble tradition and military tradition present in La Rocque's conception of leadership. He described a leader with elements of nobility that is cultivated and brave "in the old manner" with elements of the ideal soldier. La Rocque's "ardent faith" also is in evidence, and the faith that he had inherited from his father would continue to inform his decisions during his time as president of the Croix de Feu and afterward.

The Great War

In Morocco, Lieutenant La Rocque served as commander of a "goum" of cavalry, a unit approximately equivalent to a company. His unit saw a good deal of action against native guerilla forces, and the organization of the "goum" would become important to La Rocque's concept of leadership. His unit took part in multiple actions, participating in Lyautey's victorious 1914 campaign against the rebellious Zaïans.²⁸ La Rocque soon requested to be transferred to indigenous affairs, a position that he would continue to hold until 1916. He became fluent in Arabic, taking his cues at least partially from Lyautey who had urged that his men respect the traditions of the natives in the interest of earning their loyalty. During his time as an indigenous affairs officer, he developed an interest in methods of "pacification" that combined cultural understanding with selected application of force to gain and keep the loyalty of the local population.

²⁶ Nobécourt, 27.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 41.

Nobécourt describes how the methods of pacification were put forward by Lyautney in a 1914 circular, in which he recommended that the French authorities safeguard Berber customs and, “facilitate the evolution [of the Berbers] to that of the French civilization”. Nobécourt claims that Lyautney sought to eventually bring the “Berbers” closer to French civilization by evangelizing them.²⁹ La Rocque, for his part, considered the French civilization that he represented to be Christian in nature. If the ultimate intent of the pacification methods employed by La Rocque and described by Lyautney was religious conversion, in the short term it served the purpose of improving France’s relations with its allies in Morocco, and provided a template for how La Rocque would later unite disparate groups to pursue a common goal. La Rocque was severely wounded in 1916 near Khenifra, and was cited for bravery when he, “wounded, conserved all of his energy, and did not abandon command of his unit.”³⁰

In 1916 La Rocque, now a captain, was returned to France due to his wounds. He would serve there until the end of the war, attached to the 135th Infantry Regiment on a temporary basis.³¹ He had great respect for his new commander, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, as evidenced by the Marshal’s inclusion in La Rocque’s list of personal mentors as late as 1945.³² While the trench warfare of the Western Front was distinct from the cavalry engagements that had characterized his service in Morocco, La Rocque went on to receive a total of six citations for bravery and two battlefield promotions.³³

When the war ended in 1918, La Rocque served as a staff officer, taking part in the 1921 French military mission to Poland. He retired from the army in 1928 at the rank of lieutenant colonel. His separation from the military left him free to pursue a new career, one that would soon put him in contact with a group of decorated veterans whom called themselves the “Mouvement Croix de Feu.”

The Victors

The Allied victory came at a terrible economic and human cost. France had been the site of much of the fighting on the Western Front, and there was a great deal of rebuilding to be done. Millions of veterans were forced to return suddenly to

²⁹ Nobécourt, 34.

³⁰ Édith de La Rocque, *La Rocque tel qu’il était* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 34.

³¹ Nobécourt, 48.

³² François de La Rocque, *Au service de l’avenir*, 12.

³³ Nobécourt, 55.

civilian life, many of them with residual physical and psychological wounds. Their shared experiences of warfare bound them to one another and separated them from the rest of French society. For La Rocque, the military officer already had a particular political and social role in that society. The veterans of the First World War would provide the manpower for a political movement modeled in part on the military experience.

In his 1934 book entitled *Service public*, La Rocque identified his movement as one of “anciens combattants” (veterans) and offered the veterans of the Great War as France’s political salvation. His movement was to, “be animated, composed, conducted by the victors themselves, in the sole service to the general interest.” The victorious men of France’s army were implied to represent the general interest by virtue of being relatively devoid of politics, or at least of partisan affiliation. The key feature of the veterans was, “their will to public service and their quality as victors,” which “designates them as the instrument par excellence of national salvation.”³⁴ In this manner of thinking, the soldier’s service and his participation in victory made him a source of national pride, and the standard bearer of the national interest. This attitude combined with La Rocque’s prior interest in the social role of the officer to help to propel him into politics more directly.

La Rocque the Patriot

La Rocque espoused a social vision that stemmed from his upbringing and his military experience. However, he also had a set of political beliefs that stemmed from a certain conception of France. France, for La Rocque, meant certain traditions and beliefs that were shared, ideally, between all French people. The catholic faith was first amongst these, and he often made reference to “catholic France” in his writings:

The good Lord tests France harshly, that he may collect all of our sadness and make from it a merit sufficient to give us, not just victory, which is now certain, but also all the virtues of the previously Catholic and noble France.³⁵

God’s stewardship of France, in his view, allowed the possibility of a return to an older time in which France had been universally catholic and virtuous.

³⁴ François de La Rocque, *Service public* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1934), 11.

³⁵ Nobécourt, 37.

La Rocque saw France as a great family, held together by bonds of nationality and reciprocal duty:

The leadership, since 1931, of the Croix de Feu movement, confirmed their value for me, thanks to the variety, to the number of men, of women, and of “youths” united within the satellite organizations, and then within the P.S.F., under the permanent signature of an immense civic family.³⁶

The conception of the “civic family” described here is explicitly hierarchical. The hierarchy in question was based upon the “natural talents” of the various sectors of the population, and every Frenchman and woman had his or her part to play.

The French culture that La Rocque had represented and attempted to spread under Marshal Lyautey in north Africa was based on a set of religious and civic principles that were, in La Rocque’s view, timeless. In *Service public*, he would speak of certain “permanent realities and eternal truths.”³⁷ His loyalty to these realities and truths reflected his basic conservatism, and they would remain the basis of his own particular form of patriotism throughout his life.

The Croix de Feu

The Croix de Feu was founded in 1928 by “founding leader” Maurice d’Hartoy. It was symbolized by a “violent and dynamic” image in which, “a large skull occupies the center of a Maltese cross.”³⁸ This image evoked the Croix de Guerre, a military honor common to many of its members. The group received early financial backing from François Coty, a wealthy perfumer and proprietor of the conservative journal *Le Figaro*. Maurice Genay soon replaced Hartoy, with the 38-year-old lieutenant colonel La Rocque as vice president. In 1929, the organization comprised 5,000 members, primarily World War I veterans.³⁹ It used public demonstrations and its newspaper, *Le Flambeau*, to advocate on behalf of veterans and the national defense.

As it grew, the Croix de Feu developed satellite organizations. A youth group, known as “les Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu,” emerged in 1930.⁴⁰ By that time, the movement included 10,000 members in the Paris region alone.⁴¹ In 1931,

³⁶ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Nobécourt, 95.

³⁹ Rudaux, 43.

⁴⁰ “Sons and Daughters of the Cross of Fire”.

⁴¹ Rudaux, 47.

La Rocque became president or “chef” of the Croix de Feu. He represented an attractive public face for the organization. Severely wounded and highly decorated in battle, his sense of duty and sacrifice reflected the highest ideals of military service and patriotism. La Rocque’s nobility may have served to enhance his status in the minds of his followers, as evidenced by allusions to it in their writings. In 1934, Henri Malherbe published a highly complimentary book on La Rocque wherein he asserted that La Rocque was “rich in glory” and yet was described by one of his relatives as “poor in dignity.”⁴² The fact that La Rocque lived simply was evidence of his virtue for Malherbe, and also of his noble character. While he made no direct mention of La Rocque’s noble title, he implied that La Rocque possessed personal features that allowed him to be dignified in his poverty.

The organization grew under his leadership, and its rhetoric became more specifically political. In 1932, the organization took the position that budgetary issues and French war debt were undermining the national defense. The fault for this rested on both the French parliamentarians and on the American government, which had demanded that France pay its debts on time. “One evening,” Rudaux writes, “a delegation of thousand members, wearing their decorations, crossed without incident the gates of the Palais Bourbon.”⁴³ This demonstration was typical of the picketing that would be practiced by the Croix de Feu throughout its existence, culminating in the momentous events of February 6, 1934.

A Program?

La Rocque’s main emphasis was upon action. “Do something,” became a slogan for him, a response to the parliamentary stalemate that, in his view, weakened France and made her vulnerable to her internal and external enemies. In his view, soldiers, “the elite of men who have *made* war,” were the ideal leadership for France.⁴⁴ La Rocque favored a national leadership that would be willing to act decisively in the national interest.

La Rocque put forward a series of political ideas that he believed to be in the national interest in *Service public*. Some of his recommendations were to be expected from a conservative militarist. He argued that, “first we must restore

⁴² Henry Malherbe, *La Rocque; un chef, des actes, des idées, suivi de documents sur les doctrines de la rénovation nationale* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1934), 15.

⁴³ Rudaux, 49.

⁴⁴ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 8.

public morality, the authority of the state, [and] the French mystique.”⁴⁵ The authority of the state had been undermined by a long period of inefficient parliamentary government, and he expressed the intent to “clean the parliamentary gangrene.”⁴⁶ The public morality that La Rocque favored was closely related to the ideal of “catholic France” that La Rocque had put forward while serving in North Africa. The special quality of France, its “mystique,” was also seen as being endangered by the alleged dithering of the gangrenous parliamentary government.

La Rocque’s anti-parliamentary feeling was not unique to him. In the 1930’s in France, such attitudes were common across the political spectrum. French politics and society appeared stalemated and unable to deal with a series of escalating crises, not least of which was the Great Depression. The Third Republic operated by maintaining the status quo, a balanced budget, and domestic stability at all costs. It would take the threat of a fascist uprising to bring about the sweeping reform program of the Popular Front. The inflexibility and lack of strong leadership that characterized the Third Republic made it slow to confront changes of affairs. The dominant Radical party was nominally leftist, tracing its lineage to the Jacobins and espousing anti-clericalism and the enlightenment, but was fiscally conservative and often more concerned with politics than social issues. The political inertia of the Third Republic, combined with corruption both real and imagined, brought its government into conflict with political ideologies that emphasized dynamism and leadership and created openings for such views to become widely accepted as alternatives to the parliamentary stalemate.

The specifics of La Rocque’s plan, however, were more complex and somewhat less rigidly conservative than his rhetoric might have suggested. He recommended a minimum wage and a planned economy, although he opposed what he referred to as “statism.” His plans for France were forward looking, based on a “French mystique of a France that survives and progresses.” Not a simple reactionary, La Rocque included elements of several different political philosophies into a nominally common-sense solution to France’s problems. His “plan of action” called for:

Awakening of the individual and collective conscience of the people so that they may freely reveal their qualities and be encouraged to their essential resilience; this within the frame of protecting, coordinating,

⁴⁵ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

and conducting the national discipline, renovated and imposed. Elimination of irresponsible, clandestine, egotistical influences, that, under the signature of parasitism and of statism, corrupt the public existence and oppose themselves to the redeployment of [our] values. Adaptation of social and scientific progress to the fixed realities which no civilization can abandon without returning to prehistoric barbarity: work, family and country.⁴⁷

The Croix de Feu, schooled in its leader's beliefs in both progress and "eternal truths", would be quick to locate individuals and groups that were enemies of either or both.

The Croix de Feu and the Leagues

The Croix de Feu was not the only organization of its kind in France. A significant number of right-wing "leagues" existed in France in the 1920's and 30's, advocating positions ranging from royalism to fascism. The Croix de Feu fell in between these two extremes. By 1936, the Croix de Feu would boast some 450,000 members, making it the largest of the leagues.⁴⁸ The oldest league was the Action Française, led by the anti-Semitic author and journalist Charles Maurras, which had emerged out of the Dreyfus affair and advocated an essentially reactionary program. Other notable groups included the Solidarité Français and the numerous and violent Jeunesses Patriotes.

The leagues were considered by their enemies to be a sort of unit, a huge fascist bloc with secret plans for a coup. The threat posed by the leagues was especially troubling to the Socialism leader, Léon Blum, who argued a month after the riots of February 6, 1934 that, "I do not believe myself to be among those who have an exaggerated idea of the fascist danger in France, but the events of February 6th have revealed the existence of this danger."⁴⁹ Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that there were enormous political differences between the various leagues. René Rémond, influential historian of the French right-wing, has argued that only two organizations in France prior to 1936 deserve the name "fascist," and neither of these two ever had more than 10,000 members.⁵⁰ It would not be until 1936 that Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français would come into its own, with the allegiance of some 100,000

⁴⁷ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 19.

⁴⁸ James F. McMillan, *Dreyfus to De Gaulle: politics and society in France, 1898-1969* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), 104.

⁴⁹ Joel G. Colton, *Léon Blum: humanist in politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 95.

⁵⁰ McMillan, 104.

individuals recruited from both the right and the left.⁵¹ While nearly all of the leagues believed the parliamentary system to be deeply flawed and inefficient, each group had its own solution to offer. It would take an extraordinary moment to cause these disparate organizations of the so-called “far right” to act in concert with one another.

Stavisky

Elimination of corruption and the neutralization of internal enemies were among the declared aims of the Croix de Feu in the 1930's. Its members would soon have the opportunity to move against the corruption they so reviled in unprecedented strength. In 1934, scandal rocked the French government. The death under mysterious circumstances of a “crooked financier” and adventurer named Serge Stavisky brought the corruption present in the parliament sharply into focus. Stavisky had connections in the government including Albert Dalimier, minister of the Colonies, and Jean Chiappe, prefect of the Paris police. His death was considered a suicide, but many on the right believed that the police had murdered him in an attempt to cover up his corrupt dealings with the government. Due to the scandal, Prime Minister Chautemps was forced to step down in favor of Édouard Daladier. One of Daladier's first acts in power was to dismiss Chiappe. The dismissal was due to his links to Stavisky, but also due to Chiappe's tendency to apply police power more violently against left wing protesters than right-wing ones.⁵² Chiappe had said that, “never, under any circumstances, would he have gone against the ex-servicemen,” a claim that endeared him to the right-wing leagues and made his dismissal a political issue.⁵³

The leagues, the Croix de Feu included, responded with great anger to the affair and some called for the end of the parliamentary system. No doubt Stavisky, a profiteer without scruples, represented just the sort of egoist and parasite against whom La Rocque had railed. The Action Française, explicitly monarchist and counter-revolutionary, was particularly virulent in its denunciations both of Stavisky and of the parliamentary regime with which he had been so closely linked. With Chiappe's dismissal, the growing anger of the right-wing leagues exploded into a violent demonstration that appeared to many to be an attempt at a coup d'état.

⁵¹ René Rémond, *The right wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 282.

⁵² McMillan, 102.

⁵³ Alexander Werth, *France in ferment* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 130.

February 6th

Thousands of members of several of the notable leagues gathered on the sixth of February, 1934, in Paris to protest the parliamentary government and the increasing power of the left. Alexander Werth published his eyewitness account of the riots in 1935, in which he noted that although the leagues did not all coordinate their actions, “Most of them had formed the same plan: to march to the Place de la Concorde and then across the bridge to the Chamber of Deputies.”⁵⁴ The Croix de Feu was to demonstrate to the south of the chamber, at some distance from the other leagues. They arrayed themselves under the orders of their officers, called “group leaders.” Meanwhile, the right-wing press was full of exhortations to action against the regime. The Action Française newspaper published a huge headline that read, “Against the robbers, against the vile regime, all, tonight, before the Chamber!”⁵⁵

Member of Action Française, Solidarité Français and others joined the veterans of the Croix de Feu in their march. When the marchers attempted to cross the bridge leading to the chamber, the police and mounted guards blocked their way. The rioters used improvised weapons fashioned from fence posts, paving stones, and “razor blades attached to walking sticks.”⁵⁶ Clashes occurred at several locations all around the Chamber of Deputies, and the fighting dragged on through the day.



Riots in Paris,
February 6, 1934.

⁵⁴ Werth, *France in ferment*, 142-143.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

Throughout the clashes, however, the Croix de Feu was made conspicuous by its absence from the front lines. Its members were given orders not to attack the police cordons.⁵⁷ Even as the fighting raged between representatives of the embattled government and members of the leagues, François de La Rocque was penning an open letter to the Daladier government, demanding among other things that he “hand over our destiny to a small number of resolute personalities.”⁵⁸ While he appeared to wish for the replacement of the republican system of government with some form of authoritarian oligarchy, he did not show his counterparts’ willingness to seize his political aims by force.

The rioters eventually dispersed without reaching the Chamber, and any possibility of a coup dissipated. A vote of confidence in Daladier’s government, planned for the sixth, went ahead. Despite the vote of confidence, Daladier soon resigned. The relatively conservative former President of the Republic and leader of the Radical party, Doumerge, agreed to form a new government.⁵⁹ While no coup had occurred, the parliamentary regime had shown itself to be weak and faltering in the face of the lightly armed leagues.

The Aftermath

Despite the restraint shown by the members of the Croix de Feu on the sixth of February, many observers viewed them as central to the rightist “plot”. Their actions had betrayed the weakness of the parliamentary government as it stood. Werth argued in 1937 that the, “Fascist leagues had become an all-important instrument of pressure against Democratic Government.”⁶⁰ La Rocque’s restraint on the day of the riots showed his respect for the rule of law, as he opted to ask Daladier to resign from power rather than attempt to remove him.

The Doumerge government did not last long, and its fall was followed by a resounding victory for the left. A new “Front Populaire” came to power in 1936, listing “anti-fascism” as one its political aims. A broad coalition, it was composed of moderate Radicals, Socialists, and Communists. Its leader was the Socialist leader, Léon Blum. La Rocque’s “manifeste” for the Croix de Feu, published in *Le Flambeau* at the beginning of 1936, had warned of “the bolshevism

⁵⁷ McMillan, 104.

⁵⁸ Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy: the Croix de feu and the Parti social français, 1927-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 45.

⁵⁹ Werth, *France in ferment*, 170.

⁶⁰ Alexander Werth, *Which way France?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 64.

of Moscow” which “would lead to anarchy.”⁶¹ In the same year that the Croix de Feu reached its largest size, the enemies of the leagues had gained control of the government. La Rocque’s apparent worry about the growing power of the parties of the left proved to be prescient, at least for his organization. The new government wasted little time outlawing the paramilitary leagues and sending La Rocque into political exile. The pretext for their move against the leagues was a February 16, 1936 assault by the Camelots du Roi on the automobile and the person of Leon Blum. Shortly thereafter, the leagues were ordered to disband by the Popular Front government.⁶² The Croix de Feu movement, with its hundreds of thousands of adherents, was suddenly outlawed and appeared to have become politically irrelevant. The Communist-backed Popular Front appeared to have won the day.

PSF

La Rocque’s decision came swiftly. Rather than allow his growing movement to be derailed at such a critical juncture, he decided to reconstitute the paramilitary Croix de Feu into a political party with a more moderate image and a broader appeal. According to Alexander Werth:

La Rocque’s followers claimed that “we shall lose 50,000 extremists (by becoming a legitimate party)... but we shall gain 200,000 new members, who up ‘til now were put off by the idea that we were a ‘civil war army.’⁶³

The new party was not intended to differ very much in its political aims from the Croix de Feu. The difference was in the methods of the new organization, which hoped to lay a claim on the very parliamentary politics it had rejected so vigorously as a “league.”

Many changes were made in the transition from Croix de Feu to Parti Social Français. Some were superficial. For example, the organization shuffled old Croix de Feu officials out of positions of power and replaced them with “other old officials or simple members of the Croix de Feu,” who, “assumed instead the responsibilities of provisional organizers.”⁶⁴ Others, including the incorporation

⁶¹ Nobécourt, 377.

⁶² Redaux, 139.

⁶³ Werth, *Which way France?*, 200.

⁶⁴ Nobécourt, 431.

of non-veterans and women into the party, would fundamentally change its nature and set it on a new course toward parliamentary participation.

The political aims of the new party, as stated by the provisional executive committee of the PSF on July 11, 1936, would have been familiar to anyone who had read *Service public*. They included “reconciliation and cooperation of all the French, whatever the class ... to ensure the prosperity of the country.” The new party retained La Rocque’s deeply held belief in the “civic family,” held together by the national interest rather than being divided by class antagonisms. La Rocque’s social views manifested themselves in the program of the PSF as well. “Reconstitution of the family, vital cell of the nation,” was a stated goal of the party, although the means of carrying out such a plan (or even what enacting such a goal might entail) remain difficult to discern.⁶⁵

Trial and Collapse

The organization’s transformation into a political party was effected quite suddenly, and it did not immediately lose its militant character. Its members clashed violently with the Communist party and with the police throughout 1936 and 1937, and the violence of that period culminated in another public defeat for La Rocque. A PSF rally scheduled to occur October 2, 1936 was banned from assembling at the Vélodrome D’Hiver. This occurrence would not have had a momentous impact had it not been for a Communist rally that was allowed to go ahead as planned the same day. La Rocque planned a counterdemonstration, and rallied 15-20,000 supporters for the purpose.⁶⁶ The police, who were expecting this development, blocked the PSF members from disrupting the Communist rally.

As a result of the fighting that erupted between the police and PSF members, La Rocque and the other leaders of the PSF were accused of reconstituting the outlawed Croix de Feu. Escalating violence between PSF members on one side and pro-Popular Front demonstrators and police on the other validated this claim. This chaotic chain of events culminated with the so-called Clichy incident of March 16, 1937, named for the town in which a riot between PSF members and Socialist demonstrators resulted in 257 policemen and 107 demonstrators wounded, as well as the death of five demonstrators.⁶⁷ Most of the demonstrators who were hurt were loyal to the Popular Front, and the outcome

⁶⁵ Nobécourt, 434.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 126.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

was a political and legal headache for the PSF. Put on trial, La Rocque and several of his associates were convicted of reconstituting the Croix de Feu. They received relatively light sentences, being ordered to pay fines of 1,000 to 3,000 francs. In June 1938, much of the damage done by the criminal investigation was undone when La Rocque had his and his followers' fines reduced. More importantly, by June 1938 the appeals court stated, "the PSF was no longer comparable to the Croix de Feu."⁶⁸

La Rocque the Traitor

The conception of La Rocque as a traitor to the Republic remained common, especially on the political left, despite the relatively light legal penalties assigned to him in 1937-38. André Simone would, in 1940, describe the riots of the sixth of February 1934 as "the first open revolt by Hitler's fifth column in France."⁶⁹ Much of the debate over La Rocque's loyalty hinged upon his intentions on 6 February 1934. La Rocque had written as early as 1934 that he had never intended to march on the Chamber of Deputies.⁷⁰ However his enemies continued to believe that his intent had indeed been a fascist coup.

Prominent literary and political voices condemned La Rocque. Journalist André Simone named him as one of the "men who betrayed France" to her 1940 defeat by Germany. In 1935 Paul Chopine, a former Croix de Feu member, published a fiery polemic that condemned La Rocque as a fascist and a traitor in no uncertain terms. Chopine described the Croix de Feu leader as a vain and absurd individual, "for La Rocque wants us to see him, to admire him. He wants to shout: 'It's me, La Rocque!'"⁷¹ Chopine attacked, in particular, the cult of personality that had formed around "the chief," comparing him to Hitler and other fascist leaders. The comparison was not an absurd one, and Chopine was only one of many critics of La Rocque who went public with their opinions.

Some of his critics praised his intent, while attacking the tactics of his movement. Werth, in 1937, wrote that La Rocque's movement stood for "the mystique of the disinterested man, ready to sacrifice himself for his country."⁷² While he

⁶⁸ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 146.

⁶⁹ André Simone, *J'Accuse!: the men who betrayed France* (New York: The Dial Press, 1940), 65.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷¹ Chopine and Hermann, 138.

⁷² Werth, *Which way France?*, 70.

defended the intentions of La Rocque, he also argued that the Croix de Feu would eventually become “the leading fascist organization” in France.⁷³

Not all of La Rocque’s critics were to his left. After the failure of the rioters to storm the Chamber of Deputies, the newspaper of the Action Française expressed disgust with La Rocque’s lack of willingness to seize the moment. The Croix de Feu were, “lions directed by an ass.”⁷⁴ Many of those who had arrived at the Place de la Concorde to join the Croix de Feu in its march on February 6th had since become disillusioned with the relatively cautious colonel, even as his enemies attacked his aggression and willingness to use violence.

A conception of François de La Rocque as a traitorous descendant of émigrés underlay many criticisms of his actions. Nobécourt has described a slogan that was often shouted by La Rocque’s enemies. The development of the chant, “Raccourcir Casimir,” indicates how unpopular La Rocque had become on both the left and on the right as a result of his role on the sixth of February. The “Casimir” in question was a donkey from a novel by the Countess of Ségur. The exhortation to “cut Casimir” was in fact a recommendation that the “donkey” be sent to the guillotine, a fate reserved for foreign agents and enemies during periods of civil war.⁷⁵

Plotting a course more moderate than that of the most extreme leagues, and far more daring than his enemies on the left would have preferred, La Rocque managed to displease a great many of his fellow Frenchmen. For his critics of all political stripes, whether they considered him a traitor by virtue of his nobility, his fascist leanings, or his unwillingness to take a chance on violent revolution in the national interest, La Rocque after the 1934 riots was a pariah whose continuing involvement in politics could only lead to more conflict.

II. François de La Rocque’s Ideology

By the time of the founding of the Parti Social Français, La Rocque had developed a fairly consistent worldview. In his writings for *Le Flambeau* (Croix de Feu) and *Le Petit Journal* (PSF), as well as in his several political tracts written between 1934 and 1941, certain priorities can be seen to emerge. Through analysis of selected published output of the Croix de Feu and PSF from

⁷³ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁴ Nobécourt, 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

1934 to 1941, I address several important questions. First, what was La Rocque's opinion of the parliamentary regime, and what role did he take in French politics prior to World War II? Second, what would La Rocque's ideal government have looked like? This question intersects with another that has been asked repeatedly (and with disparate results) by historians, that is whether or not La Rocque had fascist sympathies.

The relatively conservative governments of Gaston Doumergue and Pierre Laval gave way by 1936 to a Popular Front backed by Socialists, Communists and moderate Radicals who proposed what for La Rocque and the leagues appeared to be an aggressive program of reform. The accession to power of the left wing Popular Front sharpened La Rocque's criticisms of the government but they do not seem to have altered his basic program. Other changes in this period included the disintegration of Franco-Italian relations as a result of the failure of the Hoare-Laval pact and near-constant political and economic crises.

La Rocque enthusiast Henri Malherbe's book *La Rocque: un chef, des actes, des idées*, published after the events of February 16th, provides both a point of departure for my analysis and a brief synopsis of the program of the Croix de Feu at the time of the February 6th riot. In his conclusion, Malherbe provided what he viewed to be the "cadre de pensée" (frame of mind) of La Rocque's movement, dividing that frame of mind into subject headings ranging from "La Politique Intérieur" to "La Politique Coloniale."

La France

Malherbe's description of the character of the Croix de Feu organization eschews political particularisms in favor of an appeal to patriotism.

We unite in an absolute fraternity of men from essentially varied social origins and philosophical and religious background that excludes all reference to a particular political faction: the cult of the homeland and love of the French order is, along with our common nobility 'of fire,' our intangible and unique link.⁷⁶

The nature of the organization as one of men united by their common experience of warfare is clear from this quote, as is the Croix de Feu's intended image as a disinterested group united only by its members' patriotism.

⁷⁶ Malherbe, 97-98.

The patriotism that La Rocque encouraged in the members of his organizations was of a very particular form. His conception of France was at the base of his understanding of patriotism and patriotic duty, and he attempted on several occasions to commit it to paper. On July 1, 1930, La Rocque wrote an article in *Le Flambeau* in which he described the “French soul” that his followers were to serve.

She is not of yesterday, the French soul. She has existed through centuries and centuries. She has known successive and different regimes. She has dominated all the circumstances of our national history. She has known the most beautiful triumphs and the greatest misfortunes. She has resisted all changes of fortune.⁷⁷

La Rocque’s words call to mind Charles de Gaulle’s conception of “France éternelle,” both because of the La Rocque’s essentially optimistic sense of the timelessness of France, and because both were given to avoiding partisan political language in favor of patriotic generalities. While generalities like those featured in the pages of *Le Flambeau* reveal little about the specific political aims of La Rocque’s movements, it is clear from a variety of sources that he had and vigorously pursued very specific aims in the period prior the German invasion of 1940.

Under La Rocque’s leadership, the Croix de Feu acted as a political pressure group, using a variety of tactics to advance a fairly stable list of priorities. Henri Malherbe offered a rationale for the events of February 6th when he wrote, “it is our responsibility to set a benchmark and to impose the viewpoint of those who claim to lead the nation.”⁷⁸ The responsibility of the disinterested patriot to impress his knowledge of France’s best interest on France’s leadership is one that La Rocque appears to have taken seriously. Through public demonstrations and prolific writings, La Rocque and the members of the Croix de Feu made themselves visible and relevant in the crowded world of French politics.

The specific ends pursued by the Croix de Feu and PSF were fairly static in the period prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Still the program of the Croix de Feu put forward in La Rocque’s 1934 book *Service public* was modified subtly during the interim years, and the organizations’ focus shifted somewhat with the rapid pace of political events in France and Europe generally. The similarities and differences between the priorities expressed in *Service public* and

⁷⁷ Malherbe, 97.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

those expressed in La Rocque's 1941 tract *Disciplines d'action* are indeed telling, as are the contents of other works published by La Rocque and his followers between 1934 and 1940.

Following naturally from Malherbe's implication that the veterans of the Croix de Feu ought to instruct the nation's leaders on how best to lead, La Rocque's main criticism of the government of the Third Republic was that it was mismanaged. In *Service public*, he singled out "the hesitation, fatalism, fantasy, impressionability, contradictions," and "the vagaries" of France's foreign office. The poor policy decisions made by that office were, for La Rocque, an important part of the reason for the Allied Powers' inability to curb the growing power of the Soviet Union.⁷⁹

Of course, the Quai D'Orsay was not the only location where La Rocque saw mismanagement and inefficiency. The national defense, as he termed it, was handicapped by the inability of those in charge to recognize reality. They had "ignored or obstructed [the development of] aviation and the saving possibilities of maneuver," and otherwise failed to learn the lessons of the Great War.⁸⁰ *Service public* rails against failings in all areas of French government policy, especially disorder and folly in leadership and a lack of vision on the part of those on power.

Anti-Parliamentarism

La Rocque was hardly unique in his mistrust of the parliament and of the ministers of the Third Republic. The rise of radically authoritarian ideologies of the right and of the left can be seen as a failure of liberal democracy, as democratic governments ran up against a series of crises that confounded the slow progress and bargaining inherent in parliamentary procedure. The anti-parliamentarism shown by the leagues of the French right in their assault on the Chamber of Deputies is reflected in La Rocque's writings as well.

In *Service public*, La Rocque assigns a section to "electoralism," a problem that he ranks alongside "lack of respect" and "apathy" as a reason for France's weakness. "at the risk of being accused of creating neologisms and being accused of an obsession, I have never ceased, throughout this book, to incriminate electoralism." The reason for his anti-electoralism appears to have been at least

⁷⁹ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 35-36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

partially his distrust of democracy. He goes on to explain that in France, “‘good elections’ are preached like salvation; an electoral seat is desired like a dream.”⁸¹ His distrust of democracy was not limited to opposing “electoralism.”

La Rocque saw the French as putting too much stock in their democratic and electoral institutions. Those institutions, for La Rocque, were essentially amoral and base, full of disreputable bargaining validated by the “noble language” of politics. One result of the immorality and baseness of the parliamentary regime was the decay of “civic virtue.” The result was “explication, justification, celebration of that collective decadence toward which France of 1934 appeared lured as toward a precipice.”⁸² La Rocque also railed against what he termed the “demagogy” of the electoral parties. In his view, the rhetoric of politics was a source of strife within France, and by extension a cause of France’s weakness.

Whatever his misgivings about the system, La Rocque did have working relationships with several right-wing governments. After February 6th, when Gaston Doumergue and his conservative government replaced Daladier in power, La Rocque referred to the change of government as a “poultice on a gangrenous leg.”⁸³ However, his relationship with Doumergue was not as icy as it appeared. Both were concerned about the potential for class conflict and “civil war” in France, and were united by their fear of the new Front Commun between the Communists and Socialists. During the constitutional crisis of autumn 1934, Doumergue referred to the sixth of February riots as a rebellion of the “general public” against the instability of the parliamentary system, citing in his radio address of September 24th the fact that there had been “six governments in 20 months” prior to the riots and used that fact to argue for the merging of the roles of the President of the Council and the Prime Minister into one strong executive with the power to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies at will.⁸⁴ The changes put forward by Doumergue sound like they could have been drawn from the mind of François de La Rocque. Doumergue and conservative politician André Tardieu sought to make use of the actions of the Croix de Feu to make a power grab, one that ultimately failed but that showed the influence of the Croix de Feu and its ideology on the French right. Rémond has written that, “according to the testimony of André Tardieu at the La Rocque-Pozzo di Borgo

⁸¹ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 91.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸³ Werth, *Which way France?*, 75.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

trial (1937) the president of the Croix de Feu every month obtained money from the government's secret fund" during the Doumergue government.⁸⁵

The Croix de Feu used its position outside of the government to influence the actions of the government, while maintaining ties with right-wing politicians. Pierre Laval, the trade unionist turned right-wing independent Senator who would once again become Prime Minister in 1935, was also seen as friendly to the Croix de Feu. During his tenure as Prime Minister, he refused to take decisive action against the leagues, and when the overthrow of his government appeared likely in the wake of the controversy over the Hoare-Laval pact, the Croix de Feu planned large demonstrations and "direct action" to coincide with the installation of the new government. This episode, interpreted by Léon Blum and the socialists as a plan for a Croix de Feu "putsch," demonstrates the closeness of the Croix de Feu to the right within the government, even while it continued to espouse anti-parliamentary views.⁸⁶

The National Defense

La Rocque's interest in the issue of the "national defense" stemmed from his own military service, although the famed traditionalism of the cavalry does not seem to have made him any more of a traditionalist in his strategic thinking. On the contrary, he was a reliable advocate for modernization and particularly for the expansion of French military aviation. Kennedy argues that the doctrine of "air mindedness" was central to La Rocque's rhetoric of "National Reconciliation."⁸⁷ The influence of the Croix de Feu on defense policy can be seen in the fact that the air minister for the Doumergue and Flandin governments of the mid-1930's, General Denain, had known Croix de Feu sympathies.⁸⁸ La Rocque showed concern regarding the growth of the German military, but did not directly reference Nazism as a source of that concern. Rather, Germany was simply France's "ancestral enemy" and was a threat to France's position chiefly for that reason.

⁸⁵ Rémond, 288.

⁸⁶ Werth, *Which way France?*, 185.

⁸⁷ Sean Kennedy, "The Croix de Feu, the Parti Social Francais, and the Politics of Aviation, 1931-1939," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 2 (2000): 373-399.

⁸⁸ Werth, *Which way France?*, 95.

Colonialism

La Rocque's support for colonialism was a common attitude on the right at the time, and also resulted from his own formative experiences as an indigenous affairs officer in Morocco. His view was that, "France is the most assimilationist of nations," incorporating diverse peoples from its empire and making them, in some sense, "French." In addition to France's seemingly unique ability to assimilate foreigners, it was evident to La Rocque that, "no country was, and is better able to pacify, manage, and unify the vast intercontinental domain."⁸⁹ He rejected racism outright, stating that "the quality, the devotion to France alone matters, on the condition that it is sincere, felt and confirmed."⁹⁰ While he was committed to the assimilation of France's colonial subjects, he was nonetheless willing to consider anyone who was truly devoted to France to be a Frenchman.

The impact of his experience in North Africa can be clearly seen in these passages, especially when he invokes France's ability to "pacify" its subjects. While serving under Marshal Lyautey in Morocco, La Rocque had become an expert on methods of pacifying indigenous peoples, and he appears to have retained an interest in colonial administration and pacification as head of the Croix de Feu. Of course, colonialism was more than just a way of including foreigners in France's destiny. Through colonial power, France could project its unique culture and spirit throughout the world and increase its political prestige abroad. La Rocque believed that France could gain material wealth, power and cultural dominance through the maintenance of an "intercontinental domain".

Economic Policy

The economic policy advocated by La Rocque was neither purely capitalistic nor socialistic in nature. He opposed capitalism without purpose or restraint (*laissez faire et laissez passer*) in *Service public*, appearing to associate it with the "egoism" of the parliamentary "profiteers" and unscrupulous individuals such as Stavisky. He comes across as a sort of economic populist, sympathetically describing the economic suffering of the nation from "economic crisis." This crisis resulted in "material concern, a growing nervousness, and a general malcontentment" that had a profound effect on French morale, on the "spirit" of France.⁹¹ The recommendations put forward in *Service public* to resolve the "economic crisis" include a national minimum wage, as well as the organization of "professions"

⁸⁹ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 47.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

regionally and nationally for the purpose of greater efficiency and to strengthen the French economy. La Rocque comes across as favoring a form of corporatism, fusing the interests of capital with those of the nation to the end of the enhancement of French power as well as the standard of living of French workers.

La Rocque's attitude toward trade unions is particularly interesting, as in 1934 he expressed a fondness for the "good will" of the "professional" syndicates. The problem with syndicalism, in his view, was the unions' involvement in politics, and particularly their alignment with the revolutionary left. He complimented the agricultural unions for remaining "professional," while criticizing the politicization of the industrial unions. His recommendation was that unions remain "exclusively professional and regional."⁹² In La Rocque's estimation, although the syndicates without doubt "clustered malcontent," yet they also were the site of "skills and good will."⁹³ By depoliticizing the unions, he believed that their best features could be put to use to strengthen the economy, and that the "good will" and necessary skills of their membership would help with the organization of industry he believed would be necessary to ensure France's continued strength.

"Le Social"

La Rocque referenced "civic virtue" as being threatened by the immorality of the electoral system in France. This term deserves attention, as it appears to be part of a larger theme in La Rocque's writings; namely, that of "the moral problem" or simply "le social". His complaint with regard to the trade unions was that they were associated with the concept of class conflict, in La Rocque's view the main obstacle to domestic peace. The domestic peace had to be kept through the renewal of "civic virtue," a sort of national moral revival that would have to be effected through various means. The moral revival recommended in *Service public* and elsewhere had strong Christian (and Catholic) undertones, although La Rocque was careful not to identify his movement as a specifically Catholic one in 1934.

La Rocque appears to have been preoccupied with the possibility of class conflict and revolution, and he supported a "national reconciliation" to bring France's social classes together in service of the nation. To this end, he chose a number of

⁹² François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 147.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 146.

social and moral problems that would need to be ameliorated in order to ensure that the nation would run smoothly and that class war would be averted. One such problem was the “moral disease,” the symptoms of which included the fact that, “the sense of tradition has disappeared, the family is in the process of decomposition...[and]...education has failed in its mission.”⁹⁴ The moral and social fiber of France was in decay, leading to all manner of strife.

The decay of the family was of particular importance to La Rocque, who was a family man himself and father of five. “The family is the elementary piece of the social collectivity,” he argued in *Service public*. The strength of the family unit alone could resist the dehumanizing influence of “Marxist economic tyranny.”⁹⁵ It was also the depository of traditional social and spiritual values and the central unit of traditional French culture, both of which La Rocque wished to see strengthened. The national education system, in his view, shared some responsibility for educating citizens to respect France’s ancient character and to reflect the military and spiritual virtues espoused by the Croix de Feu and the PSF.

In his discussion of the moral crisis of postwar France, published in 1934, the birth of the concept of Le Social that would later lend its name to the Parti Social Français can be seen developing. “The social problem” — class conflict, in essence — was seen as the result of the moral crisis of a France that had lost touch with its traditional self. The solution to this problem was “spiritual fusion” of all Frenchmen, that is a “national reconciliation” in which all classes would join together to serve that nation.⁹⁶ He went on to advocate charity and “the collective and specifically humanitarian aspect.” The conservative social values of traditionalism, the family, the nation and (it was implied) the church would combine with La Rocque’s economic populism to form a doctrine of social uplift through charity, community engagement, and high moral standards, expressed eventually in the doctrine of Le Social.

Anti-Communism

La Rocque’s concern about Communism had two notable elements: a foreign policy element that advocated distrust of the intentions of the Soviet Union, and a domestic element that led him to rail against the growing influence of the Communist and Socialist parties within the French government. His concern

⁹⁴ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

about “the Soviets” is palpable in *Service public*.⁹⁷ Foreign Bolshevism was just one part of a vast conspiracy for La Rocque, a plot by foreign forces to gain influence in France. Those forces included foreign governments and any group that was a potential threat to French power, although he also viewed “unassimilated” foreigners and Jews as a threat to French culture and sovereignty. Werth’s eyewitness account of a speech given at a Croix de Feu meeting in June 1934 reveals La Rocque’s rhetoric. In the speech, he said of recent cooperation between Socialists and Communists that, “Moscow, freemasonry, and perhaps foreign governments are at the back of it. They are trained by foreigners... The rank and file of the United Front and of Bergery’s Front Commun are merely unhappy and disgruntled people. But their leaders have hidden from them the true radiance of the French star.”⁹⁸ Bergery had begun his career on the left of the Radical Socialist party, but would drift steadily to the right and in 1940 would author the founding declaration of the Vichy regime.⁹⁹

If Socialists and Communists represented disgruntled people being misled by foreign agents, the Croix de Feu embodied the true and eternal spirit of France. La Rocque appears to have believed that it would be possible to persuade these bitter individuals to join with him, and his distrust was focused squarely upon their leaders and the shadowy networks that he believed directed those leaders. He was not incorrect in claiming that Moscow had a great deal of influence over the French Communist Party. Maurice Thorez, the party’s leader beginning in 1930 was an orthodox Stalinist who brought the party closely in line with Moscow under the doctrine of “Bolshevization”. Politically, La Rocque and his right-wing allies in the government had much to fear from the influence of a PCF that was willing to engage in electoral politics. After all, the accession to power of the Popular Front could not have occurred without huge electoral gains for the Communist Party.

In 1935, the Croix de Feu movement published *Le complot communo-socialiste* in response to growing collaboration amongst the groups that would eventually form the Popular Front. The publication of this anti-leftist tract reflects the urgency felt by the leadership of the Croix de Feu toward the threat of a Popular Front victory. The basic fear expressed in the introduction to the book was the Communist party’s ultimate goal, “conquest by armed insurrection.”¹⁰⁰ While

⁹⁷ François de La Rocque, *Service public*, 35.

⁹⁸ Werth, *Which way France?*, 72.

⁹⁹ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: old guard and new order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 214.

¹⁰⁰ Croix de Feu and François de La Rocque, *Le complot communo-socialiste: l'insurrection armée dans l'Unité d'action*, (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1934), 11.

the timing of its publication to coincide with the Front Commun and other developments in French politics is no doubt important, it is in many ways a standard anti-Marxist tract, replete with red-scare type threats and intimations. It also served as a rallying cry to the Croix de Feu and its civilian (non-veteran) counterpart, the Volontaires Nationaux, reminding them that “to the ends of Moscow we oppose our French ends.”¹⁰¹

The enemy for La Rocque was a foreign one, as he made clear in his speech excerpted above. While the collaboration of French Marxists would bring about the feared “armed insurrection,” the power of, “the destroyers of civilization” (as he termed the Soviets) would be at their backs. The first chapter of *Le complot communo-socialiste* provides somewhat dubious statistics on the PCF, including the “fact” that 30 percent of its members were chômeurs (unemployed) and 20 percent étrangers (foreigners or immigrants). Thus fully half of the PCF, in the eyes of the Croix de Feu propaganda arm, were either “not French” or not part of the productive workforce. A mere 15 percent were acknowledged to be “ouvriers” (workers) while 35 percent were designated “fonctionnaires” or bureaucrats, a class already detested by the Croix de Feu for their role in the decadent parliamentary regime. Needless to say these statistics are suspect, but they reveal something about La Rocque and his followers’ understanding of their archenemies. If only 15 percent of the Communist party was in fact made up of the workers it claimed to represent, that would have presented a major problem.

In this view, the Communists were both a foreign tool and an inauthentic worker’s party.¹⁰² The Socialists as well were implicated in the plot of violent revolution, only a year before the PCF would receive the green light to join the Popular Front and defend democracy. The power of such a tract to excite a political base, especially one as militant as the Croix de Feu and Volontaires Nationaux, against the possibility of a Socialist-led government should not be understated. International Marxism served as shorthand for all things un-French, all of the influences that the “vainqueurs” of the Great War saw as destructive to the eternal spirit of France. The doctrine of “le Social” was offered as a conscious alternative to “socialism,” substituting traditional values and collective charity for state-run wealth redistribution.

¹⁰¹ Croix de Feu and François de La Rocque, *Le complot communo-socialiste*, 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Changes from Croix de Feu to PSF

The program of the PSF differed relatively little from that of the Croix de Feu. The most striking changes are easy to see: its membership soared into the millions, absorbing all of the former peripheral organizations (such as the National Volunteers and the women's auxiliary) into the new party. The new party slowly abandoned paramilitary tactics, including the so-called "lightning mobilizations" that had looked to so many like rehearsals for a coup. As mentioned in the prior chapter, the focus on social issues exhibited by the PSF led it to create a network of social service organizations, day cares, and soup kitchens.

A more subtle change came about as well, a shift in focus from the broadly "spiritual" bond of the "veterans" to an explicitly Christian outlook. In 1941, La Rocque would acknowledge this change in his *Disciplines d'action*, asserting that, "de-Christianisation has substituted the love of the large family for [a conception of such a family as] a sort of precious but burdensome livestock: it has subordinated the vocation of service to the vain culture of the superman."¹⁰³ It was not, then, just the fading of traditionalism that was resulting in the social problems that were of such importance to La Rocque. Rampant individualism and the fact that the nation was becoming less Christian were now acknowledged to be at the root of the "moral disease".

While *Disciplines d'action* targets many of the same problems that had to be solved for the betterment of France as *Service public* did, its particular focus is on social issues. These include certain "vices mortels" such as alcoholism, "borgeouisisme" (as he termed it), and "franc-maçonnerie" (freemasonry), a term used to denote nearly all groups and activities considered "un-French" or un-Christian. La Rocque quotes a somewhat dubious document, ostensibly written by freemasons in 1883, in which they agree to rally "enemies of democracy and freedom," as well as enemies of "Catholicism."¹⁰⁴ As with communism, freemasonry became shorthand for treason and godlessness. It is interesting also to note that among La Rocque's reasons for distrusting freemasons was their alleged opposition to "democracy" and "liberty". In paying even lip service to these concepts, he separated his rhetoric from his 1934 condemnation of "electoralism" in *Service public*, and also set himself apart from royalists like Charles Maurras and fascists like Jacques Doriot. His sudden and probably halfhearted interest in defending

¹⁰³ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d'action* (Clermont-Ferrand: Éditions de Petit Journal, 1941), 89.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-99.

democracy reflects a change in the rhetoric of the new PSF, appropriate to its new status as a nominally democratic political party.

Indeed, the PSF was quite different from its predecessor. It had begun to look and act like a standard party of the right. Werth argues that the Croix de Feu became “the backbone of all of the conservative elements in the country” before its dissolution, and when it was reborn as a political party it had “turned Tory.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, “in transforming the Croix de Feu into a political party la Rocque had stated his intention to work within the republican system.”¹⁰⁶ The PSF abandoned the marching and uniformed demonstrations practiced by the Croix de Feu in favor of courting votes, even winning some local elections. However, a new program did not accompany the changes in the activities of the new party. In fact, it would take until after the French defeat in 1941 for La Rocque to publish *Disciplines d’action* as an update to *Service public*. By then, the political situation in France had changed dramatically.

At the start, the membership of the new Parti Social Français was mainly drawn from former Croix de Feu members. However, as a party La Rocque’s vision could reach people outside of the usual demographics represented by the leagues. La Rocque’s followers claimed that “we shall lose 50,000 extremists (by becoming a legitimate party)...but we shall gain 200,000 new members, who up ‘til now were put off by the idea that we were a ‘civil war army.’” Thus, the Croix de Feu’s move toward the parliamentary right would broaden their popularity amongst those who “were hostile to anything that looked too openly fascist.”¹⁰⁷

La Rocque the Fascist?

Much of the historical debate regarding the ideology of the Croix de Feu and the PSF has focused on whether or not they represented a fascist threat in the prewar years. The term “fascist” is a term of abuse in contemporary parlance, and thus assigning that title to any organization is a thorny proposition. The changes that occurred when the Croix de Feu became the PSF in 1936 further complicate the question. The debate over whether France was “immune” to fascism, inaugurated by Rémond, has focused quite heavily on the large and visible organizations led by François de La Rocque.

¹⁰⁵ Werth, *Which way France?*, 200.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Passmore, *From liberalism to fascism: the Right in a French province, 1928-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250.

¹⁰⁷ Werth, *Which way France?*, 200.

Rémond himself dismissed the notion that the Croix de Feu and PSF were fascist organizations, claiming that the leagues represented “a fundamental tradition of French political life.”¹⁰⁸ He defined fascism as consisting of the following elements; “On a foundation of exasperated or bruised patriotism and a ‘war veteran’ mentality, there flourished and raged an antiparlamentarism both doctrinal and practical, a devotion to the State, a passion for order, a taste for force, a cult of the leader, the dictatorship of a party, and official corporatism.” Some of the ideas that La Rocque enumerated in *Service public* coincide with the features of fascism in Rémond’s definition. The writings of Henri Malherbe and the ecstasy of La Rocque’s followers at hearing him speak suggest a “cult of the leader”. However, La Rocque specifically opposed “statism” in his writings, preferring private charity to government assistance for the poor. He associated such statism with the left, while advocating government intervention in the economy that seems close to “corporatism” in the Italian fascist sense. La Rocque did not openly recommend that the government dominate the economy, instead suggesting that the country would align its interests and cooperate somewhat spontaneously. La Rocque opposed centralized authority in favor of what he termed “regionalism,” arguing that France’s regions were where her true nature resided. By devolving powers onto the regions, the government could avoid the statism that he vehemently opposed.

Historian Robert Paxton argues that “what fascists did tells us at least as much as what they said”, by which he means that many fascists acted differently than their writings would suggest.¹⁰⁹ For example, many fascists were anti-capitalist on paper but cooperated with traditional capital once in power. Since the PSF never became the dominant party in France, it is impossible to hold it to the test of “what it did”. Paxton defines fascism as “marked by excessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation or victimhood, and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants... abandons democratic liberties,” to pursue, “internal cleansing and external expansion.”¹¹⁰

La Rocque was concerned with the “decadence” of France, but his position as an officer in a victorious army made the victimhood card a difficult one for him to play. The basic nationalism of La Rocque’s program is undeniable, however it does not betray a cult of energy or of purity. While *Service public* exhorts its readers to “do something,” it does not glorify violence as redemptive.

¹⁰⁸ Rémond, 274.

¹⁰⁹ Robert O. Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

Nobécourt's argues that La Roque disliked street violence, and that his writings invoke the ideal of peace far more than that of dynamism. Paxton's understanding of conservatism as being "rooted in families, churches, social rank and property" appears to fit La Rocque's beliefs more comfortably.¹¹¹

The similarities between the Croix de Feu and fascist organizations in other countries are rarely if ever denied in recent scholarship. Robert Soucy has written extensively on fascism in general, and his books on the subject of French politics support his view that at least some of the right-wing "leagues" were fascist. His multi-volume work entitled *French fascism* (published in 1995) lays out the case for a "hardly negligible" force of French fascists in the interwar period. The title and argument of Soucy's book reflects the trend toward assuming that the Croix de Feu and its counterparts were fascist in nature. "In 1934 some 370,000 persons belonged to four separate French fascist movements," he writes in his introduction.¹¹² He supports his claim that these groups were fascist with discussions of anti-Semitism on the French right going back to the Dreyfus affair. For Soucy, the anti-Communist bent of the Croix de Feu and PSF likewise made them look similar to organizations that were openly fascist. Yet by failing to separate the Croix de Feu from the other leagues, Soucy ignores La Rocque's rejection of racism and his inclusive view toward French citizenship.

There is little doubt that François de La Rocque was a right-wing authoritarian. His preference for tradition, hierarchy, and domestic and international peace all suggest that he was not in fact a fascist. What is most striking about his writings is his deep conservatism, his abiding patriotism, and his jealous fear for France's wellbeing. None of these features are particularly fascist in nature. To say that his anti-communist beliefs make him a fascist is terribly simplistic, as by that standard most of the French right and some of the political center would have been fascists. Passmore notes how the populism of the Croix de Feu made it more similar to a fascist organization than the elitist, royalist groups such as the Action Française. Populism is a slippery concept, however, and one that is applicable to all but the most elitist worldviews. It appears from his writings that La Rocque's ideal government would have been authoritarian, paternalistic, conservative and Christian in nature, but not totalitarian or fascist. By the time of the formation of the PSF, La Rocque's program for France had begun to look most similar that of the regime that would come into existence in 1940 at Vichy.

¹¹¹ Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism*, 11.

¹¹² Robert Soucy, *French fascism: the first wave, 1924-1933* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), xi.

III. A New Order

In the summer of 1940, with their armies in retreat and their capital occupied, the leaders of the Third Republic were faced with the decision whether to carry on the fight or seek an armistice with Germany. The government reconvened at Bordeaux, and on June 17th Marshal Philippe Pétain announced via radio that, “summoned by the President of the Republic, I assume from today the leadership of the Government of France.”¹¹³ In his speech, Pétain acknowledged the French defeat as a *fait accompli* and implored the army, still in the field, to stop fighting. The result was the end of the battle of France, and the beginning of a new and complex period of French politics. The rapid political changes that accompanied the collapse of the French Republic resulted in a scramble for influence and position within a new government, positioned within a new European order where German National Socialism appeared ascendant.

The Marshal and the Colonel

Philippe Pétain was the French hero of the 1916 Battle of Verdun. In his address to the French people on June 17, 1940, Pétain made sure to pay homage not only to the soldiers engaged in the ongoing fight with Germany, but to the *anciens combattants* that he had led during the prior conflict. Both Pétain and La Rocque drew their political and social identities, in part, from their military service. Pétain’s promise to steward France through its defeat and to “mitigate her disasters,” as well as his carefully cultivated image as a disinterested patriot, appeared to make him an ideal leader for France in her darkest hour.¹¹⁴

As we have seen, La Rocque’s conception of the nation and of his place in it was drawn from his conservative Catholic upbringing and his military values. The similarities between the political ideas espoused by La Rocque and Pétain are, to some extent, not surprising. The basic conservatism and militarism that they shared was not by any means uncommon in their shared time and place. However, the political visions put forward by La Rocque in *Service public* and elsewhere appear quite remarkably similar to the political programs enacted by Pétain and his government after June 1940. Nobécourt, has gone so far as to ask whether the Vichy regime was the, “state of the Croix de Feu.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Robert Aron, *The Vichy regime* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 40.

¹¹⁴ Aron, 40. Nobécourt, 702.

¹¹⁵ Nobécourt, 702.

Pétain, not unlike La Rocque, drew his essential worldview from his upbringing. Pétain's family was one of landowning farmers from the Artois region. He attended a military school in his youth, and was known from a young age for his piety.¹¹⁶ While he lacked La Rocque's noble lineage, he shared his traditionalist upbringing and education. His secondary education prior to enrolling at the military academy at St. Cyr was parochial and military in flavor. The origins of his full name, Henri Philippe Benoni Omer Pétain, have been the subject of some speculation and may provide clues as to the political views of his parents, the earliest political ideas that young Philippe would have encountered. For example, Pétain biographer Herbert R. Lottman has noted the widely held (though unproven) belief that Pétain's surname "Henri" was a reference to the Bourbon pretender "Henri V". In addition, Lottman claims that the name Benoni was, "his grandfather's name, Hebrew for 'son of my sorrow'" and that the name was commonly given to commemorate and mourn the death of the old regime.¹¹⁷ Pétain's early life and educational background can certainly be said to have been catholic, militaristic, and traditional.

By the beginning of the 1930's, Pétain was a widely trusted and admired figure both in terms of his military skills and his personal qualities. Of him, Léon Blum once stated, "if I said that among the Great War chiefs he is the one whose modesty, gravity, and reflective and sensible scruples call for sympathy, I can only embarrass him by my compliment."¹¹⁸ The Marshal's image as a mild-mannered and disinterested potential Cincinnattus can be seen to have taken hold even on the left of the political spectrum. Werth was motivated to comment that, "in France, where few people are universally respected, he (Pétain) was one of the few."¹¹⁹

Prior to the Second World War, Pétain developed a tendency to serve as a spokesman for right-wing causes. After the rioting of February 6th Marshal Lyautey met with Pétain as well as General Maxime Weygand to discuss how they might aid the rightist leagues in countering the "Masonic plot" against France. Lyautey, whom La Rocque had so idolized throughout his military career, believed that turning to Pétain for support was necessary because, "one cannot have a better guarantee with respect to the veterans, the Croix de Feu movement and the army. He remains for them the victor."¹²⁰ Pétain quietly aligned himself

¹¹⁶ Herbert R. Lottman, *Pétain: hero or traitor: the untold story* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 21.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁸ Lottman, 114.

¹¹⁹ Werth, *France in ferment*, 188.

¹²⁰ Werth, *Which way France?*, 275.

with the political right. Werth also noted the link between Pétain and the Croix de Feu in his writings, showing that Pétain was of political use to both the parliamentary right and the ex-servicemen's leagues. On the eve of the 1936 elections, with the Popular Front of the left on its way to victory, Marshal Pétain spoke out in favor of the right and "National Reconciliation." According to Werth, "the appeal was full of Croix de Feu terminology, and the Right hoped that this intervention in their favor by the eighty year-old hero of Verdun would create an impression."¹²¹ Either by design or circumstance, Pétain had on several occasions aligned himself politically with La Rocque in the period prior to the French defeat.

Vichy and Clermont-Ferrand

On July 10, 1940 Pétain signed a series of constitutional decrees that rendered him head of the new French State. By that time the French political world had been turned upside-down. The city of Vichy, a resort town transformed into a surrogate national capital (Paris remained the official capital) overnight, served as a fitting metaphor for the state of French politics. A seat of government had to be improvised from a network of luxury hotels, and the city soon became crowded with all manner of government functionaries and hangers-on. While the chaos of the transition may be overstated, the essential fact is that Vichy was indeed a new form of government, in a new place and with new institutions including a council of 12 ministers and three secretaries in place of the Third Republic's parliament. Its leadership chose to build a new state out of the ashes of the collapsed Republic, while at the same time attempting to negotiate France's place in a decidedly more German-dominated future.

La Rocque left Paris, recently declared an open city as it awaited the arrival of the German columns on June 12, 1940. He traveled to Clermont-Ferrand, near Vichy, with the goal of setting up a new headquarters both for the PSF and for its newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*. The reasons for his move are easy enough to comprehend. With the shift of power to the south imminent, moving became necessary to keep the PSF and *Petit Journal* from becoming irrelevant or falling under German control.¹²²

In addition, La Rocque remained dedicated to resisting the Germans by force of arms, strongly opposing any armistice and reminding his followers of their duty

¹²¹ Lottman, 125.

¹²² Nobécourt, 684.

to repel the invader. “François de La Rocque dreams of going to North Africa... he thinks... that on the soil of Africa excellent elements of the army remain.”¹²³ When Jean Ybarnégaray, a prominent member of the PSF and former Minister of State under Paul Reynaud, was offered the position of Minister of the Family-Public Health and Veterans in the new government on June 16th, it caused a falling out between him and the La Rocque. This development placed Ybarnégaray in the position of liaison between the PSF and the new government, overseeing both its network of social services and its activities as a veteran’s organization. When La Rocque finally realized that the war was lost, he sent a letter to his associates lamenting that, “the catastrophe has arrived! It would be vain, for the moment, for us to boast of very positive forecasts.” He went on to explain that although his associate had not consulted with him before accepting a cabinet position in the new government, “Ybar (as La Rocque dubbed him) needed my help...and I could not refuse.”¹²⁴

The defeat of 1940 threw France into chaos, and the PSF was not immune to the difficulties of the period. The division between Ybarnégaray and La Rocque represented a disagreement within the movement as to the role the PSF should play in the new government. While La Rocque had never loved the parliamentary regime, he was not willing to throw it away if its replacement was going to make an armistice with France’s ancestral enemy. His involvement in the new government in the early days appears to have been halfhearted, the result of a sense of duty rather than any kind of enthusiasm.

The French State

A new capital and a new political order required a reevaluation of the role of the PSF. Political changes in Vichy came rapidly on the heels of the armistice, and what had originally appeared to be a temporary dictatorship of a disinterested army officer began to take shape as a permanent and ideologically driven national regime. With the constitutional reforms of July 11 and 12, 1940, the French government dropped any semblance of a democratic ethos. The reforms, which came in the form of a series of decrees, declared Pétain to be Head of State in place of the President of the Republic. The also accorded him full powers, and signaled the beginning of the remaking of French politics that would become known as the National Revolution. More than just a placeholder, Pétain and his government began to remake French domestic and foreign policy and to create a

¹²³ Edith de la Rocque, *La Rocque tel qu’il était* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 174.

¹²⁴ Nobécourt, 689.

hybrid nationalist ideology in a process that would come to be known as the “National Revolution.” Likewise the new capital, which had been intended as a temporary refuge until such time as the Germans would allow the government to return to Paris, soon became the permanent headquarters of the regime.

The new state adopted the motto of the Croix de Feu, “Travail, Famille, Patrie,” (Work, Family, Fatherland) as its own. This development is most often cited to demonstrate the similarities between the political ideas of François de La Rocque and those of the Vichy regime. La Rocque signaled approval of the new government’s use of that motto in *Disciplines d’action*. He also said of Pétain that:

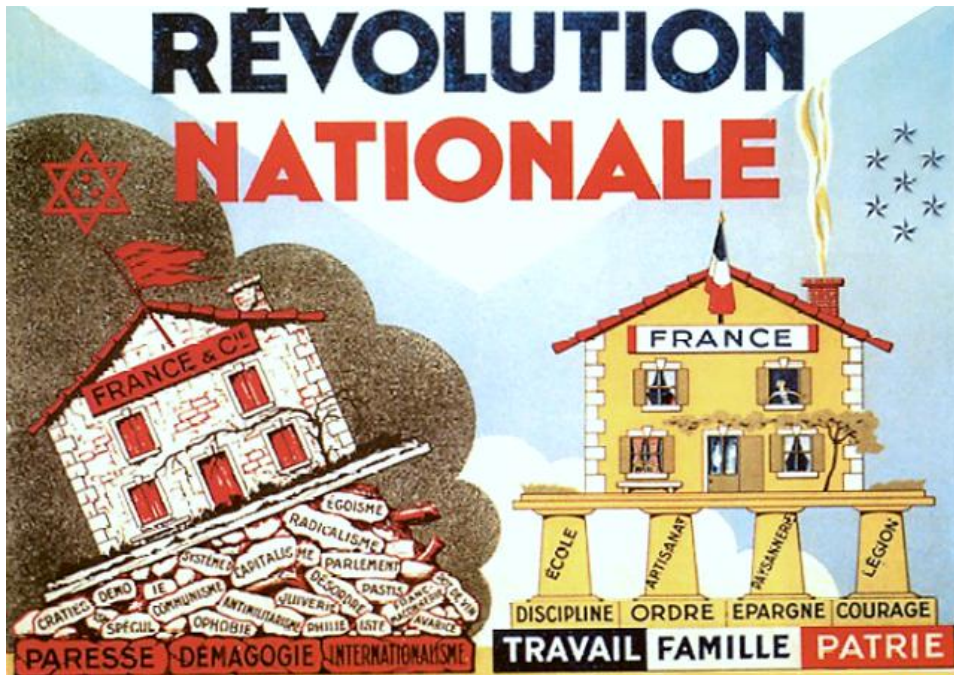
Only one man will be the object of our concern, without adulation, with exclusive concern for the public good: Marshal Pétain, designated at the hour of destiny as the only possible guarantee of our sacrifices, the only one can possibly maintain French dignity during [this] misfortune, the only one who can possibly introduce the national revolution, the national renovation.”¹²⁵

This quotation is very telling, and provides a useful place to begin an examination of La Rocque’s attitude toward Vichy during the first year of the new regime.

After all, the similarities between the Vichy program known as the “National Revolution” and La Rocque’s political ideas (especially that of “National Reconciliation”) go much deeper than slogans and mottos. For a great many Frenchmen and women from all walks of life, the Marshal was symbolic of France’s survival and what dignity it retained after its defeat. La Rocque gave a nod to that understanding of the new government, then took his assessment a step further. For La Rocque, Pétain was the only person with the power and opportunity to enact a “national renewal” and a political revolution. It is of interest to note that La Rocque did not support the use of the term “National Revolution,” believing that the term “revolution” had violent connotations and suggested disorder. He preferred the term “National Renovation” for his own use. This distrust of revolutionary politics can be seen as evidence of La Rocque’s basic conservatism.¹²⁶ By 1941 La Rocque had come to see the defeat of France and the dissolution of the republic as an opportunity for needed reform. The Vichy program itself provides some clues as to why. It soon becomes clear that, at least in theory, the new government had much to offer a stalwart nationalist like La Rocque.

¹²⁵ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d’action*, 12.

¹²⁶ Nobécourt, 762.



Vichy propaganda poster, October 1942

In a speech delivered on July 12, 1940, Pétain laid out his plan to reorganize the state. He appealed for the support of the people, stating that:

Your representatives have granted me [my position] in your name. They wanted, like you and like me, the powerlessness of the state to cease to paralyse the nation. I have constituted a new government. Twelve ministers to restart the administration of the country. They will be supported by general secretaries that direct the principal services of the state. The governors will be placed at the head of the large French provinces. Thus, the administration will be concentrated and decentralized at the same time.¹²⁷

There is much that is striking in this quotation to any student of La Rocque, the Croix de Feu and the PSF. Pétain made his case for authoritarian oligarchy using an argument that would have been familiar to La Rocque and popular among his followers. According to the Pétain, the weakness of the state and the paralysis of the nation could be solved by a hybrid government that was at once decentralized and authoritarian. The new state would have a clearly delineated hierarchy, with Pétain at the top and the smallest possible number of ministers (twelve in all)

¹²⁷ Philippe Pétain, "Allocution prononcée le 12 juillet 1940," in *Actes et écrits*, ed. Jacques Isorni (Paris : Flammarion, 1974), 456.

managing the affairs of state. The new state, in short, would reflect La Rocque's long held and loudly expressed wish for both traditional regionalism and central authority.

The proposed state structure may be said to have represented an imitation of the absolutism of the old regime, where the king had full powers in affairs of state but delegated local power to the nobility. But it would be simplistic to deem the Vichy regime a reactionary project. Its leaders branded their efforts as nothing less than revolutionary. Many of the elements of the "national renovation" should also be familiar to readers of *Service public* and La Rocque's articles in *Le Flambeau* and *Le Petit Journal*.

Once in possession of power, Pétain and his ministers began a program intended to remake society. On October 9, 1940, the Marshal made a radio address in which he elaborated some of the changes that had already come about through "legislative" action by the new authoritarian government. These included "the dissolution of the secret societies" (including instituting a ban on Freemasonry) and "the repression of alcoholism," both priorities articulated by La Rocque in *Service public* and elsewhere. But Pétain's eventual plans would have been even more familiar to the rank and file of the PSF.

A new law, prelude to important structural reforms, will determine the relations between labor and capital. It will ensure dignity and justice for all. The honor given to the family, the encouragements that will be accorded, will contribute to the restoration of hearths and the recovery of births. The teaching reforms that have already begun relative to national unity and the and the momentum given to the youth will place them in a harmonious equilibrium of esprit du corps, health, strength and joy.¹²⁸

Several points require emphasis in the above quotation. Pétain's plan for reconciling the interests of labor and capital sounds eerily similar to that outlined in *Service public*. Such a plan was key to La Rocque's conception of how the "probleme social" of class conflict could be ameliorated. In this speech alone, Pétain referenced a range of PSF priorities. He referenced the "soul of France," as eternal and certain to recover, utilizing a term that La Rocque had himself used in discussing the particular character of his nation. Pétain noted state efforts to reinforce the family and increase the birthrate, concepts that were dear to La

¹²⁸ Phillipe Pétain, "Appel radiodiffusé le 9 Octobre 1940," in *Actes et écrits*, ed. Jacques Isorni (Paris : Flammarion, 1974), 469.

Rocque. The importance of the youth and education to national renewal is emphasized, as is the importance of “l’*esprit du corps*” and the “unity of the nation”. It seems unlikely that the similarity between Pétain’s and La Rocque’s political priorities was either unnoticed at the time or entirely coincidental. Speculatively speaking, it seems that *Service public* and La Rocque’s many other published works might have provided a convenient source for some of the authoritarian governing ideas needed to build the new state.

Pétain’s radio address of October 9, 1940 contains another important mention:

The national relief committees have already been constituted in the occupied zone as well as in the free zone. Give them your support. Prepare the coming work of civic reconstruction and national rallying by a generous effort at social collaboration.”¹²⁹

This line references several concepts that may as well have arisen directly from PSF literature. François de La Rocque’s oft-articulated goal of “rallying the nation” for “social collaboration” and renewal is too clear to miss. Additionally this passage deals with the efforts of relief organizations, apparently state-run, providing services similar to those provided by the social service network of the Parti Social Français. On one hand, this development may be seen as further evidence of the influence of PSF ideas and practices on the new government. On the other hand, it foreshadows powerfully later Vichy state efforts to replace and co-opt the functions of the large and potentially powerful PSF.

While the clergy was divided in its support for Vichy, prominent bishops and church fathers spoke out on behalf of the regime and its guarantees of “work, family, and country.” On August 29, 1941, the Archbishop of Cambrai issued a statement via the Vatican’s radio station, urging “la discipline civique.” In it, he praised the Vichy government’s efforts to renew France, and cast obedience to Pétain as a religious and moral duty for Catholics.¹³⁰ The state’s opposition to the secularism and anticlericalism of the old French Republic would have likely appealed to La Rocque, as it did to many conservative clergy.

A great deal can be said to support the conception that Vichy was in fact a “state of the Croix de Feu”. Clearly the similarities in political doctrine are glaring, and it is easy to imagine that at least some of the ideas Pétain applied to governing his

¹²⁹ Pétain, “Appel radiodiffusé le 9 Octobre 1940,” 469.

¹³⁰ France, “La Situation du Clerge Catholique en France,” 1941, *Archives diplomatiques- archives des affaires étrangères, guerre 1939-1945*, Volume 33, Reel 1, Microfilm 39.

portion of France were borrowed or plagiarized from the writings of his former political ally. However, there were many occasions for disagreement and friction between the state and the PSF. While both had similar goals, there is evidence to suggest that La Rocque had not intended the state to take so active a role in the renovation of the French nation. The increasing centralization of the state, combined with its attempts to monopolize political power within the unoccupied zone soon proved contradictory to La Rocque's original intent.

The PSF in the New Order

The decision to create a ministerial level position for the purpose, apparently, of overseeing the PSF in its functions both as a social service organization and a veteran's organization can be taken several ways. On one hand, the group was a powerful potential ally for the Vichy government. On the other hand, it may be that the new government sought to oversee a potential rival power group. The new government's eventual actions may shed some light on the question of its attitude toward the PSF.

The government began to work to weaken or control the PSF quite early on. Marcel Déat, a former socialist who had adopted radical right-wing authoritarian views, put forward one possible solution to the problem of independent parties in 1940. His idea was to create a single state party, like those in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Déat and Pierre Laval worked to involve François de La Rocque in their project, but were rebuffed. La Rocque's wife, Édith, describes how La Rocque, after hearing the proposal for the inclusion of the PSF in the single party state, responded that, "in sum, you are asking me to give my place over to the parties, instruments of the Nazis, and to remove me and buy me off? I beg you not to continue this meeting, we are wasting our time."¹³¹ According to Nobécourt, La Rocque was concerned about avoiding, "'servile imitation of the methods and the terminology' of the enemy and 'an obsequious attitude.'"¹³² He recognized and rejected the similarities between the envisioned party and the state fascist parties of Germany and Italy.

The result of La Rocque's refusal to subjugate his party to the state was his "ostracism" from the inner circle of government. In his writings for *Le Petit Journal*, he expressed worry about the direction the regime was taking. In a July 1940 letter to Pétain, he had complained of the regime's increased "materialism

¹³¹ Édith de La Rocque, 182.

¹³² Nobécourt, 710.

and anti-spiritualism,” arguing that the movement toward statism and fascism undermined the concept of “Famille” contained in the motto “Travail, Famille, Patrie.”¹³³

Meanwhile, Ybarnégaray had had been removed from the government on September 6, 1940, along with four other former parliamentarians.¹³⁴ The prominent PSF member’s brief stint as part of the government reflects the strained nature of relations between Pétain’s government and the PSF leadership. Soon after it became clear that the PSF would not become part of a state dominated single party, its representative in the government was removed. With La Rocque excluded from Pétain’s inner circle, and Ybarnégaray no longer in the government, the PSF had lost much of its ability to influence state policy.

François de La Rocque complained in vain of the changes coming about in Vichy state policy, and lamented that the state had appropriated his motto without living up to the meaning he had intended for it. According to Nobécourt, La Rocque expressed his disagreement with Vichy’s use of “Travail, Famille, Patrie,” while imprisoned near the end of the war. According to La Rocque, that motto was “le motto of a movement more so than of a state.”¹³⁵ He complained, for example, that the government had misinterpreted his call for the reconciliation of labor and capital as a call for a state takeover of the economy, an outcome that he had not intended. However, his attempts to prevent the state from misusing his ideas and his motto were ineffective. La Rocque’s exclusion from the government suggests that, once his writings had been mined for ideas, he was no longer of use and his refusal to participate in a projected single party system made him a potential liability. Meanwhile La Rocque saw the Vichy government as continuing to grow more statist and centralized over time. His disappointment with the direction of the government would sow the seeds of continued conflict with La Rocque and the PSF.

Only a few years had elapsed since the Croix de Feu’s transition to become the PSF, and the party was once again required by its political and legal situation to redefine itself and find a new role in society. In August 1940, the Parti Social Français shed the designation “parti,” in response to the fact that “the situation of the country prevents electoral competitions.” The group suspended its political activities, choosing to focus on a more limited and less political set of goals. Those goals included:

¹³³ Nobécourt, 711.

¹³⁴ Aron, 124.

¹³⁵ Nobécourt, 712.

1. Upkeep of the family life of your sections.
2. Social service within and outside of your sections.
3. Relief and placement of our friends.
4. Return to the soil.
5. Help for refugees.
6. Help for prisoners.
7. The civic and physical formation of our children.”¹³⁶

The limited goals of the new Progrès Social Français allowed it to maintain its influence as a social service network, while steering the organization clear of the political pitfalls it had faced as a political party in a hostile new regime.

Disciplines d'action

In the autumn of 1941, La Rocque published a new book entitled *Disciplines d'action*. A political tract along the lines of La Rocque's earlier writings, its first line reads, “this is the sequel to *Service public*”.¹³⁷ *Disciplines d'action* served as an update to *Service public*, and reflected changes in both the circumstances of the day and the mindset of its author. Whether he was responding primarily to circumstance or his own changing ideas in writing *Disciplines d'action* is open to debate, especially given the apparent expedience of some of the changes in La Rocque's views. The book is certainly fascinating, and has been understood by historians as either an incriminating document of collaboration or a stinging criticism of the development of the Vichy regime.

A few of the issues dealt with in *Disciplines d'Action* have particular bearing on La Rocque's relationship with the Vichy government. La Rocque's understanding of the reasons for France's defeat and evidence of his attitude toward Germany can both be glimpsed in the text, as well as his thoughts on Marshal Pétain and on Jews. Each of these issues may shed light on La Rocque's thinking and help to develop an understanding of his intent in publishing the book in the first place.

The book begins with an explanation of the period leading up to the war. This discussion takes the form of an overview of many of La Rocque's writings in *Service public*, *Le Flambeau*, and *Le Petit Journal*. La Rocque's outlook on the reasons for defeat is key to understanding his response to that defeat, and his decision to publish *Disciplines d'action* in the first place. He begins by discussing the position of France prior to the outbreak of the war, with regard to various

¹³⁶ Nobécourt, 721.

¹³⁷ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d'action*, 9.

other states. Of particular interest is his discussion of Germany, in which La Rocque expresses some of his feelings about the “ancestral enemy.” The section acknowledges the long history of antagonism between France and Germany, and repeats his earlier demand that “equilibrium” be maintained between the two, especially in terms of military parity. La Rocque reiterated his praise of Germany’s recovery after the Great War, quoting a passage from *Service public* in which he encouraged his readers to “think of the magnificent bravery, of the heroic self-sacrifice of our adversaries,” and to “admire fifteen years of indefatigable national reconstruction.” This admiration was carefully qualified, and used primarily to exhort the French government to build, “a solid and well-organized army, aviation service, and navy.”¹³⁸ His respect for Germany appears to be that of a soldier for a worthy adversary and a powerful nation, and does not show any particular reverence for Nazism.

The outbreak of the war, according to La Rocque, found France unprepared. In *Disciplines d’action*, he reminds the reader of his lobbying on behalf of the national defense. Of French production, he remarks that it was, “sabotaged by the Popular Front,” and blames “seventeen years of creative incapacity” and “planism without a solid basis” for the economic failings of the time.¹³⁹ The book rails against the decadent, weak and indecisive parliamentary regime, the Popular Front, and the “gouvernants” who lulled France into a false sense of security at Munich rather than preparing for the coming conflict.

These sections, updated to reflect the years elapsed since the publication of *Service public*, also serve the purpose of showing the essential constancy of La Rocque’s views on most important political issues. Other evidence of the constancy of his positions on major issues abounds, including a significant portion of the book, dedicated to France’s domestic problems, that is in many respects identical in content to similar sections in *Service public*. Some elements of the new book are familiar to a reader of *Service public*, but by fall of 1941 had taken on new meaning. For example, La Rocque renews his emphasis on social issues and on the device “Social d’Abord [social issues first and foremost].” While his interest in social issues likely remained as it had always been, it is also true that by the time of the writing of *Disciplines d’action* the PSF had disengaged from political action in favor of only “social” action.

¹³⁸ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d’action*, 22.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

La Rocque's tract also includes a variety of new elements. An extended biographical note on Pétain is featured, as well as a lengthy discussion of the National Revolution and the development of the new state. At first glance, both elements appear to be pro-Vichy propaganda. La Rocque's description of the Marshal is overwhelmingly positive and hopeful. However, his objections also become apparent. He notes his opposition to the sycophancy of the French press toward the new government, and the press' adoption of state propaganda.¹⁴⁰ While Pétain was the only one who could bring about the necessary change, he was not necessarily doing so. The problem with Pétain, according to *Disciplines d'action*, certainly was not his character or his qualifications. Both are lauded highly in chapter five, entitled "Under the Signature of Pétain." The chapter recounts the Marshal's heroism at Verdun and his high moral and personal character, then goes on to attack the concept of democracy and posit instead active engagement of the masses in government without the "demagogy" of democratic institutions and parties. The chapter expresses aptly La Rocque's position toward the Marshal, one based on the utmost personal respect and La Rocque's sense of his duty to follow a strong leader.¹⁴¹

In the section of *Disciplines d'action* entitled "Vers L'État Nouveau" (toward the new state), La Rocque first reminds his readers of the basic elements of the state he had envisioned since 1934 or before. This section is excerpted from *Service Public*, and the implication of his choice is that his basic political views had not substantially changed.¹⁴² He lays claim to many of the ideas at the base of the new state, quoting his own works from the prior six years and creating the impression that the entire Vichy project was plagiarized from his writings. He expresses his wish to see "collaboration" amongst the "united states of Europe," a collaboration that would begin with a "preliminary economic entente."¹⁴³ It does not seem from the context of the quote that it is intended to support collaboration with Germany, and La Rocque's opposition to that sort of collaboration is well documented. Instead, it seems that he was talking about a European Union type organization, arising from economic agreements between nations.

More striking is La Rocque's apparent endorsement of anti-Semitism, a departure from his relatively pluralist line with regard to race and loyalty to France in *Service Public*. In a section entitled "A Propos de la Question Juive,"

¹⁴⁰ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d'action*, 12.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 123-130.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

(About the Jewish Question) he appears to equate Judaism and freemasonry, his preferred shorthand for all things un-French and treasonous. Although it is possible that his vilification of freemasons, as well as his very public hatred of Serge Stavisky and Léon Blum in the 1930's provided early hints of his distrust of Jews, the explicit nature of his endorsement of anti-Semitism represents a huge departure from his language in 1934. In La Rocque's view, the "Jewish question" was one of assimilation. He quotes his own writing in *Le Petit Journal* from October of 1940, asking his reader to, "Do not forget an essential point. At each juncture, on each occasion when Jewish purulence is manifested, freemasonry is its introducer, its protector and its co-conspirator."¹⁴⁴ Such a strong view of Jews, expressed before the Vichy regime was fully instituted, suggests that such veiled anti-Semitism was nothing new for La Rocque. It does not seem to have been adopted to curry favor with the regime, although he may have adopted stronger views on the subject due to his anger at France's circumstances and imminent defeat.

Nobécourt interprets La Rocque's August 1940 article on "the Jewish Question" as being in favor of "adoption and assimilation," not anti-Semitism.¹⁴⁵ This view is supported by La Rocque's repeated emphasis on assimilation of "étrangers" into the "national community." His emphasis on assimilation into "Christian society" seems to have developed as a result of his service in the Indigenous affairs branch of the French army in Morocco. Still, Nobécourt's interpretation fails to explain the explicit link between Judaism and freemasonry (itself tantamount to treason) in *Disciplines d'action*. In fact, it appears that La Rocque selected his own quotations in order to appear to have advocated such anti-Semitism earlier. The article emphasized that one day assimilated Jews would "belong to, in principle and by right, the great civic family."¹⁴⁶ In *Disciplines d'action*, La Rocque emphasizes the less-tolerant element of that article, a decision that is difficult to understand but may have been intended to appease his detractors in the government. The policy of the PSF was to "give aid to those who are persecuted," and La Rocque wrote to Pétain on behalf of French Jewry, protesting that the dates of the institution of anti-Semitic laws, "do not mark the high points of our ancient Judeo-Christian society."¹⁴⁷

La Rocque's tendency in *Disciplines d'action* is to blame a great many elements of France's unfortunate situation on "franc-maçonnerie" and treason, a very

¹⁴⁴ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d'action*, 99.

¹⁴⁵ Nobécourt, 809.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 811.

conspiratorial viewpoint that may reflect his bitterness over France's defeat. His search for scapegoats is unceasing, but ultimately implicates a vaguely defined group of "unassimilated" individuals and traitors. From his earlier writings, it is possible to conjecture that Communists, government functionaries, unassimilated Jews and freemasons all shared the dubious honor of inclusion on his list of those who were responsible for the defeat and humiliation of France. Many interpretations of La Rocque's position on "the Jewish question" are possible, and it is difficult to know how much of what he wrote was his own belief and how much was politically motivated. However it seems manifest that La Rocque was not an anti-Semite, or at least not a very committed or explicit one. Perhaps the reality is that, while he harbored some anti-Semitic views, his prejudice was of an older and more coded type that had more to do with national identity and assimilation and was wary of state based intervention in such affairs. His official stance against racism, long held in a right-wing political climate that was often pervaded by overt racism, suggests the depth of his anti-racist convictions.

In spite of the increased anti-Semitic language and conspiratorial tone of present in *Disciplines d'action*, the book stood in opposition to the direction of the government (although it was quite reverent toward Pétain). In sum, it may be understood as both supportive of Pétain and critical of the regime. It was an appeal to the government to reject statism, paternalism and demagoguery. It also reiterated many of La Rocque's ideas, originally put forward in *Service public* in 1934. Lastly, it seems to have represented a near-desperate attempt to find a rationale for France's defeat.

Retreat from Politics

By early September 1940, the PSF had withdrawn from politics. The decision to do so had something of the character of a protest, with La Rocque exhorting his followers to "display formal discipline" in support of Pétain but "absolute reserve" toward other members of the government.¹⁴⁸ According to Jacques Nobécourt, "During the war years, the work of the Croix de Feus was accomplished on the social field, on the sidelines of a regime which bore its hallmarks..." La Rocque, he adds, "did not want to participate in a system that Pétain did not change."¹⁴⁹ As the PSF disengaged from the government, it was steadily replaced by a state-sponsored veterans' organization, the Légion Française

¹⁴⁸ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 251.

¹⁴⁹ Nobécourt, 765,

des Combattants. Likewise, the state created a youth organization (Les Compagnons de France) and a variety of civic organizations that swiftly moved in to replace the functions that the PSF had abandoned. Unable to involve the conservative Colonel La Rocque in their plans, they simply skirted him and created parallel organizations that could be more easily controlled.

In early 1941, La Rocque was arrested and held by the Germans for a brief period, during which time he was interrogated on his “anti-German” views. This arrest is strong evidence of those views, although at the time he deflected questioning by emphasizing his opposition to communism. By August 1941, he had agreed to fuse the PSF with the Légion Française de Combattants, a decision that, according to Paxton, “his approximately 350,000 members were swallowed up in the Legion.” La Rocque was given a post attached to Pétain’s cabinet, although his role was evidently without serious responsibilities.¹⁵⁰

Foreign policy was a major point of friction between La Rocque and Vichy, as evidenced his statement quoted above objecting to imitation of and obsequiousness toward Germany and Italy. The doctrine of collaboration, adopted by the government at the insistence of Pierre Laval and others, required France to aid Germany economically and even militarily. This was out of the question for La Rocque, who wrote in 1941 that, “a ‘collaboration’ between two great peoples like the French people and the German people would be a mockery for both of those involved, mortal for our defeated nation.”¹⁵¹ However, the government (especially Laval, Doriot and their allies) continued to press forward in seeking a place for France in Hitler’s “new order” in Europe, and those efforts no doubt offended La Rocque.

La Rocque the Collaborator?

Several sources identify François de La Rocque as having collaborated during the period of 1940-1943. He occasionally appeared as a “fascist” collaborator in the Allied press despite his withdrawal from involvement in the Vichy government. An October 17, 1942 article in the French Canadian newspaper *Le Jour* provides a useful example. The reasoning of the article is summed up by a line that reads, “We do not [or cannot] fight Hitler if we think like Hitler.” He speaks of “unoccupied France, where the old right wing reigns, around Pétain, La Rocque,

¹⁵⁰ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 250.

¹⁵¹ François de La Rocque, *Disciplines d’action*, 155.

and Laval.”¹⁵² In reality, La Rocque was on the periphery of political power in Vichy by late 1942. This quotation says more about the lingering ideological divides within wartime France (and even within the resistance) than it does about the political attitudes of François de La Rocque.

British Intelligence also identified La Rocque as a collaborator in its 18-19th November 1941 French News Summary report. Citing the Swedish newspaper *Arbetaren*, the report informs the reader that “The former leader of the Croix de Feu movement, Colonel La Rocque, has recently been attached directly to the Vichy government.” However, it is a well-documented fact that La Rocque was by no means a strong supporter of the regime, and for most of its history he found himself at odds with its political direction. His role in the Vichy government after winter of 1941 was a minor one, which he seems to have accepted mainly out of personal loyalty to Pétain. From an undated secret memo documenting politics in Vichy France during 1940, it is possible to ascertain that Gaullists in London were aware of his “anglophile” and anti-collaboration writings. “Colonel de la Roque (sic) represents himself as an anglophile... in le Petit Journal there have been a series of articles that have been neatly anglophile in nature,” the report stresses, and goes on to report on his refusal to assent to Déat and Laval’s “parti unitaire” (single party state) scheme.¹⁵³ His opposition to collaboration with Germany was outspoken quite early on, and probably had a great deal to do with his ambivalent stance relative to the new government. Meanwhile, his dislike of the Germans was well known and caused him to be arrested by them in 1941.

Newspaper articles continued to identify La Rocque as a collaborator at least until October 1942. By that time military and political events were unfolding that would cause his break with the Vichy government. His apparent esteem with Pétain may appear to have resulted from his support for the Marshal’s ideas, but it seems more constructive to view La Rocque’s loyalty as personal. La Rocque would continue to defend the Marshal’s intentions and efforts as head of the Vichy government until his death. On the other hand, if Pétain was France’s only hope, it was necessary for La Rocque to get his ear in order to have any chance of influencing his government. It may be that La Rocque provided legitimating support to Pétain at a critical time, but his apparent exclusion from meaningful involvement in the government betrays his ambivalence. His

¹⁵² Miles, “Mission Gaulliste, Mission Antifasciste,” *Le Jour*, October 17, 1942; *Archives diplomatiques-archives des affaires étrangères, guerre 1939-1945*, Volume 121, Reel 3, Microfilm 178.

¹⁵³ Secret memo on politics in Vichy France. 1941? *Archives Diplomatiques- Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Guerre 1939-1945*, Volume 301, Reel 11, Microfilm 149-154.

increased willingness to tow the line of anti-Semitism is notable, but can be seen as part of a larger pattern in his thinking and as evidence of a search for scapegoats in the aftermath of an embarrassing defeat for his homeland. After all, in June 1935 he had reaffirmed in an interview the Croix de Feu's position that, "a wave of anti-Semitism would also be disastrous for our country."¹⁵⁴ La Rocque walked a fine line in the years 1940 to 1942, pressuring the government to adopt his ideas while avoiding involvement in collaboration with Germany and attempting to keep his followers from collaborating as well.

Soucy has argued that in *Disciplines d'action* La Rocque argued for cooperation with Germany within a new world order. Nobécourt differs on this point by arguing that La Rocque envisioned an "Atlantic alliance" rather than a German-dominated "collaboration continentale". "Collaboration continentale", according to Nobécourt, "refers to exactly the opposite context: the word 'continentale' refers to a unity after the end of hostilities."¹⁵⁵ La Rocque's feelings about Germany would seem to support Nobécourt's theory.

The End of the "Two Zones"

Just as La Rocque saw Vichy's ideology as becoming more statist and imitating the fascist systems of Italy and Germany, he worried that its tendency to collaborate with Germany was becoming more pronounced. La Rocque spoke out against this increasing tendency toward collaboration, and *Le Petit Journal* was one of the few newspapers that did not tow the state's line or utilize its terminology. During the early 1940's, La Rocque limited much of his discomfort with the direction of the government to his private correspondence, but his tense relations with the government resulted in large part from his refusal to submit his party to state control. He was even willing to dismantle the party as such in order to maintain its autonomy. Meanwhile, his loyalty to Pétain appears to have remained unshaken. While he directed some of his appeals to the Marshal, he seems to have blamed his ministers (especially Laval) for the course that the government was taking. This explains his exhortation to his followers in 1940 that they act with "reserve" toward members of the government and refrain from joining the Milice or the French Volunteer Legion Against Bolshevism. On the other hand, Marshal Pétain was a disappointment. La Rocque had expected him to be receptive to PSF ideas in his government, and

¹⁵⁴ Nobécourt, 801.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 780.

being rebuffed caused him to bemoan his “ostracism.” Still, La Rocque appears to have remained loyal to Pétain throughout the Second World War.

With the 1942 U.S. invasion of North Africa known as Operation Torch, the Wehrmacht occupied the remaining portion of France under Vichy’s territorial control. This shift was momentous for Vichy France, depriving its government of much of its independent authority and standing in world affairs. Any sense that Vichy was anything but a weak puppet state was shattered, and its government became inextricably linked to and dependent on the German occupier. For La Rocque, the change was of great importance. He declared in September 1942 that there would be, “no collaboration under occupation.”¹⁵⁶ With this statement, a new chapter in La Rocque and the PSF’s engagement with the Vichy regime had begun.

IV. La Rocque the Resister

The year 1942 would see two particularly momentous events in the history of Vichy France. The first of these was the development of the Service de Travail Obligatoire (STO) that sent French civilians to Germany to labor in the arms factories of the Third Reich. On June 22, Prime Minister Pierre Laval announced his support for a German victory against Bolshevism in an infamous speech, and went on to exhort French workers to go and work in Germany.¹⁵⁷ The second notable event was the complete occupation of the formerly unoccupied zone by German troops. According to Robert Aron, “In December 1942, France had become, in fact, a satellite state of the Reich: the whole of metropolitan France was occupied by German troops, and the French army was no longer in existence.”¹⁵⁸ Each of these developments would have a powerful impact on popular opinion of the French state, and fuel the growth of a vigorous and sustained resistance movement.

Although the PSF had lapsed into political irrelevance since its absorption into the Légion Française des Anciens Combattants, its membership remained under orders to show only “formal discipline” toward the Vichy authorities. Likewise the social service activities of the PSF and its fraternal organizations continued to operate and allowed the organization to maintain a presence in both the occupied and unoccupied zones. German use of French citizens for forced labor,

¹⁵⁶ Nobécourt, 777.

¹⁵⁷ Aron, 365.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 443.

combined with the complete occupation of France by German forces, would provide the final impetus that would drive many members of the PSF and associates of La Rocque into the arms of the Resistance.

Resist Today, Tomorrow, Always

Resistance by members of the PSF did not begin with the invasion of the unoccupied zone. PSF members had entered resistance organizations or fled France to join the Free French in London prior to December of 1942. One particularly illustrative event occurred in the summer of 1941. On August 27th, a former Croix de Feu member named Colette attempted to assassinate Pierre Laval and Marcel Déat. The assassination attempt gained him recognition as a hero by the Free French authorities in London. Both Laval and Déat were wounded, although neither was killed. This overt act of resistance provides some insight into the changing attitude members of the PSF toward the Vichy regime in the latter half of 1941. Colette's attempt took place during a procession to honor the first contingent of the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism, a unit that would go on to fight with Axis troops on the Eastern Front.¹⁵⁹ The procession was symbolic of the Vichy government's policy of collaboration with Germany, a policy of which Laval and Déat were leading proponents.

Déat, for his part, operated out of Paris after the failure of his bid for a "Parti Unitaire". He soon became a leading advocate of collaboration with Germany. From the occupied capital, he advocated on behalf of German-style National Socialism and railed against Pétain and the "defeated and decorated military men" of Vichy.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Laval's willingness to draw France into a closer alignment with Germany against Bolshevism and its former allies had become infamous. Laval's arrest and replacement as Prime Minister by Admiral Darlan in late 1940 resulted in part from his tendency to make broad promises of collaboration to the German authorities in Paris without consulting with Marshal Pétain. When asked by Laval why he was being detained and removed from office, Pétain responded in part that, "every time you went to Paris I wondered what brick was to fall on our heads next."¹⁶¹ The falling bricks in question were assurances of French assistance for German policy aims, often given by Laval without Pétain's specific approval. Thus by the time of the Colette incident,

¹⁵⁹ Aron, 287.

¹⁶⁰ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 257.

¹⁶¹ Aron, 242.

both Laval and Déat had become associated with the collaborationist pro-German faction criticized by La Rocque both in *Le Petit Journal* and in *Disciplines d'action*.

Colette's assassination attempt was also prefaced by the announcement, on August 12, 1941, of a series of measures that solidified the power of Pétain's government and made it more dictatorial in nature.¹⁶² Those measures included the outlawing of political parties, the granting of greater powers to the police, and requiring all ministers and "high officials" to swear an oath of loyalty directly to the Marshal. The Légion des Combattants was subordinated to the government, losing what little autonomy it had had and becoming an arm of the state. These changes, and the several others enumerated by Pétain, were meant to "overcome the resistance of the adversaries of the New Order," and appear to be examples of the "statism" and imitation of fascist forms La Rocque had criticized in *Disciplines d'action*.¹⁶³

PSF members were well represented in the Resistance, and their activities were not limited to written anti-German agitation. Nobécourt's provides a partial list of notable PSF members who were shot or detained by the Germans in connection with their alleged resistance activities. Among them were Noël Ottavi, vice president of the PSF, Louis Gas, administrator of *Le Petit Journal*, and numerous other notables. Nobécourt concludes that:

The reports of the Prefects and of the directors of the Services d'armistice sharing information on the arrests of French people effected by the German authorities give an impressive number of PSF and ADP (Auxiliaires de la Défense Passive, the social service auxiliary organization of the PSF) groups and militants without always giving their names.¹⁶⁴

At the time, La Rocque did not endorse Colette's actions and did not revise his call for "formal discipline" to be shown toward the Vichy government. His own actions vis-à-vis the resistance would be far less overt, although arguably more effective, than those employed by Colette. Meanwhile, La Rocque worked to keep the ear of Marshal Pétain from within the Vichy government, while continuing to oppose the extreme collaborationists through *Le Petit Journal*.

¹⁶² Aron, 295-296.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 296.

¹⁶⁴ Nobécourt, 817.

The Sword and the Shield

Philippe Rudaux (a former PSF member and an admirer of La Rocque) reveals the attitude of at least one former PSF member toward the resistance. According to Rudaux, “Pétain gave out bread, de Gaulle, hope.”¹⁶⁵ There were many in Vichy France who believed that de Gaulle and Pétain were symbiotic, that de Gaulle was the sword and Pétain the shield that would deliver France together. After all, in late 1940, Pétain had told a Canadian diplomat that, “I am obliged officially to maintain the balance between both sides (Germany and the Allies), but you know where my sympathies lie,” strongly implying his support for an Allied victory.¹⁶⁶ The esteem held toward Marshal Pétain by veterans of the First World War is well documented, and his former troops and those who respected his military successes viewed him as the sine qua non of patriotism. La Rocque was no exception to that rule, and his respect for the Marshal is laid out in no uncertain terms in *Disciplines d’action*. La Rocque’s sense of military discipline and his personal respect for Pétain both contributed to his support for the regime early on.

Pétain, however, was not the only one with power in the Vichy government. His position as Head of State gave him the power to appoint his ministers, and to remove Laval from his position in 1940. However, greater forces were at work and Laval’s return to power in spring of 1942 came about despite Pétain earlier decision to remove him. By then, in the view of Lottman, “Laval had managed to terrorize the old man with his description of the horrors in store for France,” in the event of a realignment with the Allies. German power within Vichy France had grown steadily since the beginning of the National Revolution, and even before the invasion of the unoccupied zone German police roamed Vichy territory at will.¹⁶⁷

The Decision to Stay

La Rocque’s decision to stay in France was not a simple one, and was influenced by more than personal loyalty to Pétain. Rudaux claims that La Rocque’s correspondence with General Weygand, commander of the defeated French army, was part of his decision. According the Rudaux, Weygand invoked military duty and informed La Rocque that, “to leave at this moment would be a

¹⁶⁵ Rudaux, 288.

¹⁶⁶ Lottman, 225.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 277.

desertion.”¹⁶⁸ Likewise, when La Rocque informed Pétain that he was considering leaving for North Africa, one of the Marshal’s cabinet officers informed La Rocque that “the Marshal has said for you to stay.”¹⁶⁹

Édith de La Rocque claims that La Rocque’s intent had been to go to North Africa, where his knowledge of indigenous affairs and his military training might have allowed him to help the forces of the French Empire. She recounts an episode in which he invoked his experience and knowledge of Arabic and the potential usefulness of his prior experience in the region. She writes that:

François de La Rocque dreams of going to North Africa. He thinks, along with many other Frenchmen at the same time, that on that African soil excellent elements of the army remain. Was not his duty to bring his experience as an officer and his deep knowledge of indigenous affairs there?¹⁷⁰

The question of what, exactly, duty would require was no doubt a source of confusion for many patriotic Frenchmen and veterans. It goes without saying that La Rocque decided to stay. His reasons for doing so, however, are open to debate.

La Rocque acted on several occasions to thwart attempts by that government and by the Germans to bring his party and his newspaper under state control. By late 1942, his “anti-German” views had seen him interrogated by the Gestapo and his party outlawed. Still, La Rocque stayed in France. La Rocque’s son Gilles, in correspondence with General Charles de Gaulle years after his father’s death, offered an explanation for his father’s decision to remain in France. When asked why La Rocque had not joined the Gaullists in London, Gilles described his father’s concern about the PSF becoming “decapitated.” To leave his “great family of mind” would have been, “like the abandonment of a post.”¹⁷¹ Despite his wish (expressed in 1940) to carry on the fight from North Africa, and his known opposition to the armistice, La Rocque eventually became critical of the decision of others (including de Gaulle) to abandon the métropole to carry on the fight from North Africa and London.

¹⁶⁸ Rudaux, 286.

¹⁶⁹ Édith de La Rocque, 174.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁷¹ Nobécourt, 813.

Soucy notes that La Rocque denounced de Gaulle and his followers for what he viewed as the British-dominated nature of the Gaullist faction. Soucy quotes La Rocque as saying that, “we do not want a Free France that would be a British dominion.”¹⁷² This quotation betrays his mistrust for France’s former allies, complicating the testimony of his wife and of Rudaux that La Rocque was an “anglophile.” According to Sean Kennedy, in the aftermath of the German invasion La Rocque blamed Britain and the United States for failing to prevent the defeat and occupation of France. He also worried that British and American power would be increased after the war, at France’s expense. “Must France be relegated to a secondary rank to work out the [international] order of which she had been the first [nation] at issue and the principal propitiatory victim?” La Rocque would ask in a prayer, written during his imprisonment in 1944.¹⁷³ La Rocque’s brand of nationalism led him to reject foreign models, including the fascist forms that he saw the collaborationists as imitating. However, it also led him to view even France’s allies as potentially untrustworthy.

Foreign Workers for German Factories

Beginning in early 1942, French civilians traveled to Germany to work for the German arms industry. At first, they went of their own volition, seeking jobs. Eventually, Vichy developed an arrangement by which workers were exchanged for French prisoners of war, hundreds of thousands of which were held in camps in Germany. This arrangement soon devolved into wholesale conscription of French workers.¹⁷⁴ The decision to send French workers to Germany is widely credited to Pierre Laval, whose extreme collaborationist views had, by the end of 1942, become state policy. Aron has described the intense political pressure exerted on Laval by the German authorities, characterizing his decision as “either to leave Sauckel (the German official in charge of recruiting French workers) to recruit 250,000 volunteers himself, or to undertake to furnish him with them.”¹⁷⁵ The imposition of the STO, or “Service de Travail Obligatoire,” offended a great many in France, and La Rocque was no exception. He had opposed collaboration with Germany as an absurdity, and the inequality of the STO showed the impossibility of an equal collaboration between victor and vanquished.

¹⁷² Soucy, 121.

¹⁷³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 256.

¹⁷⁴ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 311.

¹⁷⁵ Aron, 445.

In his memoirs, Weygand makes explicit his strong feelings against the STO. He also presents Pierre Laval as the true villain behind the program, much as La Rocque came to see Laval as the villain behind the Vichy regime. By his own account, Weygand confronted Laval about the program in early November 1942, saying that, “he and the Germans, through the imposition of forced labor, the refusal of increases in wages, and the shortage of raw materials, had exasperated the working class.”¹⁷⁶

Resistance from the Right

Operating out of London from 1940 until the end of the war, General Charles de Gaulle became, for much of the world, the face of armed French Resistance. His Free French forces made contact with and helped to organize many of the resistance networks that sprung up in France after the defeat of 1940. However, La Rocque never made contact with the “Gaullists” during the war. It is conceivable that de Gaulle’s flight from France appeared to La Rocque to be an abandonment of his post. It is clear that La Rocque’s upbringing and military experience developed in him a strong and specific sense of his duty to the French nation, and particularly to the individuals under his command. One of La Rocque’s citations for bravery, received after the Battle of Khenifra in 1916, lauded him for the fact that, “wounded, conserved all of his energy, and did not abandon the command of his unit.”¹⁷⁷ The cavalry officer who had refused to abandon his command in 1916 remained unwilling in 1940 to leave the PSF to its fate.

Of course, not all of the members of the Resistance did abandon their posts. Many stayed in France and entered into contact with de Gaulle’s “fighting French”. Many other far-rightists and former league-members were involved in the Gaullist resistance, however they did not attempt to contact La Rocque and the PSF in any meaningful way during the Vichy period. Nobécourt notes that several individuals who had been Action Française, Cagoullards, or had left the Croix de Feu during the 1930’s and had “a score to settle” with La Rocque were involved in the resistance. He posits that their prior political disagreements with La Rocque may have influenced them to avoid contact with him.¹⁷⁸

La Rocque’s criticisms of the Gaullists were not limited to their willingness to leave French soil during wartime and their perceived alignment with British

¹⁷⁶ Weygand, 399.

¹⁷⁷ Édith de La Rocque, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Nobécourt, 814.

policy aims. He also criticized them for attempting to seize elements of the French empire from the Vichy authorities. In particular, the Free French raid on Vichy-held Dakar provoked criticism from La Rocque. “Gaullism and the émigrés were severely judged at the moment of the Dakar and Syria affairs in the name of national unity,” according to Philippe Rudaux.¹⁷⁹ The internal conflict between Gaullists and Pétainists in France and in the colonies would come to be characterized by violence among and between groups of Frenchmen. Such conflict offended La Rocque’s conception of national unity and domestic peace. His response to the actions of the Gaullists betrays the strength of his preference for stability, order and national unity.

In July 1942 Charles Vallin, a former PSF deputy and a member of the leadership of the Légion Française des Combattants, was charged by the Free French with the task of drawing PSF members into the Gaullist fold. The socialist resistance leader Brossolette recognized the potential power of the PSF’s networks within the resistance, describing them as “the only collectively considerable and useful force” in France.¹⁸⁰ The Gaullist resistance already had the support of most of the left, but Brossolette and Vallin realized the utility of involving the largest party of the right in a unified resistance movement. Among the PSF members who joined the resistance against the will of their leader, Kennedy writes that, “it appears that a greater proportion of PSF supporters found their way into resistance movements with a conservative-nationalist bent.”¹⁸¹ Prewar political divisions continued to separate Frenchmen, even within the resistance. However, Vallin imagined that it would be possible, under the auspices of Gaullism, to “remake France... [with] the conjunction of all that is good in socialism and all that is good in the PSF.”¹⁸² Vallin travelled to London to join with de Gaulle, hoping to draw the PSF into the Free French resistance. Meanwhile, La Rocque continued to invoke his opposition to any thought of leaving French territory during the occupation. La Rocque’s condemnation of the defections of Vallin and others resulted from what Kennedy has called “La Rocque’s consistent hostility to Gaullism,” as well as the fact that their disobedience undermined his authority over the PSF and its fraternal organizations.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Rudaux, 294.

¹⁸⁰ Nobécourt, 832.

¹⁸¹ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 252.

¹⁸² Nobécourt, 832.

¹⁸³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 253.

Social d'Abord

During the Vichy period, the social service organizations and networks of the PSF and the ADP continued to function. Édith de La Rocque provides a description of the services rendered by the networks of her husband's organizations during the war, and the numbers are surprising. If her statistics are to be taken at face value, during "the years of exodus" the ADP (service arm of the PSF) gave out 75 million meals, 2.5 million articles of clothing, and continued to operate in both the occupied north and the unoccupied south of France. In 1941 alone they distributed 13.8 million meals, while building 200 libraries and 44,000 "worker's gardens", which she describes as "centers of sport and culture."¹⁸⁴ While Édith's version of the activities of her husband's party is likely biased (and La Rocque's own penchant for manufacturing numerical data can be seen in *Le complot communo-socialiste*), Nobécourt's biography corroborates her basic claim that the PSF and its affiliates were actively pursuing their social mission under Vichy. Likewise, Kennedy's study of the PSF reveals that "the ADP alone sent 16,000 tons of parcels to POW's in Germany" during the war, and that "the scope of the ADP's contribution (through charitable work) was impressive."¹⁸⁵

The social activities of the PSF and its fraternal organizations gave them extraordinary reach, and its members had the opportunity to take part in various forms of subversion. For example, Nobécourt relates how the *Le Petit Journal* survived and was used to broadcast orders to the agents of the Klan Network throughout the war. The journal of the PSF also served to hide Jewish employees, including a "Mme Devise, a Jew camouflaged under the name of Mme Julien," was shifted from one job to another and provided with false documents by her employers.¹⁸⁶ The social doctrine of the PSF provided the motivation to run a massive network of social services, to protect "the persecuted" and refugees and would eventually provide the network necessary to collect valuable intelligence and pass it to Allied intelligence services.

On the other hand, Kennedy has noted that the ADP's work in conjunction with the official state aid organization (Secours Nationale) "helped to project Vichy's message," partially because it was the policy of the ADP to "venerate the Marshal."¹⁸⁷ This attitude, for Kennedy, was evidence of the ADP's (and, by

¹⁸⁴ Édith de La Rocque, 186.

¹⁸⁵ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 243.

¹⁸⁶ Nobécourt, 818.

¹⁸⁷ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 243.

extension, the PSF's) attachment to collaboration. However, La Rocque's vocal opposition to the collaborationist faction represented by Laval and Déat suggest that he was capable of venerating Pétain and opposing collaborationist policies at the same time. Support for Pétain and respect for his character and accomplishments, both in war and as head of state, should not be confused with the collaborationism that La Rocque explicitly opposed.

The Founding of Réseau Klan

In September of 1942, Vallin had arrived in London to begin his work of drawing the membership of the PSF into the resistance. His defection to London had great symbolic power, adding the sheen of PSF support to de Gaulle's coalition. As the PSF had been the largest political party in France at the outbreak of the war, its involvement in the resistance was no doubt desired. While individual adherents of Croix de Feu and PSF ideas had joined the resistance prior to Vallin's defection, Vallin's high rank within the PSF gave his act more force. La Rocque, although still opposed to the idea of leaving French soil, would soon find his own way to aid the military efforts of France's allies. On October 1, 1942, *Le Pilon* (an anti-Semitic and collaborationist newspaper published in the occupied zone) described what its author viewed to be La Rocque's position:

The Colonel is against the Legion tricolor and believes that we have nothing to do in Russia. The Colonel is against collaboration with the Germans, and, in his words, is confident of the defeat of Germany. The Colonel is not an Anglophobe, he is even an Anglophile, for certainly, he says, we need to get along with the English.¹⁸⁸

Nobécourt writes that La Rocque made his first contacts for the purpose of gathering intelligence information in the summer of 1940. In February 1942, an associate of his, Colonel Charaudeau, put him in contact with the British Intelligence Service, which deemed La Rocque "disposed to accord his collaboration to the Allies."¹⁸⁹ The early contacts made by La Rocque starting in 1940 would eventually form his resistance network, the Réseau Klan. La Rocque made use of his prewar political contacts to build a resistance network, and Klan's earliest contacts were PSF members and former Volontaires Nationaux.

¹⁸⁸ Rudaux, 310.

¹⁸⁹ Nobécourt, 821.

What Was Klan?

The Réseau Klan was an intelligence-gathering outfit, not a violent guerilla organization. Its main function was to gather military information for Allied intelligence organizations, and to that end it employed the vast network of PSF and ADP members organized into regional “under-networks” and coordinated centrally by Colonel La Rocque and his close associates. Édith de La Rocque writes that the Réseau Klan’s activities were hidden, and that, “that vast organization camouflaged the underground work of La Rocque: an intelligence-gathering network created during 1940 on his own initiative. My reason for worry was his reason to live.”¹⁹⁰ The network of social services provided by the PSF and ADP served as a cover for the activities of the Klan network, an organization tasked with collecting military intelligence for the Allies.

The organization, according to Édith, took two years to organize and “put on its feet”. While it is difficult to know what sort of preparations La Rocque was making during the period of 1940-1942, the question of what resistance activities he took part in during that time is key to interpreting his true role in the government of Vichy France. On one hand, building a clandestine resistance network is a complex proposition. On the other hand, from the defeat of France to the fall of the unoccupied zone in 1942 was the period of La Rocque’s closest involvement in the government. While it did take the network two years from its inception to contact British intelligence, those years were also ones during which La Rocque served as an officer in the Vichy government. The possibility remains that La Rocque was hedging his bets, preparing to act on behalf of the Allies if such action appeared expedient (that is, if the Allies appeared likely to win).

The Klan Network eventually became a subsidiary network of the larger Alibi Network. Many important members of the PSF and ADP were involved in the resistance activities of the Klan Network, including La Rocque’s sons, Jacques and Gilles. Jacques de La Rocque served as “informer for Haute Savoy and the Lyonnais Region,” while Gilles served as “informer for Savoy and also for the Hautes-Alpes and the Drôme.”¹⁹¹ Only a few, high ranked members of the PSF were aware of the organization of the Klan Network, although Philippe Rudaux has claimed that a great many members of the PSF and ADP were “assistants that were more or less aware” and aided in the network’s activities.¹⁹² They reported

¹⁹⁰ Édith de La Rocque, 186.

¹⁹¹ Nobécourt, 822.

¹⁹² Rudaux, 312.

on military convoys crossing the Demarcation Line between Vichy France and the occupied north, and aided in smuggling of people and information. The organization of the Klan Network reflected La Rocque's view of leadership, in that it was both decentralized and centralized. Its organization consisted of local "sub-networks" under departmental and regional coordinators. However, "inspectors" who answered directly to La Rocque oversaw the local organizations.¹⁹³

The level of success enjoyed by the Klan Network, resistance arm of the PSF, is difficult to determine. Nobécourt relates the claim of a former Klan Network operative, Professor Pierre Lépine, that after the war an American general extended his official thanks to the network for the quality of the information it supplied. He notes, however, that in 1996 there was no way to verify that claim, as any information on resistance contacts would likely be sealed in the records of British intelligence until the beginning of the following decade.¹⁹⁴

Charles Vallin and the PSF "Résistant"

A partial explanation for La Rocque's residual reputation for collaboration may be found in the actions of Charles Vallin. After arriving in London, he went on tour to promote the PSF and its potential role in the resistance. During his trip, he was described as "the true head" of the PSF, as opposed to La Rocque who was widely viewed as a collaborator. Nobécourt notes that the French journalist Henri de Kerillis, in the American francophone newspaper *Pour la Victoire*, wrote on October 3, 1942 that Vallin "became the real leader of the PSF...and it is thus that, in Gaullism, French unity will be accomplished." Meanwhile, de Kerillis dismissed La Rocque as a "Vichy functionary."¹⁹⁵ La Rocque's unwillingness to join with the Gaullists caused many to assume that he was a collaborator, and his role in the Vichy government, however minor, was difficult to explain away. Vallin's split with La Rocque also resulted from their differing political views. While Vallin saw Gaullism as the future of French politics and a possibility for national unification, La Rocque appears to have drawn his own resistance contacts mainly from within the PSF and ADP, thus keeping his network free of the influence of both contemptible "émigrés" and foreign governments.

¹⁹³ Nobécourt, 822.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 823.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 843.

Rapprochement?

With the German invasion of the formerly unoccupied zone of France, the political position of Vichy was that of a client government under German hegemony. In addition to his activities as the leader of the Klan Network, in late 1942 La Rocque worked to convince Pétain to reorient himself in favor of the Allies. La Rocque's proximity to the Marshal, although providing fodder for his detractors (and historians such as Robert Paxton) to accuse him of collaboration, did give him the opportunity to have his views heard. Édith de La Rocque excerpts a letter from La Rocque to General de Gaulle, dated August 15, 1945, describing La Rocque's attempt to draw Pétain toward the Allies. "On March 7th, 1943," he wrote, "I have finally, despite the barrages directed toward me, gained the verbal adhesion of Marshal Pétain to the idea of an accord with the Allies." La Rocque's letter describes how, once in Pétain's confidence, he set about convincing him to aid the allied war effort. Pétain, "had the imprudence to affirm, in front of a score of individuals almost completely unknown to me, his regret at not having listened to me earlier and his resolution to turn toward my advice."¹⁹⁶ The episode described in the letter is surprising, and suggests that Pétain himself was ready to turn toward the allies in spring of 1943. It is difficult to know Pétain's mind, of course. All that this letter tells us is that La Rocque believed that Pétain was in agreement. No doubt such a letter, addressed to the leader of the Free French in 1945, might have been embellished to emphasize La Rocque's role as a voice of resistance.

Édith recalls her husband's words on the night after the meeting with Pétain described in the letter. According to her account, he remarked that it was:

Unimaginable! The Marshal took me by the arm, like a friend... his decisions made, he rejoined his band and declared: 'I will receive colonel La Rocque regularly all eight days, his presence is necessary for me.' The declaration fell neatly in a nest of vipers. One of my good friends alerted the Germans without delay.¹⁹⁷

Édith goes on to relate that within 48 hours, François de La Rocque was to be arrested by the Gestapo. Kennedy has expressed the opinion that "La Rocque overestimated the degree of autonomy Pétain retained in the fall of 1942, as well

¹⁹⁶ Édith de La Rocque, 192.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

as the marshal's determination to break with Laval over the policy of collaboration."¹⁹⁸

Although the scenario given in Édith de La Rocque's book makes her husband out as a resister partially by ignoring "details" such as his employment as "chargé de mission [official representative]" by the Vichy government, the basic scenario she describes seems to fit the experience of other rightists who dissented against Vichy's collaborationist policies. One such right-wing figure was General Weygand. He and La Rocque had found themselves on the same side of French politics in the mid 1930's, as evidenced by the meeting between Weygand and Marshal Lyautey during which the two men discussed their concern about freemasonry and the rise of the left. Weygand and La Rocque shared the military experience of the First World War, and conservative and militarist political views that appear to have been common to French army officers of their generation. Both men became entangled in the government of Vichy, but eventually came to advocate "anglophile" and pro-Allied policies.

In his memoirs, Weygand describes the events of November 1942 and his appraisal of the politics in Vichy on the eve of the German invasion of the unoccupied zone. He reveals that Marshal Pétain was considering sending Admiral Darlan to North Africa to command French troops "in the event of a resumption of war against the Axis."¹⁹⁹ This claim seems to agree with Édith de La Rocque's implication that Pétain was open to reentering the war on the Allied side. Weygand and La Rocque found themselves in accord on this point, and both understood Pétain's decision to stay in France as the result of the Marshal's belief in his role as a shield against the worst potential German atrocities.

Weygand also describes the split between Pétain and Laval on the subject of collaboration. He describes how collaborationist faction in Vichy, led by Laval, showed "entirely undisguised" hostility to Weygand and his stance in favor of the Allies. His account makes sure to mention that his conversations with the Marshal began while Laval was away visiting Hitler at Berchtesgaden.²⁰⁰ Weygand and La Rocque both described Pétain as considering a return to the Allied fold in late 1942 into 1943, and both portrayed themselves as part of the driving force behind this shift in attitude.

¹⁹⁸ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 247.

¹⁹⁹ Weygand, 397.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 398.

The similarities between Weygand's reported interactions with Pétain in the period just prior to the German occupation of Vichy France and La Rocque's interactions with the Marshal recorded in *La Rocque tel qu'il était* are striking. Also notable (although not exactly surprising) is the apparent increase in right-wing agitation in favor of the Allies in this period, a period in which recent Allied military successes in North Africa and elsewhere made an eventual German defeat appear increasingly likely. In the end, the decision to return to the fight at the side of the Allies was not Pétain's to make. After the German invasion of the unoccupied zone, his government would be essentially irrelevant. In March 1944, the Germans would remove Pétain from power. As early as December 4, 1943 the German Minister of Armaments, Albert Speer, would note that, "it is not necessary in the future...to have any particular consideration for the French."²⁰¹

Both Weygand and La Rocque would make scrupulous efforts to defend Pétain. Weygand's memoirs provide a detailed explanation of the Marshal's noble motives, recalling that, "when he had agreed to take the country's destiny in his hands, he had declared from the first that he would never leave the soil of France," and that, "He considered that it would be cowardice to abandon (the French people); that was his gift of himself. That is what so many Frenchmen do not forget. It is the basis of their faithful attachment to him."²⁰² La Rocque would likewise defend Pétain's conduct and intentions after the war, as evidenced by an August 15, 1945 letter addressed to General de Gaulle. The letter requests that Pétain be spared execution, noting that himself and Pétain, like himself and de Gaulle, "are attached to one another by indestructible links. Those links were formed in the army." La Rocque went on to invoke Pétain's "Satanic tortures" under the heel of the German machine, his secret sympathy for the Allies, and his old age. While the letter claims (dishonestly, as it happens) that La Rocque never worked for Pétain or served under his command, it also reveals La Rocque's deep personal loyalty to the "last Marshal of France" and his desire to see reconciliation amongst his countrymen.²⁰³ Perhaps La Rocque's attachment came from the political views and life experiences he held in common with Pétain, or perhaps his loyalty stemmed from the same respect for the Marshal's sacrifice shown by Weygand. Either way, La Rocque never disparaged Pétain's intentions or military honor, and can be seen to have defended him to the last.

²⁰¹ Aron, 445.

²⁰² Weygand, 401.

²⁰³ Rudaux, 346-351.

Another interpretation of Pétain, offered by Paxton, is less charitable. Paxton describes Pétain as attached to French neutrality. He argues that “the allied landings (in North Africa) were a disaster to Pétain’s hopes for a compromise peace,” and reminds the reader that the Vichy French armistice army was placed on defensive footing against a possible Allied invasion near Toulon before being disbanded by the Germans. Weygand and La Rocque’s claims that Pétain favored the Allies are, for Paxton, “altogether out of character” given his attempts to negotiate with Germany that continued well into 1944.²⁰⁴ Of course, this view conflates Pétain and Laval. In order to believe the defenses of Marshal Pétain offered by Weygand and La Rocque, one must first believe that Pétain and Laval envisioned France’s role in Europe differently. Certainly Robert Aron’s work on Vichy France suggests that there was a deep division between Laval’s policy aims and those of the Marshal.

Arrest and Deportation of La Rocque

On November 12, 1942, shortly after Weygand’s last meeting with the Marshal, he would be ambushed and arrested by the German authorities.²⁰⁵ Ten days earlier, on November 2nd, the German authorities had ordered the PSF and all of its affiliates disbanded in the occupied zone.²⁰⁶ On March 9, 1942, shortly after his last meeting with the Marshal, La Rocque was arrested by the Germans along with most of the leadership of the PSF. La Rocque’s wife describes her husband’s defiance at being arrested, relating how he lit up a cigarette and informed the S.S. men present that, “in France, the officers still smoke beside fake soldiers.”²⁰⁷

La Rocque would spend the remainder of the Second World War in German prisons at Eisenberg in Czechoslovakia and Schloss Itter in Austrian Tyrol. Weygand and La Rocque would meet again as prisoners at Schloss Itter, a VIP prison that would also play host to General Gamelin, Edouard Daladier, and the tennis star Jean Borotra, among others. During his time at Itter, from January 1944 to the end of the war, La Rocque would compose his last political tract, *Au service de l’avenir*.²⁰⁸ The most striking element of the new book was its similarity to La Rocque’s prior works, showing an essentially static set of beliefs that the Colonel no doubt considered to be essential and timeless.

²⁰⁴ Paxton, 306.

²⁰⁵ Weygand, 401-402

²⁰⁶ Édith de La Rocque, 190.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 200-201.

²⁰⁸ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l’avenir*, 11.

Au service de l'avenir

Au service de l'avenir is, above all, concerned with permanence. Its first chapter stresses the permanence of the ideas it contains, and La Rocque informs the reader that, “je n’ai pas changé d’avis” since writing *Service public*. He goes on to remind us that:

That which I have repeated for so long, an unforgettable father – my only teacher in all matters until my sixteenth year – instilled in me during my childhood and my adolescence; masters like Lyautey and Foch dictated and demonstrated to me; and years of work at Indigenous Affairs, as well as my modest and direct command of a suffering and victorious troop taught me the use of.²⁰⁹

Indeed, few of the basic tenets of Croix de Feu and PSF doctrine had changed in more than a decade since the events of February 6th. However, the times had changed and much had occurred since La Rocque had last authored a book. The key differences between *Au service de l'avenir* and his prior books can be seen to stem from the extraordinary events of the prior five years of war and occupation.

By the time of the writing of *Au service de l'avenir*, he had formulated a list of four categories of things he considered to be “formal and permanent,” and the list of four points he provides encompasses many of the basic views enumerated in his earlier writings:

- 1) The representative and directing mechanism (The state for the nation, the command for a troupe, the administration for an industry, etc.)
- 2) The group, the enterprise, and most of all, communities.
- 3) The forces of spiritual, moral and intellectual order that, separately or together, animate the work of those who act and each rank of the hierarchies to cooperate.
- 4) The human person of each of those who will compose the envisaged community.²¹⁰

La Rocque’s list reflects his continued attachment to hierarchy, reciprocal duty, respected elites and traditional communities that he appears to have considered the basic elements of Frenchness. The entire system, in his view, would be

²⁰⁹ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, 12.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

insupportable without certain moral, spiritual, and intellectual ideas that would “animate the work” of every level of society. These ideas are implied to be Christian in nature, but also particularly French and the basis of the unique nature of the French national family.

In the second chapter, La Rocque discusses his principles for leadership and organization. He describes the bond between elites and the community at large as coming from, “the network of responsibilities” which forms, “some sort of nerve tissue for human collectivities.”²¹¹ He goes on to urge the necessity of every individual attending to his or her own responsibilities and cooperating with the community as a whole to achieve collective goals. These principles for organization had been reflected in the organization of the PSF, which consisted of a number of specialized organizations and auxiliaries that acted in concert to advance a broad but coherent political and social agenda.

The second chapter also describes the necessity of authority, but stipulates that such authority requires the fulfillment of responsibilities. His discussion of the appropriate powers and responsibilities of “the leader” is of particular interest, given La Rocque’s complex interactions with Chef d’État (head of state) Pétain over the prior four years. In his words, “Authority alone is flame without heat. The end to be attained is its only reason to exist.”²¹² This quotation can be taken to be a disavowal of arbitrary power, but signifies little without an understanding of what La Rocque considered to be a worthwhile goal for leadership.

While he is far from explicit about what, generally speaking, is a worthwhile goal, he does reveal that leadership must take into account the aspirations and interests of those that it seeks to lead. He opposes demagogy, which he describes as stemming from authority that becomes distracted from its goals by, “impatiences, lassitudes, fantasies,” of the group that gave him his power. He likewise opposes tyranny, which in his view occurs when a leader, “marches towards an assigned end without considering the possibilities and aspirations of the group and individuals.”²¹³ Demagogy in this sense is democratic (or at least plebiscitary) in nature, imposed on the leadership from below. Its opposite, tyranny, results from a total lack of such input from the polity. Both appear to have been equally repugnant to La Rocque.

²¹¹ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l’avenir*, 21.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Other features of *Au service de l'avenir* are familiar as well. La Rocque repeatedly quotes his military associates to argue his points relative to the issues of authority and command. Most of his choice quotes come from Marshal Lyautey, his commanding officer in Morocco, but some are also drawn from Weygand and others. After all of the complications of war and occupation, La Rocque appears to have maintained his loyalty to his comrades in arms, who also happen to have aligned themselves with La Rocque and the Croix de Feu in the interwar period. The similarities I have noted between La Rocque's and Weygand's experiences under the Vichy regime may also have contributed to La Rocque's apparent reverence toward Weygand's words of wisdom.

La Rocque provides a brief history of his military and political life prior to his imprisonment. This discussion is fairly cursory, emphasizing the basic values and experiences that informed his worldview. His view of his own experience as leader of the Croix de Feu, however, is telling. "We were the object of continual aggressions,"²¹⁴ he argues, gesturing toward a vaguely defined group of political enemies responsible for his persecution. However, a footnote provides great insight into his purpose in writing his final published work:

I repeat that we were dissolved into smoke, by the enemy, by virtue of motives based on our anti-fascism and our active sympathy for persecuted Jews: It is not always easy to remain uniquely and fiercely French!²¹⁵

La Rocque's decision to make explicit his "anti-fascist" and pro-Jewish credentials (and to sound the note of victimization) is easy enough to understand in light of the climate of the period just prior to the German defeat. That said, his association of anti-fascist feeling and sympathy for persecuted Jews with true Frenchness seems to represent the first shot in what would become a heated and long-lived debate over the significance of La Rocque's wartime activities. While *Au service de l'avenir* is in most senses similar to his prior writings, its increased emphasis on La Rocque's own life story gives it the character of a hybrid political tract and personal memoir. It also gives its author the chance to speak in his own defense, an opportunity that would not be afforded him by his own government before his death in 1946.

His attempts to undo what he saw as calumnies and libels committed against himself and his organizations over the prior decade go on for the better part of a

²¹⁴ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, 40.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

chapter, touching on his 1938 trial for reinstating the Croix de Feu as the PSF and other controversial events in his history. However, bitterness is not the intended tone of the book. Most palpable in La Rocque's writing is his wish to return to normalcy and permanence after the cataclysm of the Second World War. The conclusion of chapter three reads like a motivational speech, reminding the reader that, "The fatherland, alone, remains when the State, governments, the body of the citizens is transformed."²¹⁶ The eternal soul of France, for La Rocque, would march on even after the current state was transformed. It seems from context that he could only have been referring to the Vichy regime, in its death throes even as he wrote. The fact that "the State" in the quotation is capitalized seems to refer to the "French State" that Pétain and his men had sought to build in place of the Republic.

The following chapter, entitled "Le Social," essentially reiterates the basic social and political ideas put forward in *Service public* and emphasized in *Disciplines d'action*. He repeats his call for "organized professions," his particular brand of corporatism, and states his view that Capitalism had "reached the end of its evolution" and would need to be controlled and reformed by future governments.²¹⁷ He continues his call for people to embark on "social works" and service to the community.

La Rocque's views "On the Topic of Politics" come next. In the chapter bearing that title, La Rocque provides a comprehensive examination of everything that was, in his view, both wrong and right about democracy. His emphasis is on the need to limit democracy by imposing strong executive authority and by the elevation of elites. His discussion of the three forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, and the republic) reveals his nostalgia for the institution of nobility. "the aristocracy is, by definition, an elite." He uses a quotation to lament the loss of the term's original meaning, "a superiority of race," a term that he clarifies in a footnote as referring to, "heredity and not in a properly racist sense."²¹⁸ François de La Rocque, descendant of illustrious noblemen and soldiers, could not resist paying homage to the hereditary elite from which he had issued. His view of his own role in society, as both officer and gentleman, appears to have continued to inform his worldview until his death.

Notably missing from the book is any explicit assessment of National Socialism, the outcome of the war or political responsibility for anything that occurred

²¹⁶ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, 44-45.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

during it. In his rush to bring about national reconciliation (capitalized and otherwise) he appears to have avoided touching on issues that were, by 1944, already extremely controversial and politically difficult. Still, he does provide a critique of dictatorship that is paired with a defense of “authority.” His critique of dictators boils down to his distaste for personal rule, predicated on the need for stable institutions and constitutionally ascribed authority.²¹⁹ According to La Rocque such authority would need to be separated into the balanced powers of the judiciary, the executive, and the representative legislature, to provide order and stability.²²⁰ It may well be that, for La Rocque, the Nazi regime had comprised both demagoguery (in that it was driven along by popular hatreds and enthusiasm) and personal dictatorship (lacking separation of powers and regard for the true welfare of its people). His failure to make an explicit statement on the subject should not be taken as ambivalence.

The remainder of the book covers essentially the same ground as *Service public*. It contains no discussion of the Jewish question, or of the place of France relative to Germany. In this sense the book can be seen as a return to the source for La Rocque, having far more in common with *Service public* than with *Disciplines d'action*. He concludes by reminding the reader of the virtues of public service and the necessity of selfless elites to the maintenance of a stable society. He finishes with an exhortation to heal France, “gravely wounded” due to years of war and “a Pyrrhic victory.”²²¹ What France needed at the end of the war, to facilitate healing and rebuilding, was summed up as follows.

Turn hardily to the future, attach ourselves to immortal principles, the loss of which ensures the failure of our enterprises.

Revive liberty. That liberty must not be license or false and specious.

Revive justice. That the latter will not be given over to enterprises without a mandate, to the grudges of individuals.

Revive civic equality and add to our sentiment of equality of souls the consequences of my last postulate. For abolished inequalities, for privileges done away with, do not substitute new inequalities, new privileges.

Revive fraternity. Exclude the proven traitors, begin to reconcile yourselves with one another.

Revive honor. Prevent injuries to national sovereignty, shameful and destructive practices, of speculation and the scandalous display of our disgraces.²²²

²¹⁹ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, 92.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²²² *Ibid.*, 195,

La Rocque's call to restore the virtues of the old France, and not to create new inequalities and injustices, seems to be an appropriate sign off for the political career of a consummate traditionalist. Yet in the same breath he can be seen to have been looking toward the future, using some of the most pro-democratic language of his career. France, in this view, could be restored in both power and honor through a return to its basic values and its original nature. All of the virtues necessary for her recovery are implied to be inherent in her makeup, waiting only for the right authority to restore them.

François de La Rocque was freed from Germany custody in Austria by a unit of the United States army in August 1945. Upon his return to France, he was to be interned by the French government and kept under close watch until his death on April 28, 1946. The last years of his life and his experiences in captivity would soon become central to the growing debate over his place in the history of wartime France, a debate that would in many ways mirror the larger controversy that had stuck to La Rocque since becoming president of the Croix de Feu in 1930.

V. The La Rocque Syndrome

The story of La Rocque's activities under the Vichy regime is, in many ways, an ambiguous one. Certain things about his activities can be known for sure. It is clear, for example, that he held a position in the government and helped to coordinate the social services of the PSF with those of the Vichy government. Besides being a Vichy government official, La Rocque also appears to have adopted some Vichy policies in *Disciplines d'action*. Using a broad definition of collaboration, it could be said he did in fact collaborate with the Vichy government in its project to remake France. The similarity between many of the ideas put forward in *Disciplines d'action* and *Service public* and Vichy state policy, especially in Vichy's early days, suggests that La Rocque had good reason to be intrigued by, and even supportive of, the proposed National Revolution.

The reality of the Réseau Klan, and the widely acknowledged anti-collaborationist opinions of the *Petit Journal* seem to tell a different story. However, the reality of La Rocque's involvement in the Resistance does not necessarily contradict the reality of his role in the Vichy government. Likewise, his opposition to the extreme collaborationism of Laval and Déat does not necessarily contradict his own more limited involvement in collaboration and his well-documented support of Marshal Pétain. There are certainly ways in which

the seemingly contradictory reality of his involvement in both resistance and collaboration may be understood.

If La Rocque's wife and supporters are to be credited, his delay in joining the Resistance and his involvement in the collaborating government was the result of his clandestine and meticulous efforts, starting in 1940, to put his resistance network "on its feet."²²³ At the same time, La Rocque apparently remained personally and politically loyal to Pétain, unwilling to disobey the orders of "the last Marshal of France." Much evidence exists to suggest that La Rocque required the affront of the S.T.O. and the German invasion of Vichy France before he could fully commit to joining with the Allies. His distrust for the Allied powers' intentions in France, and his disdain for Gaullism suggest that basic elements of La Rocque's worldview led him to shy away from the Resistance and favor Pétain's regime during the first two years of the German occupation. La Rocque's aversions, loyalties, values and fears all played into the complex political course he plotted during the years of the Second World War.

Collaboration

The story of La Rocque as heroic resister is no doubt an attractive one, and much effort has been put forward to portray him as such. Of course, to take his wife Édith and his former compatriot Rudaux at their word would be to ignore the political nature of the Croix de Feu and the PSF and the importance of La Rocque's reputation to this family and his followers. Nobécourt's meticulously researched biography corroborates many of the claims made by François de La Rocque's supporters since his death, but also reveals his role in the government of Vichy and his personal reverence for Pétain. His proximity to the Marshal was a double-edged sword. Being taken into the Marshal's confidence, on one hand, could be portrayed as evidence of the effectiveness of La Rocque's anti-German agitation. On the other hand, countless detractors of La Rocque, as well as some historians, have seized on that relationship to brand him a collaborator. The truth appears to be somewhere in between, as is so often the case.

Through comparing La Rocque's writings with the political doctrine of the Vichy regime, it appears likely that many Vichy policies were drawn from or influenced by Croix de Feu and PSF doctrine. After all, the regime did not stop at adopting the motto "travail, famille, patrie" as its own. Vichy's stated goals included the reconciliation of the interests of labor and capital, the advancement of family

²²³ Édith de La Rocque, 186.

values through the elimination of alcoholism and the expansion of the birth rate, and a variety of other emphases that would have been familiar to any student of *Service public* or casual reader of *Le Petit Journal*. It is also clear that in the early days La Rocque sought to influence the course of the regime, although to what end is more difficult to tell. Two common explanations for his proximity to Marshal Pétain seem plausible: The first is that La Rocque wished to gain Pétain's trust in order to advance essentially "anglophile" and pro-Allied policies, while the second is that La Rocque was mainly an opportunist, not advocating a French reunion with the Allies until late in 1942 when a German defeat appeared likely. Each of the conceptions is drawn from a particular view of La Rocque's political orientation and character, and together these perspectives represent a larger political and historical debate over La Rocque's wartime activities and political and personal loyalties.

The first narrative has been trumpeted by La Rocque's family in the period since his death, and partially vindicated by Nobécourt's research. The second attitude has been adopted by Paxton and promulgated by critics of La Rocque since the outbreak of the Second World War. Both narratives have had a long and complex lifespan. In examining the literature relating to both sides of the debate, I hope to uncover the lineage of each point of view before offering something like a verdict on the relationship between La Rocque's role in the Resistance and his larger political worldview.

The Syndrome

Since his death in 1946, François de La Rocque has not ceased to be the object of controversy. I have described above the controversy over La Rocque's loyalty to France, centering in large part on his involvement in the 6 February 1934 demonstrations. His activities during the Second World War would bring about a new debate over his legacy as a resister or as a collaborator. The first round, so to speak, of the debate began with the publication of La Rocque's last book, *Au service de l'avenir*. That book was followed by the publication Édith de La Rocque's *La Rocque tel qu'il était* in 1962. In the years that elapsed, La Rocque's stature as a resister was contested at the highest levels of the French government and eventually came to the desk of General (and eventually President) Charles de Gaulle.

Au service de l'avenir can be seen as serving several important purposes. On one hand, it was a final message to his followers and an exhortation to rebuild France along the lines of PSF doctrine and with respect for what he viewed to be his

nation's eternal character. It reiterated much of his worldview, and included a few additions and updates as needed. But *Au service de l'avenir* was not just another political tract. It was also the opening volley, so to speak, of a debate over the place of La Rocque and the PSF in wartime (and to a lesser extent, interwar) France. It can be seen from the text that La Rocque was well aware of the controversy he had attracted over the prior decades, and his last book would be his last word on various allegations that had plagued him during his career.

In *Au service de l'avenir*, La Rocque attempted to remind the world of his anti-fascist credentials and his principled opposition to dictatorship.²²⁴ He even appeared to have finally gotten used to the concept of democracy, provided the government still had strong and virtuous leadership. He attempted to erase his earlier half-explicit adoption of anti-Semitism (in *Disciplines d'action* and in his writings for *Le Petit Journal*) under the Vichy regime by invoking the efforts of the PSF and its affiliates to shelter persecuted Jews.²²⁵ There is much, however, that *Au service de l'avenir* allows to remain obscure. It does not discuss National Socialism or the defunct Vichy regime explicitly, nor does it attempt to explain the content of *Disciplines d'action*. It would seem that La Rocque sought simply to move on from the war, suggesting that he may have been aware of the apparent ambiguity of his wartime loyalties. His emphasis on permanence and continuity suggests that the unpleasant memory of France's "pyrrhic victory" was one that he wished to put behind him.

In seeking to ensure his reputation as a loyal Frenchman, resister and anti-fascist, La Rocque had a great deal of work to do. Even before the 1935 publication of Chopine's *Six ans chez les Croix de Feu*, La Rocque had been accused of Nazi sympathies. The Popular Front had outlawed the Croix de Feu as part of its "anti-fascist" mission, and the conception of La Rocque as a fascist and disloyal to the French republic was a popular one, especially on the political left. The events of February 6th had left a fascist stain on La Rocque's reputation, and his apparent involvement in Vichy policy making and in the collaborating government could easily be seen as confirming the suspicions of those who had doubted his support for democracy and the Republic during the 1930's. His attempt to burnish his image would be aided by the political climate of the liberation, during which time national reconciliation of a sort became a primary project of the new government led by Charles de Gaulle.

²²⁴ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, 40.

²²⁵ Ibid.

On August 25, 1944, shortly after the liberation of Paris by Allied troops, General de Gaulle articulated what historian Henry Rousso has described as, “the founding myth of the post-Vichy period.” De Gaulle claimed that Paris had been, “liberated by itself, by its own people... with the support and aid of France as a whole, of fighting France, of the only France, the true France, the eternal France.”²²⁶ On one hand, de Gaulle’s quotation describes the so-called “myth of resistance” that allowed for the broadest possible definition of a resister. This broad definition, which explicitly absolves “France as a whole” of the crime of collaboration, would serve individuals like La Rocque well as they worked for their own political rehabilitation.

In addition, De Gaulle’s conception of the eternal, unified spirit of France is strikingly similar to the conception of France outlined in the conclusion of *Au service de l’avenir*. “The fatherland, alone, survives when the State, governments, the body of the citizens is transformed,” he wrote more than a year after de Gaulle’s speech lauding the fighting spirit and permanence of the “eternal France.”²²⁷ Each had political and personal reasons for insisting on the permanence and resilience of France’s basic nature. For de Gaulle, as the self-appointed legitimate leader of France, the difficulties of the period of national healing to come must have been all too clear. For La Rocque, the difficulties and disappointments he had faced under the Vichy regime may have contributed to his wish for a return to normalcy and stability. Certainly the violence and radical changes wrought by the war left a deep impression on La Rocque, and his reassurances to a battered nation (and a battered PSF) were those of a father to his “great family of thought.”

What I have described as the “motivational” tone of the conclusion to *Au service de l’avenir* betrays La Rocque’s leadership qualities, as well as one intended function of his book. Its tone seems calculated to reassure the scattered and demoralized membership of the PSF, and unite them in the service of the eternal France. The book described the PSF as it wished to be remembered; opposed to fascism, dedicated to the protection of the weak, and above all “uniquely and fiercely French.”²²⁸ If the PSF had been the expression of the true nature of France, then it would follow that its membership (with the exception, perhaps, of a few bad apples) had resisted the Germans in any way that it could.

²²⁶ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy syndrome: history and memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16.

²²⁷ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l’avenir*, 44-45.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

Rouso has noted how de Gaulle described the German invasions of 1914 and 1940 as interventions in France's "domestic battles," implying that "France's internecine struggles would have no reason to continue once the enemy was defeated."²²⁹ La Rocque had been on the front lines of the domestic battles of the interwar period, leading his force of veterans against the threats of Communism, freemasonry and "decadence." Yet, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, he too would call for healing and unification. Of course it was nothing new for La Rocque to advocate for "national reconciliation," and his recommendations for how France might be healed are largely unsurprising. Twelve years after the publication of *Service public*, France still needed order, authority, hierarchy, and moral renewal. The implication of *Au service de l'avenir* was that the PSF would continue to advocate for those things in the postwar period.

Au service de l'avenir did not only seek to influence La Rocque's reputation through overt statements regarding his patriotism and specific political views. Items appended prior to the publication of the text, whether by the choice of the author or of his estate, also appear calculated for effect. Between pages 184 and 185 of the 1946 edition is inserted the most direct reference to La Rocque's imprisonment in the entire book. It is a photograph of a tiny room or cell. The picture's caption reveals it to be the attic room at Versailles where the PSF's leader was interned for eight months by his own government following the Allied victory of 1945. The caption informs the reader that:

The first nine chapters were written in Germany, in the prisons of Eisenberg and Itter. The last chapter, chapter X, was written in the mansarde de Coches, at Versailles, where the government of the Liberation sequestered La Rocque illegally for eight months.²³⁰

The note of victimization sounded by the inclusion of the photograph and caption foreshadows the tone of later works written by those friendly to La Rocque. The choice to include the photograph highlights the injustice of his treatment by the Gaullist government in the months preceding his death, implicitly comparing and even equating it to his mistreatment by his German captors.

²²⁹ Rouso, 17.

²³⁰ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l'avenir*, insert between pp. 184-185.

Post Mortem

Oddly enough for a book that seems to have been written as a letter to posterity and a defense of its author and his movement, *Au service de l'avenir* does not contain mention of either the Réseau Klan or the concepts of either collaboration or resistance explicitly. Yet between 1945 and 1962, the project of La Rocque's family and supporters would be to rehabilitate him and his ideas, and their method of choice would be to reveal and popularize his role in the Resistance. As Rudaux has recorded, "with its leader, the Parti Social Français succumbed."²³¹ Former PSF members found themselves divided by their various attitudes toward the Resistance and Gaullism. In 1945, former Croix de Feu member and resistance fighter André Mutter founded the newspaper *Paroles Françaises*. Henry Rouso has described this "more or less clandestine" outfit as reflecting "neo-Vichyite sentiment." He describes how *Paroles Françaises*, "launched violent attacks on" other members of the resistance.²³² Mutter would go on to help found the Parti Republicaine de la Liberté, a conservative party that aimed to rehabilitate the French right from the shame of collaboration. While Mutter's involvement in a "neo-Vichyite" newspaper seems to contradict the La Rocque family's efforts to be accepted by the resistant community, his essential anti-Gaullism and defense of Pétain appear consistent with La Rocque's own views in the last years of his life.

La Rocque's defense of the PSF and of himself in *Au service de l'avenir* foreshadows the growth of the so-called myth of resistance. In the years following the war, De Gaulle's RPF would become the dominant political party in France, its members trumpeting their Resistance credentials as a matter of course. Those who could be pinned down as collaborators were purged from politics after the war, and some, like La Rocque, were detained. Those who were able donned the mantle of resistance based on whatever contribution they had ostensibly made. It was in this spirit that individuals on the right who had not been involved in active resistance, such as General Weygand, came to publish memoirs that emphasized their anti-German credentials and supposed secret efforts to aid the Allies.

Starting in 1945 with the imprisonment of La Rocque by the Liberation Government, members La Rocque's family began to correspond with General Charles de Gaulle, advocating for their patriarch's rehabilitation. La Rocque

²³¹ Rudaux, 360.

²³² Rouso, 28.

even informed de Gaulle of his own unjust treatment in a letter written while he was detained at Versailles. This letter, cast mainly as a defense of Pétain, the “last Marshal of France,” characterized him as “the victor of Verdun, the savior of the morale and so the honor of the French army,” and opposed his condemnation to death by the High Court of Justice.²³³ However, the letter was nearly as detailed on the subject of La Rocque’s own experiences. It described his “brutal incarceration by the Germans,” and his work to convince Pétain to rejoin the Allied war effort. He claimed that:

I was never a member either of the governmental structures, or of the administrative structures... that were led by Marshal Pétain.²³⁴

Most notably, he invoked his mistreatment by his government, noting that:

Today, I am writing you from the attic where, without investigation, without trial, without motive, you have kept me imprisoned for 3 months.²³⁵

In January of 1946 de Gaulle stepped down as head of state, and no meaningful government action on La Rocque’s behalf would occur until he was once again in power. Rudaux records how:

The family of colonel La Rocque... waited for General de Gaulle’s return to power. She (Edith) wrote. Her letters, claiming justice and reparation, confided directly to the members of the Military House or of the Civil Cabinet, were returned punctually.²³⁶

Letters from Gilles and Édith in particular reminded the governing authorities of the injustice done to the arch-patriot La Rocque, and of his valiant service to France.

The Trial of Le Petit Journal

The first major opportunity the PSF would have to announce its resistance credentials would be the trial of the editorial staff of *Le Petit Journal*. The investigation was begun in November 1945, with the staff being accused of the

²³³ Nobécourt, 945.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Nobécourt, 947.

²³⁶ Rudaux, 358.

crime of collaboration.²³⁷ The trial centered upon the alleged role of the journal of the PSF in communicating Vichy propaganda. In effect, it was a near-perfect opportunity to highlight the resistance activities of the PSF and ADP. Rudaux's book provides a description of the trial. In his words, the journal was accused of having followed, "blindly the Marshal's politics." Rudaux's description shows how the attorneys for the accused made sure to describe, "the public and clandestine actions of La Rocque and his friends," including his imprisonment by the Germans, the *Petit Journal's* protection of Jews, of "British subjects and Maquis members."²³⁸ On July 10, 1948, the journal and its staff were acquitted of all charges.

In the time that elapsed between the trial of *Le Petit Journal* and Charles de Gaulle's return to power, his supporters did not cease to advocate on behalf of his memory. One illustrative instance occurred in March of 1952. Jacques Nobécourt tells of how, "on the invitation of Mme La Rocque," General Weygand held a conference entitled, "La Rocque, Soldier and Christian."²³⁹ At this event Weygand, whose own memoir (published in English as *Recalled to service*) defending his patriotic credentials had been published just two years earlier, defended his fellow inmate from Schloss Itter. Weygand's action drew the ire of some La Rocque's old enemies on the extreme right. Charles Maurras, former leader of the Action Française and longtime critic of La Rocque, wrote that "praise for that individual La Rocque from a man of the stature of Weygand would be the scandal of French history."²⁴⁰

Meanwhile, lobbying efforts on behalf of the late La Rocque had continued without success. In 1958, Charles de Gaulle returned to power from his self-imposed retirement under a new constitution that, among other things, concentrated a great deal of state power in the hands of the President of the Republic.²⁴¹ His return heralded a change in La Rocque's posthumous fortunes, and the new political realities of the late 1950's would finally provide the opportunity to ameliorate the suspicion that still hung around La Rocque's memory.

²³⁷ Nobécourt, 934.

²³⁸ Rudaux, 357.

²³⁹ Nobécourt, 951.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ McMillan, 159.

Official Recognition

On April 18, 1961, in response to Madame La Rocque's request, President Charles de Gaulle wrote that:

I seize this occasion to give homage to the memory of your husband whom the enemy made to suffer a cruel deportation for acts of resistance of for, I know, his ordeal and the sacrifice he offered in service of France.²⁴²

His letter was followed twelve days later by a ceremony, featuring former members of the Réseau Klan and presided over by a M. Triboulet, *Ministre des Anciens combattants*. At this ceremony, La Rocque's widow Édith received a concrete reward for the efforts to rehabilitate her husband, "the card and medal of a deportee" recognizing his deportation by the Germans, "in the name of the government, finally to repair an injustice the depth of which it has measured."²⁴³ This recognition was the result, as can be seen, of a long effort at rehabilitation. It also vindicated the narrative of La Rocque's victimization by the Gaullist government, as the government was forced to publicly acknowledge the "injustice" of his treatment. In many ways, the event could not have fit any better into the narrative that had already been constructed by La Rocque's family and supporters. They would lose little time announcing their victory to the world.

The Context of 1962

While de Gaulle's recognition of La Rocque was no doubt important and deserved, it did not occur in a political vacuum. De Gaulle's efforts at renewing France's national unity in the period following the end of hostilities set the stage for the political rehabilitation of many former supporters of the Vichy government. Rousso describes how the right used de Gaulle's "abstract and disembodied" conception of the Resistance to claim that there had been an official "resistance of the right, frequently anti-Gaullist, aligned with Petain, Weygand, and Giraud, and faithful to the French military tradition."²⁴⁴

La Rocque's own situation, of course, was different from that of General Weygand in that La Rocque had, in fact, been part of a formal Resistance

²⁴² Édith de La Rocque, 252.

²⁴³ Rudaux, 359.

²⁴⁴ Rousso, 28-29.

organization. However, his clearly favorable attitude toward and known collaboration with the Vichy regime in 1940-42 meant that simply calling himself a resister would not be enough. His Resistance credentials would have to be validated by an outside source, someone who was as widely respected in postwar France as Marshal Pétain had been in the interwar period.

General de Gaulle's own political situation played into the hands of La Rocque's supporters in 1961. It was, after all, a difficult period for the Fifth Republic and President de Gaulle's decision to reconcile with the family of a prominent (and formerly popular) rightist figure in this period is in many ways unsurprising. On the foreign policy front, France was locked in an increasingly ugly colonial war to maintain control of Algeria. The Algerian situation was exacerbated by the actions of what Rousso describes as the "neo-Vichyites," who overwhelmingly favored France's continued dominion over its North African possessions. At times, the French far right appeared ready to revolt over the possibility of a French withdrawal from Algeria, and de Gaulle likely felt a great deal of pressure to reconcile with whatever right-wing forces he could.²⁴⁵

Defenses of La Rocque

Less than one year after the ceremony at which General de Gaulle put the stamp of a patriot on La Rocque, his widow Édith published *La Rocque tel qu'il était*. Written as a combination biography and memoir, it lionized La Rocque, the Croix de Feu and the PSF. Unsurprisingly, *La Rocque tel qu'il était* gives an assessment of La Rocque's intentions and conduct as uniformly positive and patriotic, and to that end glosses over or ignores multiple ambiguities and controversies. Édith's book expresses limited nostalgia for Pétain by casting him as friendly to the Allies, but ultimately acknowledges the legitimate authority of de Gaulle as an arbiter of who was and who wasn't a resister.

The book is not uncritical of the Gaullists, and actually goes farther than any other publication on the topic in equating the imprisonment of La Rocque by the Germans to his internment by the French government after the war. Two parallel chapters deal with the two periods of his imprisonment. The first, entitled "Calvaire Allemand," describes La Rocque's suffering at the hands of the enemy. The second, entitled "Calvaire Français," describes his unjust imprisonment by his own countrymen. This juxtaposition seems to equate the

²⁴⁵ McMillan, 160

two injustices, and can be interpreted as a strong statement against the Liberation Government.

Édith sets a precedent by omitting any mention of La Rocque's role in the Vichy government. Her book does not mention the fusion of the PSF with the Légion Française des Combattants, nor does it attempt to explain La Rocque's complex relationship with Marshal Pétain. Instead, it makes the questionable claim that from 1940 to 1942 La Rocque was fully consumed with the preparation of his resistance network. The book does not address La Rocque's attitude toward Jews, preferring to avoid messy and complicated issues in favor of a broad-brush homage to the bravery and virtue of the late colonel. It is a personal account of a beloved husband and father, but it is also a politically savvy book that seems to have been timed to capitalize on the recent recognition afforded La Rocque by President de Gaulle. Of the ceremony, Édith wrote:

We have placed the photograph of François de La Rocque surrounded by flowers and it is before them that the minister gave me the card and the medal, in the name of the government, 'finally to repair the grave injustice the depth of which it has measured.' Our mission was accomplished.²⁴⁶

Her response what was, in effect, her husband's acquittal for the crime of collaboration shows how important de Gaulle's word was to legitimating La Rocque's reputation as a resister. Ironically, the man who La Rocque has seen as abandoning his post and operating as a British agent became in some sense the final arbiter of that reputation.

La Rocque did not fit neatly into either the classic image of the resister, being too much tainted with the memory of Vichy collaboration. Still in the years following his death, La Rocque's supporters did not continue along the path of many others on the right by rejecting Gaullism. While they did defend Pétain's intentions, they also increasingly turned to Charles de Gaulle himself as a source of legitimate recognition and thus as a uniquely legitimate representative of the true French Resistance. The willingness of La Rocque's defenders to court and them flaunt de Gaulle's recognition is evidence of the strength of his mystique. As Daladier wrote in *Schloss Itter*, "if a de Gaulle, be he short or tall, skinny or fat, svelte or a hunchback, had put the stamp of a patriot on la Roque (sic), even those who were most difficult to satisfy would salute."²⁴⁷ Certainly La Rocque's

²⁴⁶ Édith de La Rocque, 252.

²⁴⁷ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 255.

family cannot be blamed for believing that de Gaulle could remove the Vichy taint from their patriarch's reputation.

In 1967, five years after the publication of *La Rocque tel qu'il était*, former Croix de Feu member Philippe Rudaux published a substantial history of the Croix de Feu and the PSF. The book is dogged in its defense of La Rocque against charges of collaboration, echoing Édith's earlier conclusions almost without exception. It is also clear from a close reading of both sources that *La Rocque tel qu'il était* was the central source Rudaux used in his own defense of La Rocque. Passages analyzing the actions and thoughts of the PSF's leader appear to have been either lifted in their entirety from his widow's book, or closely paraphrased. It is difficult to doubt Rudaux's intent to write a defense not only of the Croix de Feu and PSF, but also of Colonel La Rocque.

Rudaux provides an entire chapter on the role of the PSF and its leader under Vichy, arguing that La Rocque's motto ("travail, famille, patrie") was taken and misused by the regime and emphasizing La Rocque's order to his followers that, "regarding the government, discipline, nothing more and nothing less."²⁴⁸ The chapter distances the organization from the government, and in emphasizing La Rocque's commitment to resistance from day one likewise ignores his role as chargé de mission at Vichy.

Predictably, Rudaux defends the wartime PSF's record of protecting the persecuted by way of deflecting charges of anti-Semitism.²⁴⁹ However, Rudaux does break with La Rocque's widow by revealing La Rocque's mixed feelings toward Jews. Rudaux reminds his readers of La Rocque's opposition to Vichy's anti-Semitic laws, and argues that La Rocque's, "distinction between assimilated Jews (those notably who had spilled their blood on the battlefield) and the rising tide of the stateless... conformed to his prewar attitude."²⁵⁰

Also of interest is Rudaux's description of the general attitude of the French toward the collaborators. He restricts that category to "a minority of economic and intellectual collaborators..." while all other Frenchmen hated the occupier. He offers his opinion that the collaborationists, "were meanwhile impressed by Germanic discipline." Meanwhile, he argues that the French, "did not idolize their Marshal..." but that they did, "appreciate the gift of his person."²⁵¹ Rudaux

²⁴⁸ Rudaux, 290.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 293.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 296.

provides a favorable assessment of the Gaullist resistance, describing the bravery of its clandestine operatives. “In London, the Free French registered more and more brilliant adherents,” he writes, betraying none of the late La Rocque’s distrust of Gaullism.²⁵²

Rudaux’s attitude toward Gaullism becomes more interesting when he lays claim to many prominent members of de Gaulle’s RPF on behalf of the defunct PSF. According to Rudaux, “the Gaullist deputies of 1951, numbering 120... were also delegate of a virtually PSF tendency.”²⁵³ He traces the origins of Christian democracy to the PSF, noting the prominent role of its former members in the government of France in years elapsed since the end of the Second World War. By the time of the publication of Rudaux’s book, the “stamp of a patriot” administered by de Gaulle to La Rocque had come full circle. Rudaux, chronicler of the PSF and defender of its legacy, was ready to conflate his former party with the same Gaullism that François de La Rocque had so strongly criticized and distrusted.

The Réseau Klan of History

Since 1967, historians have picked up the debate over La Rocque’s role in wartime France. Paxton’s understanding of La Rocque’s role in the Vichy regime is a popular one, and is based mainly upon the fact that La Rocque served as a minor government functionary under Pétain. Paxton relates the fact that La Rocque served as “chargé de mission” in the Vichy government, and as a result argues that, “this essentially colorless figure had thus gravitated to his proper level.”²⁵⁴ La Rocque’s responsibility in the government, at least on paper, was to coordinate the activities of the PSF with those of the Légion Française des Combattants. His tenure in office lasted only one year, although it did coincide with the “fusion” of the two organizations and the shift of the PSF out of the political sphere. For Paxton, this act of collaboration was enough to lead him to essentially dismiss the possibility that La Rocque had been a resister.

In a footnote, Paxton deals directly with claims put forward by La Rocque’s wife and by Philiipe Rudaux. According to Paxton, “La Rocque’s obscurity at Vichy and his arrest, along with so many other nationalist figures, by the Germans in 1943 allow such recent works by Edith de La Rocque and Philippe Rudaux to

²⁵² Rudaux, 307.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 363.

²⁵⁴ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 252.

treat La Rocque as a member of the Resistance.”²⁵⁵ Paxton’s point of view, namely that La Rocque’s resistance was a myth, is somewhat surprising given Paxton’s more recent defense (in particular *The anatomy of fascism*) of La Rocque against allegations that he was a fascist. However, Paxton’s skepticism is easy enough to understand in light of Édith de La Rocque and Philippe Rudaux’s complete failure to mention La Rocque’s job at Vichy. If nothing else, Paxton’s dismissal of the Réseau Klan and the resisting PSF serve as evidence that de Gaulle’s recognition did not suffice to convince every one of La Rocque’s Resistance credentials, and the clumsy omissions of La Rocque’s defenders did not enhance their credibility.

Soucy would later contradict Paxton, recognizing La Rocque as a member of the Resistance and expresses the opinion that La Rocque was sympathetic to Vichy as late as 1942, before switching sides and starting a Resistance network. He notes that La Rocque ordered his followers in 1942 to, “‘remain French’ and join neither the Milice, which fought the Resistance in France, nor the French Volunteer Legion Against Bolshevism, which fought communism in Russia.”²⁵⁶ Soucy’s decision to credit La Rocque’s role in the Resistance as fact foreshadowed what can be seen as the final vindication of his role in the Resistance, the 1996 publication of Nobécourt’s biography. Ironically, Soucy has been one of the strongest advocates for La Rocque being a fascist, arguing that “the fact that La Rocque finally sided with the Resistance in 1942 (after the tide of the war had turned against the Germans... [does not] prove that he had not been previously fascist in his domestic politics.”²⁵⁷ Clearly Soucy is no partisan of La Rocque, yet facts were clear enough to lead him to contradict Paxton. Of course, this difference in interpretation could easily have resulted from the greater availability of documents on the Réseau Klan in 1995 than in 1972.

In 1996, Nobécourt provided an in depth description of the workings of La Rocque’s Resistance outfit, making full use of all of the archives then available. His research agreed in substance with Soucy’s conclusion that La Rocque had resisted, but differed on some points of interpretation. In general, Nobécourt was more inclined to credit claims by La Rocque that he had commenced resistance activities in 1940 rather than 1942. This difference of two years is of paramount importance to understanding La Rocque’s role at Vichy, as is the timing of his decision to resist. If, for example, he is understood to have been sympathetic to the Allies and committed to resistance in 1940 as both La

²⁵⁵ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 252-253, *fn.*

²⁵⁶ Soucy, 123.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

Rocque's widow and his primary biographer have claimed, then his role as a Vichy functionary from 1940 to 1942 becomes less incriminating. If, on the other hand, he remained aloof from the Resistance until German defeat appeared assured, he would appear to have been more of an opportunist than a die-hard patriot.

Kennedy published the first comprehensive historical study of the Croix de Feu and the PSF in 2007, and he likewise entered into the debate about Réseau Klan and La Rocque's attitude toward Vichy. Kennedy has expressed skepticism at claims that La Rocque was sympathetic to the Resistance in 1940, instead siding with Soucy in saying that La Rocque truly distrusted Gaullism and preferred Pétain as the lesser of two evils until 1942.

Memory

Nobécourt writes that La Rocque was, "between 1930 and 1945, one of the most vilified actors in French political life."²⁵⁸ While the controversy over his loyalties and his political persuasion has faded since his death, in the realm of history writing his trial continues to be argued. The small matter of his activities between 1940 and 1942 is not so small after all, and the subtleties of his role in the Resistance and the reasons for his peculiar timing have been the focus of no little debate. For the French right, and particularly for Christian nationalists, his legacy as either a slimy opportunist or a principled conservative patriot remains acutely relevant. It is clear, in sum, that Édith de La Rocque was ahead of herself when she claimed, in the conclusion of *La Rocque tel qu'il était*, that the mission of La Rocque's defenders was accomplished. Even Charles de Gaulle did not have to power to convince all of La Rocque's critics of the sincerity of his patriotism. Nearly half a century later, La Rocque's reputation as a patriot and a resister remains open to debate and to revision.

VI. Conclusion and Reflections

François de La Rocque's role in the history of the Second World War in France is in some sense unique. His political activities during the period of 1940-1945, much like his activities with the Croix de Feu in the interwar period, were positioned between more obvious extremes. On February 6, 1934, as the followers of other far-right figures attempted to storm the Chamber of Deputies,

²⁵⁸ Nobécourt, 9.

La Rocque and his Croix de Feu had stood by, uncertain of whether they were part of the “fascist” revolution or the Republican order. Likewise while Doriot and other prewar fascists became extreme collaborators, and center-right veterans such as Charles de Gaulle became the face and leadership of the overseas Resistance, La Rocque found himself positioned precariously between resistance and collaboration. In both cases, he drew the criticism of more extreme “fascists” and more active anti-fascists alike.

A “Moderate” League

My first chapter introduces the debate over La Rocque’s loyalty and patriotism that existed in France prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. It can be seen that La Rocque was highly controversial throughout much of his political career, and unpopular with figures of both the extreme right and the left. Recall that the disparaging nickname “Casimir” was given to La Rocque by Charles Maurras, who described the Croix de Feu as, “lions led by a jackass.”²⁵⁹ Maurras, an extreme anti-Semitic and reactionary figure, was a reliable critic of La Rocque from the right, pressuring him to act more decisively and to abandon his relatively moderate stances on race, Jews, and political violence. Even worse from Maurras’ standpoint, La Rocque appeared weak and indecisive on February 6th, when members of the other far right leagues were locked in a pitched battle with the gardes mobiles near the Chamber of Deputies.

A variety of factors likely combined to prevent him from joining the rioting on February 6th, not least of which was his basic conservatism and stated opposition to political violence. With the riot still raging, instead of trying to force the issue, La Rocque sat down to pen a letter to Prime Minister Daladier asking him to put in place an authoritarian oligarchy. It is important to note La Rocque’s appeal to a legitimate authority for the enactment of the reforms he sought. Throughout his political career, La Rocque can be seen stopping short of revolutionary solutions and appealing to traditional ideas and structures to bring about the changes he considered necessary. While it is true that members of the Croix de Feu and PSF engaged in political violence on several occasions, their attacks were generally aimed at their enemies on the left. Their rhetoric placed them as a bulwark against the red menace, and thus as an ally of the legitimate authorities in protecting France from class war.

²⁵⁹ Nobécourt, 15.

The appeals of La Rocque's wife and followers to General de Gaulle after the war speak to their respect for the importance of legitimate authority, as well as their political sense. Despite the long history of antagonism between La Rocque and de Gaulle, when it came time to advertise their leader's Resistance credentials to the world, they chose to do so through the man whom so many saw as the personification of the Resistance. In this way, in the post-war period, former PSF members such as Philippe Rudaux could claim that he and his compatriots were likewise allies of the legitimate authority, not a "civil war army" or subversive force.

Other far right leagues, especially the Action Française and its affiliates, were more aggressive in their attacks on the vestiges of state power, engaging the gardes mobiles on the sixth of February and even perpetrating a direct (though random) attack on Prime Minister Leon Blum. While La Rocque's rhetoric was often strongly anti-parliament, equating the regime with the corruption of Stavisky and worse, the Croix de Feu and PSF largely confined their actions vis-à-vis the government to demonstrations and angry editorials in *Le Flambeau* and *Le Petit Journal*.

If the Croix de Feu was less violent and less extreme than some of the other leagues, its transition to become the PSF moved it farther from the realm of street fighting and into the realm of electoral politics. The PSF's adoption of a social mission, visible in its social service network, day cares, summer camps and soup kitchens, can be seen as benefiting rather than subverting the existing order, and seems to demonstrate the commitment of the PSF to working within that order. Rather than engaging in subversive or revolutionary action, the PSF turned much of its energies to the moral and social uplift of the French people.

The traditionalism of La Rocque's worldview, rooted in church, family and hierarchy, resisted revolution in all of its forms. In *Disciplines d'action*, La Rocque pushed back against the use of the term "national revolution," by the Vichy government, preferring the more peaceful and non-threatening "national renovation." His alignment with the Vichy government, though rooted in his ideological compatibility with its basic doctrine, was qualified by protests against some of its more radical and "statist" changes to the interwar status quo. Likewise, as La Rocque became disillusioned with Vichy collaboration, he continued to encourage his followers to show basic obedience to the regime's legitimate authority.

Despite his criticisms of the “sycophancy” of the press toward the government, he focused his own criticisms on the extreme collaborationists rather than on Pétain. His personal loyalty to the “last Marshal of France” remained unshaken until his death, and he likewise remained convinced of the essential compatibility of his own politics with what he assumed to be Marshal Pétain’s private opinions.

La Rocque at Vichy

The level of compatibility between La Rocque’s basic political goals and the earliest stated program of the Vichy regime is discussed at length in my second and third chapters. Some of the similarities between the doctrine advanced in *Service public* and *Disciplines d’action* seem too uncanny to be entirely accidental. It would seem perfectly appropriate to invoke the regime’s adoption of “travail, famille, patrie” as its motto to demonstrate the regime’s acknowledgment of its lineage from the prewar Croix de Feu and PSF. Whether it was, in Nobécourt’s words, “a Croix de Feu state” is a more complicated question, and in practice its state policy soon diverged from jealous nationalism and decentralization advocated in La Rocque’s writings.

Within the government at Vichy, La Rocque was a political nonentity. Yet his presence in the administration suggests his continued interest, at least until 1942, in the success of its mission to remake France socially, morally and politically. As Soucy has written, “if La Rocque was in fact playing a double game, it did not stop him in his public writings between 1940 and 1942 from damning the Allied cause.”²⁶⁰ La Rocque’s distrust for both Gaullism and British/American designs for France in that period is well documented, although that distrust should not be taken to imply that he welcomed the prospect of a German victory.

At base, François de La Rocque was a nationalist, and his split with the Vichy regime should be viewed in light of that fact. As long as it was capable of advancing France’s interests despite the defeat, La Rocque was willing to help, offering up the social services of the ADP to help the government’s social service organizations and agreeing the fuse the PSF veteran’s arm with the Légion Française des Anciennes Combattants. The events of 1942, most notably the invasion of the unoccupied zone and the humiliation of the Service de travail obligatoire, demonstrated the inability of the regime to advance nationalist aims and to maintain France’s national dignity, and exposed it as a tributary regime

²⁶⁰ Soucy, 123.

under the Nazi boot. This unequal collaboration was incompatible with La Rocque's sense of France's dignity, and drove him into active Resistance.

Opportunism or Principle?

There are barriers to declaring La Rocque an opportunist. For one, he remained on the periphery of power in Vichy partially because of his decision to resist inclusion in the Doriot and Déat's single party state. That decision also arose from a broad range of circumstances and considerations, but if La Rocque's main goal was power within Vichy he missed several opportunities to seize it. His party remained independent, criticizing both Allied and collaborationist ideas more or less at will. As noted by former Prime Minister Daladier in his prison journal, La Rocque was, "a man who held passionately to his newspaper, [*Le Petit Journal*] his achievements, and the leadership of his party," and his maneuvering in the period after the French defeat of 1940 betrayed the same stubborn independence that had made him so unpopular on both the far right and on the left in the interwar period.²⁶¹

Former PSF members and his relatives would have us believe that François de La Rocque was a man of principle, "poor with nobility."²⁶² Of course, to argue that he was purely principled and possessed only the highest virtues of his noble line would be too kind. Given his political ambitions and the sometimes-expedient changes in his political views (particularly his half-endorsement of anti-Semitism in *Disciplines d'action*), he was neither a saint nor was he impractically stubborn. He was willing to change his methods when circumstances demanded. Recall how, when the Croix de Feu was outlawed, he created a new and different organization that became vastly more successful than the Croix de Feu ever had been.

To possess both political acumen and strongly held principles, for La Rocque, was not contradictory. After all, many of the changes that came about with the transition from the Croix de Feu to the PSF were cosmetic, and the basic ideas and texts of the movement remained the same. In 1936, on the cusp of the transition from Croix de Feu to PSF, then PSF propaganda chief Charles Vallin had described how, "PSF propaganda must remain completely Croix de Feu in spirit, and become political in form."²⁶³ Ideologically, the PSF did remain Croix de Feu in spirit, and the essential consistency of the political and social ideas put

²⁶¹ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 254.

²⁶² Malherbe, 15.

²⁶³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy*, 148.

forward in *Service public* with those contained in *Au service de l'avenir* twelve years later demonstrates the consistency of La Rocque's worldview. Only the form of his political engagement seems to have changed in any meaningful way. Likewise, with the transition of the PSF from being the French Social Party to being the French Social Progress, little of its basic doctrine changed. In the words of one former member, it represented a "retour a la souche," dropping the temporary electoralism of the PSF and returning to the direct social action pioneered by the Croix de Feu and its affiliates.²⁶⁴

Loyalty to France

For any supporter of La Rocque, the question of whether he was a patriot would seem patently absurd. After all, had he not been a war hero, risking his life for the nation that he loved? Had he not taught his followers to sacrifice themselves for their country and to stand on guard against her enemies, whether Bolsheviks or freemasons? Those polemical positions aside, La Rocque certainly was not a traitor in any meaningful sense of the word. Any accusations to that effect from his critics are more reflective of the heightened political rhetoric of the interwar period than any collusion that La Rocque had taken part in with his country's enemies. Also key to understanding the debate over La Rocque's loyalty is his understanding of France's interests. As a nationalist and a militarist, his primary interest in international affairs was that France be powerful and respected. His politics reflect that fact, from his well-documented support for "air-mindedness" and military modernization to his advocacy against class conflict and in favor of a unification or "fusion" of the French people for the advancement of French national interests.

Under Vichy, his loyalty to Pétain undoubtedly came in part from his nostalgia for the brotherhood of veterans of the First World War. But it also had a practical side, in that Pétain could be seen as the shield behind which France could rebuild and eventually regain its place in the world. For La Rocque, duty required that he work for that resurrection, and for what he viewed to be the legitimate government. Of course, it helped that the political program that Pétain put forward seemed purpose-built to appeal to the La Rocque and the membership of the PSF. But it also seems reasonable to credit his claim that he saw remaining in France as his military duty, part of his larger goal of remaining

²⁶⁴ Rudaux, 292.

“uniquely and fiercely French.”²⁶⁵ It was also part of his larger duty to help ensure France’s continued strength and prestige.

It didn’t help that the Gaullists were tainted by their association with foreign governments, and with an Allied war effort spearheaded in part by the Bolshevik USSR. As Soucy describes how, in May 1941, La Rocque wrote that the communists and the Gaullists were, “allied from the outset.”²⁶⁶ Jealously nationalistic to the point of paranoia, La Rocque seems to have preferred the decidedly French Vichy government to its cosmopolitan counterpart in London. Even when Vichy had been discredited by its weakness and the Réseau Klan’s resistance activities were in full swing, La Rocque scrupulously avoided association with the “émigrés” of the Gaullist Resistance in favor of his own “patriotic” associates within the PSF.

It must be realized that, for La Rocque, French interests were not necessarily Allied interests, and early in the war it appeared that Allied victory would not guarantee France’s place in the world any more so than a stalemate would. France’s former allies were, for La Rocque, just as much of a potential threat to French sovereignty as her victorious enemies. Recall his 1941 assertion that, “We do not want a free France that would be a British dominion,” and that, “we do not want an enslaved France.”²⁶⁷

Memory

The episode described in the introduction of this thesis was the second closest La Rocque ever came to a real trial. The trial of *Le Petit Journal* offered a chance to demonstrate the resistance credentials of the PSF to the world, but did not clear La Rocque or his movement of suspicion. Not even Charles de Gaulle’s absolution of La Rocque and the giving of a posthumous award for his service could prevent Robert Paxton, writing in 1972, from dismissing the possibility that La Rocque had been a resister. As Daladier said after the “trial” of January 9-10, 1944, “it would be up to the people of France, and to them alone, to judge.”²⁶⁸ Since then, a great many individuals have judged La Rocque. Their efforts have been hampered variously by prejudices against a man who is widely understood to be the “fascist” and an opportunist. Views of La Rocque that have

²⁶⁵ François de La Rocque, *Au service de l’avenir*, 40.

²⁶⁶ Soucy, 121.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁶⁸ Daladier, Daladier, and Daridan, 256.

been popular since well before 6 February 1934 continue to influence our collective understanding of his place in the history of wartime France.

By placing his actions squarely in the context of the Vichy period, it is possible to better understand how his particular brand of nationalism, his conception of France and of his place in it, combined with his personal experiences and values to chart an unusual path during the period of 1940-1946. He maneuvered between collaboration and resistance, but his basic aims remained consistent. From the French defeat to his death, in his writings and in his actions, he sought a way to ensure the position of his party and of his country in a rapidly changing Europe torn apart by war.

From 1930 to 1946, through a dizzying period of political change, François de La Rocque worked for a strong, dignified France blessed with authority, hierarchy, social health and domestic peace. His last book, published in the year of his death, returned in its conclusion to the eternal “soul of France” that he had first described in *Le Flambeau* on July 1, 1930.²⁶⁹ In his own way, he rode out the political storms of the 1930’s and of Vichy while keeping his essential conception of France and of his role as a leader intact. After his death, former members of the PSF would carry on the political adaptation that had made them such a powerful force in prewar politics. In their various ways, they would look to apply La Rocque’s ideal of service and his conception of an eternal and exceptional France to the political challenges of an uncertain future.

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²⁶⁹ Malherbe, 97.