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# *Faisceau* Visions of Physical and Moral Transformation and the Cult of Youth in Inter-war France

## I

The inter-war era in France was in many ways the epoch in which youth came to prominence for the first time. Dozens of groups formed across the political spectrum which catered exclusively to a younger clientele. Youth began to assume political and social stances of their own, often encouraged by adult leaders of established political parties and groups. Most importantly, youth were extremely visible during the inter-war period, both in physical and ideological terms. Despite the relatively low proportion of young men and women in the various new groups — less than 15 per cent of those aged fourteen to twenty belonged to a particular association — the proliferation of new organizations succeeded in attracting the young at an age when the struggle for an identity or a career, or the attraction of an ideology or adventurous lifestyle, loomed large. Combined with the turmoils of the Third Republic, primarily its perceived inherent instability and political gridlock, such struggles led many to turn their backs on the 'old ways', seeking their own solutions to particular problems. Many inter-war French youths, rejecting the past as sterile, viewed themselves as a new force, possessing the will and ability to deliver a moribund France from its impasse. Inspired by the German *Wandervogel* and the Portuguese youth movement, they returned to nature, seeing themselves as a new knighthood, an élite alone capable of regenerating the nation and the state.[1] As a newly-radicalized bloc disenchanted with the status quo, youth were also a primary target for recruitment by various groups across the political spectrum.

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Among those reaching out to youth in the postwar era was the first self-proclaimed fascist movement in 1920s France — the *Faisceau*. Formed in 1925 by Georges Valois, formerly the economics expert in the Action Française, the group proposed a complete transformation of the nation and state. Upon seizing power through the efforts of the paramilitary Légions, the *Faisceau* pledged to enshrine a 'National Revolution' with the ultimate goal of implementing an 'État Combattant', which was dedicated to instilling France with the lessons learned in the trenches during the Great War. As such, Valois and his colleagues created detailed plans for a new political and economic order, and a rejuvenated nation in which the roles of women, families, and 'undesirables' were to be redefined.

According to the group's leadership, each of these endeavours depended upon a successful mobilization of youth. Unlike other leading French extreme-rightist groups of the day, such as the Action Française — whose *Camelots du Roi* were dedicated to hooliganism — Valois and his *confrères* never envisioned mere street troops, to be utilized against the state in the interests of a counter-revolution. Neither did they share the virulently anti-communist vision of youth offered by the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, whose Phalange Universitaire provided shock troops to disrupt leftist meetings, and whose leader Pierre Taittinger infamously declared:

> One does not fight against the communists with traditional means, with parliamentary babbling, with legal inertia . . . . These people know no other argument than the Browning or the knife. Let us respond with truncheons and handcuffs.[2]

Rather, the group took the spirit of the youthful inter-war era, the concept of youth as a new élite vanguard and their dissatisfaction with the 'decadent' and aged Third Republic, and combined it with their own socio-political aspirations. As the future French élite, *Faisceau* youth would be taught nationalist and militarist values not merely for agitational purposes, but as the ideological basis for a new nation and state in which they were to play a leading role. Only by harnessing the best and brightest, they argued, could France regain the world predominance which had been lost as a consequence of the Great War.

However, the group was deeply divided on the question of what function the younger generation was to play within the new nation, and how they were to be guided along the right path

towards the assumption of this role. For war veterans within the group, such as Valois and Jacques Arthuys, the Tourcoing industrialist and member of the Comité Directeur, youth were the soldiers who had served France at the front, sacrificing themselves as a fraternal generation for the nation. The task of the young combatant was now to win the peace as they had emerged victorious from war, by toppling the decadent republic and then forging a new, vibrant fascist state.

Such a vision owed much to the doctrine of early Italian fascism, the *Faisceau*'s chief inspiration, echoing the sentiments of Giuseppe Bottai and Giovanni Gentile, among others. But neither Valois nor Arthuys actually designed a programme for youth. Content to issue slogans, they left the blueprint in the hands of Hubert Bourgin, the ex-Lycée professor and staunchly conservative admirer of the royaliste Action Française leader Charles Maurras and extreme-rightist author Maurice Barrès. As a non-combatant, he ignored Valois' call to 'win the peace' using the values of the trenches. Bourgin instead proposed the cult of the soil and social Catholic ideals for young recruits, concepts steeped in moralism and tradition, rather than Mussolini and Italian fascism. Where other members of the group focused upon the militarization of youth, using will, heroism, and sacrifice to topple the decadent Third Republic, Bourgin demanded moral and physical education, in order to instill students with non-republican values. Although never openly expressed, the tension between the two positions is clear: Valois and Arthuys favoured the values of the *anciens combattants*, while Bourgin wished to create good Christians and Frenchmen.

## II

The idea that youth could actively regenerate the nation appealed especially to the French Right, which had derided the republic in no uncertain terms since the days of Boulanger and Dreyfus in the late nineteenth century. Arch-conservative Robert de Jouvenel famously quipped before the Great War that 'there is less difference between two deputies, when one is a revolutionary and the other is not, then between two revolutionaries, when one is a deputy and the other is not'.[3] Similarly Maurice Barrès, the prominent author and bastion of the extreme Right, whose works

on Alsace-Lorraine and Gallic deracination schooled a generation of young Frenchmen in the redemptive concepts of the soil and the dead, claimed that the deputy had no redeeming qualities. His only concern was the satisfaction of constituent electoral committees, Barrès jeered, while public service was concomitantly ignored.[4] Worse still, claimed Maurras, the republic itself — le pays légal — contradicted the will of the people — le pays réel. He viewed parliamentary democracy as a conspiracy against the common good, 'the regime of windbags', and a malignant affliction which would destroy France if untreated. 'There is only one way to improve democracy', seethed the *vieux maître royaliste*: 'To destroy it.'[5]

Yet for all of their bluster, Catholics and conservatives expended little effort to enlist youth in the prewar era. The success of the *Camelots du Roi* and the Institut d'Action Française, the Maurrassian youth initiatives founded in 1908, were not replicated before 1914, despite their success in attracting the younger generation to the royalist Right. In the inter-war era, however, the right-wing agenda appeared much more prominently in France. Newspapers, journals, and reviews containing Catholic content mushroomed, creating what John Hellman has termed a religious revival:

> A wave of enthusiasm seems to have touched some school teachers, army officers, priests, and a certain segment of the bourgeoisie nurtured by the religious revival that had been flourishing in France since the late nineteenth century.[6]

Rejecting the anti-clericalism of the founders of the republic, right-wing partisans lauded Barrès, Charles Péguy, and Hubert Lyautey. Equally repulsed by parliamentary democracy, they were determined to restore church, morality, and hierarchical discipline in place of individualism and liberal capitalism.

In the aftermath of war, these groups and individuals viewed youth as a new élite, capable of regenerating the nation. Representative of their efforts were the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française (ACJF) and the Scouts. Both groups emphasized moral revivalism, and the need for youth to actively take control of their own lives in order to regenerate society. The ACJF was an umbrella organization comprising the *Jeunesses Chrétiens* groups (*Ouvrières*, *Agricoles*, *Étudiants*, *Maritimes*) for

both boys and girls, the Union Chrétien des Jeunes Garcons/ Filles, and the French YMCA. They appealed directly to Catholic youth in a staunchly anti-Marxist tone, emphasizing spiritual regeneration. The Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (JOC) in particular proved an immediate success, gaining 65,000 adherents by the mid-1930s, while their newspaper *Jeunesse ouvrière* enjoyed a circulation of 270,000 copies per issue.[7] Although not explicitly political, the Scouts, with their emphasis upon hierarchy, uniforms, and physical accomplishment, were equally adamant that youth should be inculcated with virtue, healthy in both body and spirit. Most importantly, they successfully recruited 125,000 members by 1939.[8] In addition, both the ACJF and the Scouts proved far more attractive than left-wing youth groups during the inter-war era. The Jeunesse Communistes garnered only 12,000 adherents by 1925, and Parti Communiste Français (PCF) attempts to forge a scout movement in the 1930s — the Pionniers Rouges — failed miserably. Similarly, the Jeunesses Socialistes were only moderately successful, gathering 55,000 youths by 1935.[9]

Neither the ACJF nor the Scouts advocated extreme solutions to perceived social and political decadence. Although the JOC proclaimed the rectitude of the 'Christian ideal', for example, in opposition to liberal individualism and the exploitation of the worker, group leaders never envisioned the abolition of the republic. But given their success during the inter-war period, it was only natural that harsher voices similarly attempted to attract youthful members to the right-wing programme. Chief among them was the *Faisceau*, and particularly Georges Valois and Jacques Arthuys.

Valois and Arthuys represented the mentality of what Robert Wohl calls the 'Generation of 1914', those who came of age in combat during the Great War. Both men had taken part in the nationalist revival in France in the years before the conflict. Like many young intellectuals at the time, they viewed the events of 1914 as a harbinger of national regeneration, during which the decadent France of the prewar period would be replaced by a higher spiritual order. To these men, the trench experience demonstrated the innate superiority of action over reason, along with a natural human preference for fraternal unity rather than class conflict. As integral components of military service, élitism, sacrifice and fraternity were seen as the highest spiritual values to

which man could aspire.[10] Most important to Valois and Arthuys was the youth of war veterans who, instilled with the virtues of the trenches, desired to bring their warlike mentality into the civic arena, to win the peace as they had won the war.

This was not the rhetoric of the Scouts or the ACJF. To Valois, 'for all of us, the war was a prodigious school . . . a bath in the deep waters of our people', training a youthful vanguard for the fight against republican decadence and for the fascist future.[11] Represented in the *Faisceau* press by parliamentarians of all stripes, from Raymond Poincaré to Joseph Caillaux, the *vieux équipe* was blamed for all vestiges of French weakness, while the young were cast in the dual role of the principal victims of 'old men' in government and their democratic *modus operandi*, and the saviours of France in its hour of need. But as a *mouvement des anciens combattants*, the *Faisceau* also viewed youth as the heroes of 1914–18, representing the values of the trenches.[12] Hence the characteristics attributed to youth were militaristic, such as physical ability, virility, and the mentality of the warrior. They were the soldiers and producers of the future, whose baptism by fire had constituted for the younger generation of Frenchmen their first true life experience of any kind. These youthful *combattants* symbolized renewed French greatness, which they demonstrated with their energy, intelligence, and blood. The National Revolution was to be their creation alone, a duty for which they had prepared in the trenches.[13]

This vision was an integral part of *Faisceau* doctrine from the beginning. Speaking at the first group meeting in Paris, in November 1925, Arthuys called youth a 'new harvest' and 'the voluntary avant-garde of an immense renaissance movement', embodying the spirit of the victory. They had sacrificed their bodies and souls for France, placing the nation above themselves in direct contrast to the democratic individualism of the republic. Arthuys further argued that youth had become an indissoluble fraternity during the war. While fighting in unison the young soldiers had experienced the love of the nation that springs from the 'depths of the race', a product of the ultimate bond: the national soil. To Arthuys, this served to demonstrate that French survival depended upon a reconstitution of the national collective of which the younger generation, steeped in the values of fraternity, will, hierarchy and sacrifice discovered in the trenches, were now living representatives. Wartime experiences made them

impatient, ready to resume the battle of the Marne against the weak and decadent republic. The war would not be over, Arthuys thundered, until the 'leeches' in government were removed from French soil by the younger generation, as the Germans had been before them, to be replaced by the *État Combattant*.[14]

The latter point was the crucial one for the *Faisceau*, which viewed youth as both eager to exercise power and inherently anti-parliamentary and anti-republican. Youth, Valois professed, were interested solely in action. Thus the experience of the front operated as a line of experiential demarcation. Speeches and debates were anathema to the young men of 1914, and the deputies who prattled on in the chamber were symbols of the old way of thinking. This *vieux équipe* was representative of the generation of the defeat of 1871, in direct opposition to the youthful 'generation of the victory', having come of age with the disastrous Franco-Prussian war and its aftermath during the 1870s. Valois believed that they were conditioned to accept French weakness as a *fait accompli*, and that this attitude had governed their conduct during the Great War, a conflict which they had experienced solely through debates in the Chamber of Deputies and newspaper articles. They had not fought for the nation at the front, and therefore did not share the youthful values of absolute authority and hierarchy. Neither had they experienced the concerted effort of hundreds of thousands to win on the battlefield, incapable of appreciating the positive revaluation produced by will, heroism, and national discipline. Despite their lack of effort and sacrifice, the older generation had retained the levers of power after the war as custodians of a debilitated nation.[15] Youth, by contrast, perceived only a people rejuvenated by victory, climbing towards greatness through a collective effort. Valois believed that the generation of 1914 wanted to cast aside the older caste of war profiteers, mercantilists, and *embusqués*, ready to both lead and be led, waiting to rise up and take power upon receiving the signal: 'They have understood, they understand better each day, that they were victims of defeated old men, and that we will only see the true face of France once the generation of the victory seizes power.'[16]

Thus the *Faisceau* specifically linked themselves to the hopes and ambitions of the war generation. As only the new fascist mass movement could vanquish the *vieux équipe* of the republic, youth were by inclination and necessity fascist:

> Swift, to the point, disliking idle chatter, full of a taste for action, they wait in seeming indifference to be called upon for a great undertaking. They await the national leader and his team. They want orders. They wait for us to give the signal to attack a putrefied world where cowards, war profiteers, swindlers, dealers, blackmailers, assassins, homosexuals, and pimps pretend to be leaders or form the funeral procession for elected officials.[17]

Should they remain passive, the nation would be relegated to second-class status. For the generation of 1871 represented failure, their legacy visible throughout Europe in the rising communist menace, the plummeting franc, the rule of foreign plutocracy, and the political and financial predominance of New York, Frankfurt and London over the Latin nations. Worse still, trumpeted Philippe Barrès, those in power, too weary to contemplate the use of force in order to staunch the threat, ignored the menace across the Rhine:

> The pan-Germanist bells of Cologne triumphantly salute the weakening of our morale and the abandonment, with our consent, of an incomparable victory. Our Rhenish friends remain helpless, at the mercy of the indefatigable adversary preparing his next victory on *our* side of the Rhine.[18]

Son of the revered nationalist author and deputy Maurice Barrès, he wrote that it was the burden of the nation's youth to act for the salvation of France before it was too late. As Arthuys sternly warned, there was no third way, one was either in favour of the Révolution Nationale that the *combattants* and the *jeunes producteurs* were creating, or championed fatigue, disorder, and decadence.[19]

## III

The Italian fascists provided the model of creative and energetic youth for the *Faisceau*, a movement whose dynamism Valois and others frequently compared to their flabby republican neighbours. To Valois, fascism represented 'the cry of the new Italy, young and ardent, who grow with a stunning quickness, and who want to live'. Its youth were living expressions of the Italian creative genius, harnessed by Mussolini, who gave them a soul, a doctrine, and the will to elevate the nation to a superior level. In the east such a young society also existed, in the form of com-

munism, a phenomenon equally at odds with the venerable 'legitimate' democracies. Yet communism was flawed, a system where the masses starved and bureaucracy ruled, a virus which spread across the globe slowly while inexorably destroying those nations that it infected. If France was not to fall victim to the barbaric hordes from Russia, Valois opined, the younger generations must adopt fascism, since democracy was crumbling and no longer afforded sufficient protection to the nation.[20]

In championing fascism as both a movement of youth and the only effective barrier against the threat of communism and the decadence of weak republican institutions, Valois and Arthuys mobilized arguments identical to those expressed by prominent Italian fascists. Mussolini himself maintained that Italy represented a revolution of youth against 'old Europe'; through their efforts a higher civilization would be produced.[21] That youth alone could regenerate the nation, striking down the venerable liberal bourgeoisie in the name of a 'new man', was taken for granted. Echoing Valois and Arthuys, Giuseppe Bottai, editor of the leading Italian fascist journal *Critica Fascista*, called for leadership by 'natural selection', whereby the youthful veterans of the Great War would assume leadership positions.[22] Although duplicitous in its rhetoric, for youth was expected to express simple obedience to the regime and worship of Mussolini, in the mid-1920s the Italian government conscripted youth into various organizations which were designed to train them as a new élite, beginning with their participation in the *Squadristi*, and then in more organized form after the seizure of power, through the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* from April 1926 onwards.[23]

Such ideas would become the ideological and practical impetus for Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Robert Brasillach, and the so-called French fascist intellectuals a decade later. Writing in the Croix de Feu newspaper *Le Flambeau* in June 1936, Drieu la Rochelle — the right-wing novelist soon to become a convert to fascism himself — declared that youth were on the march against parliamentarism and capitalism in every European country except France. The 'irresponsible bourgeoisie' would be overthrown by either communism or the extreme Right, he trumpeted, and French vitality depended solely upon the latter option. Like Arthuys and Valois a decade earlier, Drieu envisioned no third way:

> In light of this, Europe from North to South, and from West to East (except in England), lives under regimes which have become more numerous and dedicated, to authority and discipline — communism or fascism — the most admirable and formidable effort to reawaken the human race.[24]

Such talk similarly appeared during the Vichy regime, particularly in the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse* and the ministry of sport under the watchful eyes of Marshall Pétain and General de la Porte du Theuil, and the education ministry during the tenure of Abel Bonnard from April 1942 onwards. Each championed the notion of a new man, a disciplined and virile youthful élite. The organization of these energies, particularly in physical activity, would effectively eradicate old individualistic and liberal habits, creating what Brasillach called a 'new human type'.[25]

Given their similar interests, one might presume that the *Faisceau* attempted to emulate the Italian example, producing youthful cadres in the service of Valois' proposed National Revolution. But no direct appeal for the formation of a new and virile order of youth was ever made by the group's leadership. This is not to say that Valois and Arthuys rejected the notion that young males possessed the qualities of heroism, sacrifice, and virility that Mussolini and later, French fascists ascribed to them. They simply did not engage in any systematic attempt to create such an order. Unlike later groups such as Colonel de la Rocque's Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français or Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français, who drew up precise plans for the reconstitution of a young élite, *Faisceau* leaders issued only vague and unambitious slogans.

Thus, despite the verbal prioritization of youth by the group leadership, little attention was paid to mass recruitment within those *Faisceau* organizations specifically dedicated to the younger generation: The Jeunesses Fascistes (JF) and the Faisceau Universitaire (FU), founded in December 1925 and January 1926 respectively. Unlike other leading extreme-rightist groups of the day, such as the Action Française and Jeunesses Patriotes, the *Faisceau* did not direct propaganda specifically at youth, a fact that the Paris police attributed to the exclusive attention paid by the group's leaders to economic matters such as the *Faisceau des Corporations*, an initiative designed to attract workers and producers rather than a younger clientele.[26] The JF was to encompass all members aged under twenty, but its membership never rose above a few hundred Parisian students, a far cry from the

1000 *Camelots du Roi* who roamed the streets of Paris at the time. Local police in the provinces recorded the presence of additional sections in St Quinton, Reims, Chateau Thierry, and Verdun. However, the numbers were relatively low. In Toulouse, local officers estimated 150 members, mostly 'young intellectuals' of approximately thirty years of age. The latter observation points to a rather fluid *Faisceau* definition of youth, a notion shared with the *Camelots du Roi*, among others.[27] Nonetheless, like the *Camelots* and the Phalange Universitaire, the role of the JF was confined to recruitment, dissemination of group propaganda, fundraising activities, and distribution of the group's *Nouveau Siècle* newspaper. The JF lacked the violence of the *Camelots* and the military style of the Phalange, however, and the non-existence of police records regarding their activities strongly suggests that they rarely saw street action.[28]

The FU, headed by the young lawyer Philippe Lamour, received more attention from the *Faisceau*. Lamour lauded youth as a modernizing force, a theme which he continued to promote in the post-*Faisceau* years as the editor of *Plans*, a journal fusing anti-parliamentarism and syndicalism with avant-garde art and architecture.[29] Given their leader's determination, the FU at least merited a semi-regular column in the group's newspaper. But the *Faisceau* devoted few resources towards its growth, and as a result the student initiative attracted only 500 members in Paris, and slightly over 100 in Toulouse.[30] Valois and his colleagues remained preoccupied with economic and political matters, neglecting recruitment despite their failure to attract young newcomers.

## IV

Despite their lack of initiative towards youth, the *Faisceau* managed to concoct elaborate plans for the rejuvenation of French schools and universities in which students were to play a pivotal role. That these proposals for educational reform were conservative rather than fascist in nature, and in certain cases representative of fairly common concerns, reflects Valois and Arthuys' lack of involvement in their formulation. In their place was Hubert Bourgin, an arch-Catholic and conservative, whose vision of youth had little in common with the *anciens combattants*

in the group. Bourgin was a graduate of the prestigious École Normale Supérieure (ENS) at the Rue d'Ulm, an *agrégé* and doctor of letters. Upon leaving the ENS he found employment at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris and authored several specialized works on the topic of education. He had been a member of the Proudhonian wing of the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière before the Great War, and served under armaments minister Albert Thomas during the conflict, only to resign due to his mounting patriotism and disapproval of the defeatism and political wrangling of the socialists during wartime.[31]

Bourgin was not an *ancien combattant*. A staunch Catholic moralist and educator, his concerns regarding youth parroted ideas long present in right-wing discourse. Since Jules Ferry's fateful declaration that his ministry would 'organize humanity without God', the Right and particularly the extreme Right had warred openly with the republic concerning the school curriculum. From 1882 onwards, the state's free and primary laic education replaced Catholic dogma with 'moral and civic instruction', which was designed to convert youth to the republican cause. Needless to say, the Right would have none of it. By the postwar era, prominent Catholics demanded a *Répartition Proportionnelle Scolaire*, through which the government would fund both confessional and public schools on a per capita basis. Although the campaign failed, along with attempts to reinstitute mandatory Latin courses in 1923, the election of the Left-centrist Cartel des Gauches government the following year produced yet another round of heated rhetoric. Education, claimed rightist A.G. Michels, had fallen victim to the Masonic conspiracy running France. Socialist educators working tirelessly for Moscow, he charged, transformed French youth into fodder for the republic, ignoring the *patrie*.[32]

In keeping with such attitudes, *Faisceau* plans for educational reform owed more to Maurice Barrès than to Mussolini, and much of the platform which the group favoured was traditional in nature. Bourgin certainly paid lip service to the concept of the Faisceau Universitaire as a future fascist élite, in direct contrast to the theoreticians produced by republican schools. He half-heartedly adopted the Valoissian notion that the student never separated thought from action, combining speculative intelligence with the practical creative process. As their role would be to train the future renovators and innovators of the fascist nation

and state, all instructors would necessarily be men of action rather than empty talk: the professor as educational engineer. In the new state, Bourgin proclaimed, all study would serve to propel national activity forward, even in such 'passive' disciplines as history or literature. The educator in the fascist state would train the young mind towards the mobilization of creative energy and instinct, so that these factors alone would express themselves in place of abstract thought.[33]

Such talk should have betrayed a blatantly fascist mindset, echoing appeals from Italian leaders such as Achille Starace to forge a healthy body and 'combative spirit' for youth.[34] However, Bourgin was no ideological alter ego of Valois or Mussolini. The legitimacy of his élite rested upon ancestral morality, region, and soil, instead of their position as a new leadership endowed with virility, will, and productivism:

> The students are faithful disciples of their masters, and their philosophical successors. They are the inheritors of ancestral virtues and the descendants of families, sanctified by the immense sacrifices of the past. They are the representatives and leaders of their communities, called upon to resurrect them using the pulsing energy at the centre of the national intellect, and also to bring to it the sometimes forgotten insight emanating from the eternal rivers of the provinces.[35]

Where Valois and Arthuys focused upon the construction of a new fascist nation and state based upon the doctrine of renovation and innovation, the old Normalien looked instead to the intellectual purification of pedagogy. In adopting such a curricular bent, Bourgin hoped to dispel the 'intellectual decadence' permeating twentieth-century higher education. In his view, the abandonment of 'positive duties' in favour of empiricism, careerism, and party political doctrine had resulted in the jettisoning of reason and morality, and the de-emphasizing of creative ability in French schools. Criticism of this state of affairs came regularly from both Left and Right in the 1920s, but to no avail, as political groupings preached reform solely to garner votes. Thus to the more traditional Bourgin, far from producing fascist youth, the *Faisceau* would instead elude instead the traps of partisan politics and bickering, creating a new education system in which 'modernized bohemianism' was replaced by action in thought. In Bourgin's mind, the first tangible step towards this goal would be the restoration of the university as a

corporative body, with hierarchy, discipline, and dignity. The clientism and sectarianism that divided the republican *facultés* would be eradicated, a move accompanied by an elevation of the material and moral situation of both professors and the administration.[36]

None of these points were particularly original, as any contemporary reader of Maurras, Barrès, or even Ernest Renan and Frédéric Le Play would attest. Such observations were quite common during the Third Republic years, when low state subsidies prevented the expansion and modernization of already inadequate library and laboratory facilities, and the consequently low enrolment (some *facultés* in the provinces contained only a handful of students even after the Great War) provided the government with the rationale to further restrict funding. For as Theodore Zeldin notes, by the Second World War 'the universities were still shackled by the outdated ambitions of Napoleon and still enslaved to the secondary schools'.[37] The lycée graduate either attended one of the specialized post-secondary schools, such as the ENS or the École Polytechnique, or received a nominal education at a university.

Yet Bourgin's preoccupation with morality and old-fashioned corporative discipline is unmistakable. He alleged further the existence of a conspiracy to weaken the French education system which betrayed the influence of the Maurrassian extreme Right. Bourgin contrasted his proposed system with the republican one, deriding the sacrifice of schooling to the political ends of diverse electoral, doctrinal, and sectarian interests. Modern universities, he cried, were mere fiefdoms for parliamentary patrons and the Masons, whose goal was to form loyalists rather than to educate. To this end all instructors, from the primary school teacher to the élite professoriate of the *Écoles*, were socialist and *cegetiste*:

> The final result is that today instruction and education, in the French state, are taught for the most part by men who are declared citizens of the international state of Geneva or the nationalist and revolutionary state of Moscow.

Echoing the traditional rightist sentiment of *La République des professeurs*, he pointed to Théodore Steeg (former head of ENS), and Paul Painlevé (former mathematics instructor) as examples of those who had committed treason by using the French academe for 'republican careerism' alone. The professor, he claimed, was usually a Masonic agent who had a vested interest

in omitting instruction against vice and democracy. Such men could never teach youth the virtue of experience, or the primacy of the soul and instinct over the rational and bookish idea.[38] Echoing Marshall Pétain's call throughout the Vichy years for a curriculum emphasizing 'travail, famille, patrie', designed to combat 'l'anti-France' with Christian and moral teachings, Bourgin thus demanded a corporative education ministry, which would purge all suspect (i.e. republican and communist) teachers, while assuming responsibility for the adjudication of the school curriculum on all levels. Both bodies would be completely independent, with no ties to the state, ending the government 'monopoly' on education.[39]

Bourgin reserved his greatest ire for the primary school system, however. Here he echoed Barrès' notion, from *Les Déracinés*, that children were being indoctrinated with false scientism and immoral republican orthodoxy in school rather than receiving a Catholic and national education befitting French youth. Bourgin further assailed the lack of morality in the primary classroom, charging that children were taught the Kantian categorical imperative rather than the common shared realities of material and spiritual life. The call for 'neutrality' in the education statute was merely an excuse for republican and socialist schoolteachers to eradicate religion, region, nation, and soil from the school in favour of positivism and science.[40] Echoing the rightist notion then being used to promote the reinstatement of classics in both the primary and secondary streams, he called for a renewed balance between modern and ancient subjects in schools. As with the conservative Right, which had supported education minister Léon Bérard's 1923 initiative to reintroduce Latin, Bourgin lashed out at the radicals, who supported the elimination of ancient languages in favour of additional science courses.[41] As the object of a national education was the formation of Frenchmen, Bourgin argued, these subjects were indispensable, forging character and discipline: 'We must provide an impeccable elementary education, imposing a total and universal discipline of body and spirit, constituting both the habits of conscience and the necessary occupations of a healthy, hardworking, and civilized people.'[42]

Yet Bourgin was no Charles Maurras, dreaming of a return to pre-revolutionary France. He recognized the changing nature of technology and society, and the role that they would necessarily

play in the new state. Although he never espoused Valois' Henry Ford/Le Corbusier-inspired modernist economic and political model, Bourgin acknowledged that the future needed 'producers, technicians, and leaders, capable of understanding, of wishing, and of realizing the transformations of which the present is composed'. In this regard, the primary school was pivotal, as it would prepare the producer for his future profession. As such, the curriculum would necessarily provide a physical and moral, rather than a strictly intellectual education. Dogma and politics would be replaced by the pedagogy of strength and skill, what Bourgin called the acquiring of a 'cerebral and muscular culture' through 'moral and physical gymnastics'. Having completed this process, the students would be evaluated based on ability, and directed either into the secondary schools, whose mission was to form the national élite for private enterprise and the public administration, or to technical and trade schools.[43]

Once again, however, Bourgin was more moralist and conservative than fascist regarding primary and secondary education. Despite paying lip service to the need for science and technology in the classroom in order to create workers for the nation, he reserved his greatest concern for the 'laicization' of the primary school. The need to teach religion, spirituality, and tradition, which Bourgin regarded as the precursors of national and hierarchical values, had never been greater. Here he sounded almost like the *vieux grand-père* castigating the young rascal caught misbehaving, as he chided the reader that only through the adoption of a moral curriculum could proper discipline be imposed, and respect for instructors and parents restored. In an age when families protested even the vestige of discipline in the classroom, he cried, it was not surprising that Soviet teachers abounded in French schools.[44] Here, Bourgin again directly presaged ideas which took root under the Vichy regime, where Pétain and General de la Porte du Theuil argued that sport and physical activity increased the moral and physical health of the nation, through an emphasis on discipline and collective activity. The idea of competition as a moral regenerative tool, akin to George Hébert's prewar 'natural method', appealed to Bourgin as a character-building technique.[45]

True to such concerns, Bourgin took as his model school the École des Roches in Verneuil. Founded in 1899 as an institution faithful to Le Play's principles of social science, the school was

both dedicated to French humanism and characterized by the imposition of discipline and virtue. Its self-imposed role was the formation of a French physical and moral élite.[46] Bourgin most admired its dedication to physical activity, regaling *Nouveau Siècle* readers with descriptions of the gymnastics, fitness, and hydrotherapy sessions taken by every student in the afternoon. Classes were held in the mornings, leaving the rest of the day for physical activity, which culminated in the extra-curricular practice of team sports.

Bourgin was equally impressed by the moralism at work within the school. Instructors and their families ate together with the students, and professors' children participated in the afternoon fitness activities, lending the institution an atmosphere of absolute fraternity and the inculcation of family as a social ideal. Furthermore, all students were given a strict moral preparation, which he lauded as leading to the voluntary acceptance of discipline, moral creation, and continued spiritual renewal. Each class also received religious instruction, to ensure their correct formation as Christian children. The transmission of these ideals, claimed Bourgin, prepared the student for his future duty as a worker, producer, father, and soldier.[47] Perhaps inspired by his visit to the École des Roches, less than three months after returning he announced the formation of a scout section within the *Faisceau Sportif*, in a *Nouveau Siècle* article entitled 'The Moral and Physical Education of our Youth'. Scoutism, he wrote, prepared youth physically and morally for the *cité moderne* and trained future soldiers. In this way the 'propagators of the race' would be taught their primordial duties: will and work.[48]

## V

*Faisceau* plans for youth were not without precedent. The republic itself acted in much the same way, using schooling, conscription and the army, and even sports, to take youth under its wing. With so much time spent under the influence of its loyal servants, various ministers theorized, young men and women would inevitably support the status quo. It was this concept which drove Jules Ferry in 1882 to weaken the stranglehold of the Catholic church on education, an organization which he viewed as the bastion of anti-republican reaction. Ferry knew that the fidelity

of the masses could be ensured through the indoctrination of their children, and acted accordingly. After their time in the schoolhouse the young were stripped of their familial ties, and shipped off to the military or higher education for finishing touches, a captive audience already softened up by primary and secondary school teachers.[49]

But this carefully implemented scheme went awry during the inter-war period. Prevented from obtaining political power, or even the vote in most cases, youth proved to be exceptionally receptive to extreme-rightist attacks against republican decadence and French weakness. Valois and Arthuys' optimistic belief that youth would abandon democracy in favour of the politics of the trenches, influenced by their experiences during the Great War, was thus taken up by a host of extreme-rightist groups in the late 1920s and 1930s. These leagues echoed the *Faisceau* proposition that a National Revolution, which symbolized the union, fraternity, and spirit of the *combattants*, had merely to present itself as a viable option in order to succeed. Communism, the only other available choice, was similarly deemed antithetical to the young because they had fought for the nation, and not a specific class. Writing in the journal of the group Ordre Nouveau in the mid-1930s, Denis de Rougement sounded a Valoissian note, stating:

> Faced with jackbooted youth, bareheaded, open-shirted, with which our press likes to rally the troops, what have we to offer? A potpourri of imitation stiff collars, rosettes, fat stomachs, and bowler hats.

Given Italian, German, and even Soviet success, he proclaimed, the sterile parliamentary liberalism of the Third Republic alienated French youth.[50] In similar terms, the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français urged young members to adopt the military discipline and voluntarism of their veteran fathers, in the service of a 'renovated' France devoid of democratic sentiment.[51]

But for all its popularity, the doctrine expounded by Valois and Arthuys was bound to remain unrealized, not least because the exact role of youth in their proposed fascist nation and state remained obscure. Both men spoke in language full of vague assertions, slogans, and avoidance. Primarily concerned with the establishment of a new economic order, they tackled the question of youth only in the most general terms. Furthermore, the vision

of the *combattant* espoused by Valois and Arthuys was itself a fiction. As Robert Wohl writes:

> Intellectuals from these [middle] classes dreamed of a spiritual revolution that would eliminate the exploiters and the exploited and fuse all sectors of a society into a unified and conflict-free community . . . . The 'generation of 1914' was therefore first of all a self-image produced by a clearly defined group within the educated classes at a particular moment in the evolution of European society. It was both an attempt at self-description by intellectuals and a project of hegemony over other social classes that derived its credibility and its force from circumstances that were unique to European men born during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.[52]

Although the postwar generation shared *Faisceau* concerns about national decadence, they were not ready to 'win the peace' as they had triumphed in war. The architecture of Valois and Arthuys' entire project rested upon the utopian notion that youth were inherently fascist because fascism best represented the values of the trenches. In other words, it rested upon assumptions not shared by the young soldiers on whose behalf the two men spoke.

The one *Faisceau* member who attempted to fill in the blanks in the group's youth policy was Bourgin, a non-combatant whose interests were conservative rather than fascist in nature. The so-called 'fascist professor' was exclusively concerned with the restoration of discipline and hierarchy in society, and the reintroduction of Catholic virtue and hard work in youth. Where Valois worshipped the machine gun, Bourgin idolized the strap. Like Maurras and Barrès before him, the old Normalien wished to return to the days before the Ferry laws and republican youth policy. Rather than the trenches, his ideals embodied the family farm and the village church, symbolic of an idyllic life which Frenchmen had lost to the decadent, immoral, and individualistic republic. In an effort to combat this malignant development, he proscribed a strict moral and physical regimen for contemporary youth.

Such traditional attitudes were a far cry from Valois and Arthuys' modernizing fascism. But Bourgin, too, prefigured a doctrinal emphasis prevalent within later extreme-rightist initiatives. In particular, his Catholic and moral bent, and his insistence upon the primacy of discipline and physical effort, prefigured currents which emerged within the Vichy regime from 1940 onwards.[53] *Pétainiste* education ministers Jacques Chevalier

and Abel Bonnard, himself an ex-member of the *Faisceau*, emphasized a combination of moral instruction and discipline in the new school curriculum. Like Bourgin, they derided the Masonic and communist influence which had dominated pedagogy under the Third Republic, introducing legislation to remove any teacher seen as 'an element of disorder, an inveterate politicizer, or incompetent'.[54]

Nowhere were Bourgin's ideas more evident than Uriage, the leadership school established in 1940 by Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac with Vichy's approval. Run by Segonzac and Hubert Beuve-Méry, another *Faisceau* sympathizer, the school provided a curriculum seemingly drawn directly from Bourgin's columns in *Nouveau Siècle*. The Uriage charter of 1941 rejected individualism and democracy, materialism and decadence in equal measure. In their place, the school proposed authority, hierarchy, and sacrifice, forging an élite in the service of the nation. To Segonzac, physical and moral learning clearly outweighed intellectual exercises, while the Uriage newspaper *Jeunesse . . . France!* mimicked Bourgin's appeal to the soil, as necessary nourishment for the French race. Surely Bourgin, rather than Chombert de Lauwe, could have written that 'we have to place the maintaining of unity among the most urgent tasks . . . the defence of our spiritual patrimony based on Christian civilization'.[55]

But such could easily be said of many inter-war French youth groups, whose staunchly Catholic rhetoric, and sense of community and 'healthy attitudes' also prefigured a turn against republican orthodoxy. Just as Valois, Arthuys, and Bourgin rejected parliamentarism and decadence in government and society, so too did scout leaders, the JOC, and many others preach the gospel of physical prowess and moral regeneration. Likewise, many of their members eventually joined extreme-rightist leagues and adhered to Vichy initiatives such as the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*. In the words of Philippe Laneyrie, such a drift seemed to reflect the tenor of the age:

> It is a *reactionary* movement, in the etymological sense of the word. That is to say it is defined against the secularism and anticlerical politics of the Third Republic, against materialism (both Marxist and capitalist), against the latitudinarian morals of liberal society, against the various ingredients of triumphant urban civilization, against the phenomenon of massification, and against democracy as a political system.[56]

This statement equally applies to the *Faisceau*, whose vision for youth presaged a complete transformation of France.

## Notes

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1. Aline Coutrot, 'Le Mouvement du jeunesse, un phénomène au singulier?', in Gérard Cholvy, ed., *Mouvements de jeunesse Chrétiens et Juifs: Sociabilité juvénile dans le cadre Européen, 1799–1968* (Paris 1985), 114–17, 120; John Hellman, *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France* (Montreal 1993), 5–7.

2. Quoted in Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924–1933* (New Haven 1986), 203. On the *Camelots*, see Eugen Weber, *Action Française* (Stanford, CA 1963).

3. Jean Estèbe, 'Le parlementarisme' in Jean-François Sirinelli, ed., *Histoire des droites en France: Vol. 3, Sensibilités* (Paris 1992), 336.

4. Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras* (Princeton, NJ 1959), 79.

5. Quoted in Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (London 1965), 107–8. See also Charles Maurras, *Kiel et Tanger* (Versailles 1928), 199, and idem, *Enquête sur la monarchie* (Paris 1924), 139. These works were written in 1899 and 1900 respectively.

6. Hellman, op. cit., 7–9.

7. Yves-Marie Hillaire, 'L'Association Catholique de la jeunesse française, les étapes d'une histoire (1886–1956)', *Revue du Nord*, no. 261/262 (1984), 913; Oscar L. Arnal, 'Towards a Lay Apostelate of the Workers: Three Decades of Conflict for the French Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (1927–1956)', *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 73 (1987), 211–27. Membership numbers and circulation figures taken from Oscar Cole-Arnal, 'Shaping Young Proletarians into Militant Christians: The Pioneer Phase of the JOC in France and Quebec', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32 (1997), 510–13.

8. Gérard Cholvy, 'Les organisations de jeunesse d'inspiration Chrétienne ou Juive, XIXe-XXe siècle', in Cholvy, op. cit., 44–6; Philippe Laneyrie, *Les Scouts de France* (Paris 1985), 51, 80, 86. Membership numbers in Rémi Fabre, 'Les mouvements de jeunesse dans la France de l'entre-deux-geurres', *Mouvement sociale*, no. 168, (1994), 11.

9. On communist youth initiatives, see Susan Brewer Whitney, 'The Politics of Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France', PhD dissertation, Rutgers University, (1994), 17 (membership) and *passim*; For socialist efforts, see Christian Delaporte, 'Les jeunesses socialistes dans l'entre-deux-geurres', *Mouvement sociale*, no. 157 (1991), 33 (membership numbers) and *passim*. See also Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion: culture et politique sous le signe du Front Populaire* (Paris 1994), 769–72.

10. Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge 1979), 215, 231. As

Wohl correctly asserts, such attitudes were not confined to French youth, but could be found in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere at war's end.

11. This phrase appears in Georges Valois, *D'un siècle à l'autre: chronique d'une génération* (Paris 1924), 267.

12. Arthuys bluntly told a reporter that 'The real Faisceau was formed on August 2, 1914'. See Archives Nationales (hereafter AN) F/7/13209, 'Y'a-t-il vraiment un "fascio" a Paris?', *Le Journal*, 7 December 1925. For similar statements, see Jacques Arthuys, 'Les Combattants, le patriotisme, et l'ordre', *Nouveau Siècle* (hereafter *NS*), 4 January 1926 and AN/F/7/13211, tract #5, Georges Valois, 'La conquête de l'avenir'. (1926).

13. AN/F/7/13208, *Faisceau* Meeting at the Sociétés Savantes, 29 January 1926.

14. 'Discours prononcée le 11 Novembre', *NS*, 12 November 1925.

15. AN/F/7/13211, tract #5, Georges Valois, 'La conquête de l'avenir' (1926); Georges Valois, 'L'arrivée des nouvelles équipes et la jeunesse', *NS*, 5 October 1926.

16. George Valois, *La Politique de la victoire* (Paris 1925), 93.

17. Ibid.

18. Philippe Barrès, 'Le mal: veulerie. La remède: jeunesse.', *NS*, 2 February 1926, original emphasis. Oddly Barrès does not mention the 1923 occupation of the Ruhr and its aftermath here or elsewhere.

19. Jacques Arthuys, 'L'urgence de la révolte', *NS*, 14 February 1926.

20. Georges Valois, 'L'ancienne et la nouvelle Europe', *NS*, 18 September 1926.

21. Michael A. Ledeen, 'Italian Fascism and Youth', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4 (1969), 137–8.

22. Paolo Nello, 'Mussolini e Bottai: due modi diversi di concepire l'educazione fascista della gioventù', *Storia Contemporanea*, Vol. 8 (1977), 335–9.

23. Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922–1943* (Chapel Hill, NC 1985), 91–4; Nello, op. cit., 345–7.

24. Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, 'Pour sauver le peau des français', *Le Flambeau*, 27 June 1936.

25. On Vichy and the organization of youth along 'fascist' lines, see W.D. Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford 1981), 34–6, 190–9. Brasillach quoted in David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton, NJ 1995), 105.

26. AN/F/7/13208, 'Chez les fascistes', police report, 26 May 1926.

27. AN/F/7/13208, untitled *Sureté Générale* memorandum, 6 January 1926. This document further mentions that only a portion of the paltry 110 legionnaires in Chateau Thierry were youths. For the Toulouse membership, see AN/F/7/13210, memo of 5 July 1926. The *Camelots* notoriously accepted members well into their sixties. See Weber, op. cit., 64.

28. See Contre d'histoire de l'Europe du vingtième siècle/Valois (CHEVS/V) 45, *Faisceau* 'Manuel de délégué', August 1926; Allen Douglas, *From Fascism to Libertarian Communism: Georges Valois Against the Third Republic* (Berkeley, CA 1992). As Douglas elsewhere attests, the *Faisceau* were victims more often than perpetrators in battles with both communists and the Action Française. See, idem, 'Violence and Fascism: The Case of the Faisceau', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19 (1984), 689–712.

29. On Lamour and *Plans*, see John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the French Catholic Left* (Toronto 1981), 57–8; Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, NJ 1996), 202–3.

30. AN/F/7/13208, untitled *Sureté Générale* memorandum, 19 March 1926; AN/F/7/13210, Commissaire Speciale de Toulouse to director of the *Sureté Générale*, 5 July 1926.

31. Douglas, 'From Fascism', 75.

32. John E. Talbott, *The Politics of Educational Reform in France, 1918–1940* (Princeton, NJ 1969), 24–9, 52–3, 100–4.

33. Hubert Bourgin, 'Le rôle des Faisceau universitaire dans la nation', *NS*, 6 March 1927.

34. Nello, op. cit., 355–8.

35. Hubert Bourgin, 'L'état et la corporation', *NS*, 10 February 1926.

36. Hubert Bourgin, 'L'état et la corporation', *NS*, 13 February 1926.

37. Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945. Volume 2: Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety* (Oxford 1977), 326.

38. Hubert Bourgin, 'L'université et la politique', *NS*, 30 July 1926. See also 'Le Nouveau Siècle au service de l'université et de l'intelligence françaises (1)', *NS*, 26 November 1925; 'La corporation des étudiants et le salut de la France', *NS*, 3 December 1925.

39. Hubert Bourgin, 'Le Faisceau et l'enseignement national', *NS*, 25 June 1926. On this point, the *Faisceau* as a whole were agreed. See Maurice de Barral, *Dialogues sur le Faisceau: ses origines, sa doctrine* (Paris 1926), 13. On Pétain's vision, see W.D. Halls, op. cit., 7–9. The idea of a national corporation for education would become a much-discussed initiative on the extreme-Right in the 1930s, proposed by Weygand, Pétain, and the Cercle Fustel des Coulanges, among others.

40. These sentiments permeate Bourgin's writings. The best summary of them pre-dates the formation of the *Faisceau* by three months. See 'Le mercantilisme dans l'enseignement national', *Cahiers des États-Généraux*, August 1924, 231–41. Bourgin faithfully copies Barrès, almost to the letter. See Maurice Barrès, *Les Déracinés* (Paris 1924), 33, 36–7.

41. Talbott, op. cit., 80–5, 99.

42. Bourgin, 'Le Faisceau', op. cit.

43. Hubert Bourgin, 'L'Université et le devoir présent', *NS*, 18 September 1927.

44. Hubert Bourgin, 'La Discipline', *NS*, 20 August 1925.

45. Halls, op. cit., 190–9.

46. Laneyrie, op. cit., 47.

47. Hubert Bourgin, 'Comment L'École des Roches conçoit et donne l'education morale', *NS*, 13 August 1926.

48. Hubert Bourgin, 'L'Education physique et morale de notre jeunesse', *NS*, 5 November 1926.

49. Yolande Cohen, *Les jeunes, le socialisme, et la guerre: Histoire des mouvements de jeunesse en France* (Paris 1989), 19–20.

50. Denis de Rougement, quoted in Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, 'Une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française', *Nouvelle Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Vol. 5 (1975), 330–1.

51. Examples of such talk permeate Croix de Feu/Parti social français (CDF/PSF) newspapers and tracts. Among others, see *Le Flambeau*, August

1932, speeches by Colonel de la Rocque and Pozzo di Borgo; André Maurois, 'Reflexions sur le commandement', *L'étudiant sociale*, January 1939; AN/451/82 tract, 'Étudiants françaises'.

52. Wohl, op. cit., 209.

53. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Vichy borrowed the *Faisceau* concept of the National Revolution, first used by Bourgin, Valois, and Arthuys two decades earlier.

54. Halls, op. cit., 18–36, 71–2, 113–15. Perhaps emboldened by the success of his platform, Bourgin reintroduced many of his inter-war ideas in a 1942 work entitled *L'École nationale*.

55. Hellman, *The Knight Monks of Vichy France*, 59–63, 120.

56. Laneyrie, op. cit., 109, original emphasis.

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