

From liberalism to fascism

The right in a French province, 1928–1939

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1 Introduction

In April 1928 Raymond Poincaré led the right to its second and last clear majority under the Third Republic. Once the Radical-Socialist Party conference of November 1928 had ordered its representatives to leave an administration too reactionary for its tastes (the 'coup d'Angers'), conservatives took sole responsibility for government. The left meanwhile had been reduced to disarray by the fiasco of the Cartel des gauches government of 1924 to 1926; the extreme right, which had briefly flourished during that period, was also in decline. Many conservatives believed themselves to be on the threshold of a new era.

Yet 1928 proved to be yet another false dawn in the history of the right. In both parliament and country it remained as fragmented as it had ever been. The system of proportional voting by list which had been used for the elections of 1919 and 1924 had imposed an unusual degree of electoral discipline on the right. But since negotiations between tendencies were carried on informally by political barons, extra-parliamentary political organisation withered away. In parliament the deputies of the right were dispersed in five groups in the legislatures of both 1919 and 1924. The restoration of two-round single-member constituency voting in 1928 meant that local complexities could once again come to the fore. Party structures also revived. There were, however, three distinct movements within the parliamentary right: the Catholic Fédération républicaine, the secular Alliance républicaine démocratique and the recently formed Christian democratic Parti démocrate populaire (PDP). None of these was able to unite the right in the Chamber of Deputies, where there were now six groups of the right and centre-right.

Poincaré and especially his successor André Tardieu endeavoured to stabilise the Republic through a programme of moderate reforms. The result was only to open up cracks within the right-wing coalition and even the Republic itself. Tardieu failed to transcend the deep historical and socio-economic divisions of the French right. Instead of building a strong conservative party on the British model, his position was

undermined by elements within his own majority, principally the right wing of the *Fédération républicaine*. Governments succeeded each other with the tedious monotony typical of the Third Republic. There also developed extra-parliamentary opposition among conservative supporters, who were organised in the *Défense paysanne* and the *Fédération des contribuables*. Together with the onset of the world economic crisis, these tensions led to the return to power of the left in May 1932. Disarray was such that there were now no fewer than ten conservative groups in the Chamber.

Return to opposition at least gave conservatives a common enemy, and in the following twenty months all were apparently united in disgust at the inability of a succession of Radical-led governments to implement a deflationary economic policy. On 6 February 1934, following the implication of several Radical politicians in the Stavisky scandal, various organisations of the extreme right demonstrated on the Place de la Concorde. Fifteen people were killed and 2,000 injured. On the following day the Radical Prime Minister Daladier resigned. His party switched its support to a government of the right under ex-President Gaston Doumergue. Subsequent events, however, showed that the unanimity of the right had been superficial. The right was no more able than the Radicals had been to elaborate a coherent economic strategy. The left meanwhile reorganised around the new issue of antifascism. On 14 July 1935 the Radicals joined the *Parti socialiste* (SFIO) and the Communist Party in the Popular Front. Successive conservative governments under Doumergue, Pierre-Etienne Flandin and Pierre Laval failed to master the political, economic and international situation. Many of their supporters therefore turned to antiparliamentary leagues, of which the *Croix de Feu* was by far the most important.

Even the electoral victory of the Popular Front in May 1936 and the mass strikes which greeted the installation of Léon Blum as Prime Minister failed to cement conservative unity. Although the number of right and centre parliamentary groups was reduced to five, a reorganisation of the right outside parliament merely added to the scrum of competing parties. The *Croix de Feu* became the *Parti social français* (PSF). Its new strategy of seeking power through the electoral system led to conflict with the established conservative parties. The situation on the far right was further complicated by the formation of the *Parti populaire français* (PPF), led by the ex-communist, Jacques Doriot. Neither parliamentary nor extreme right played a central role in the defeat of the Popular Front. On the eve of war both supported an increasingly authoritarian government led by Daladier. The rule of the 'fusilleur du 6 février' was accepted only because there was no alternative.

Thus the history of the French right in the interwar years was marked by weak leadership, division in the Chamber of Deputies and extreme volatility on the part of an electorate that was difficult to contain within sketchy party structures. The purpose of this book is to account for this pattern. Did these divisions reflect fundamental material and/or ideological cleavages? Were they merely superficial, masking a deeper unity? How is the periodic emergence of movements of the extreme right to be accounted for? What implications does this chronic fissiparousness of the right have for our understanding of the Third Republic? How, if at all, did the regime cohere if those most committed to stability were unable to realise their avowed aim of creating a united political movement?

Conservative divisions and republican society

The obligatory starting point for those interested in these questions is with René Rémond. Inspired by André Siegfried and François Goguel, Rémond explains the history of the right in terms of subterranean traditions and mentalities. Whereas Goguel sees a single right-wing 'mentality' marked by a concern for order and liberty, Rémond detects three irreducible elements within French conservatism throughout the period from 1815 to the present day, each 'with its own system of thought, temperament and clientele'. The first is a reactionary and traditionalist strand descended from Ultraroyalism. The second is a liberal-conservative tradition which originated in the July Monarchy. The third is Bonapartism, which reconciled democracy and authority in a manner unique to France. Amongst its capacities is the ability to absorb and neutralise movements of the antidemocratic extreme right. So fascism has never found fertile ground in France. No single idea united the three rights, not even defence of the status quo. The task of the historian is to trace the successive forms taken by each tendency.¹

There is no need to rehearse the objections to Rémond's views in detail.² Most important, fixing the essential characteristics of the right in the first half of the nineteenth century allows little room for new responses to new problems. As chronological distance from the founding years increases, it becomes ever more difficult to fit individual movements into any of the three categories. In consequence Rémond's

¹ René Rémond, *Les Droites en France* (1981); André Siegfried, *Tableaux des partis en France* (1930); Emmanuel Berl, *La Politique des partis* (1931); François Goguel, *La Politique des partis sous la Troisième République* (1946).

² Roger Martelli, 'Peut-on connaître la droite? Approches critiques', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'institut Maurice Thorez* 20-1 (1977), 15-19.

method becomes increasingly anticontextual. The essential components of each tradition are regarded as constant in all periods, while other features of particular movements are dismissed as a product of historical contingency. Nevertheless, Rémond's approach does have two advantages. First it emphasises that there is no single characteristic which defines the right across all periods. The concept of the 'right' gains meaning only in opposition to the 'left' in a given historical context. Secondly, there can be little doubt that something akin to Rémond's traditions has helped to define the history of the right. The problem lies rather in the assumption that the traditions exist in the real world in a pure form and that they are internally coherent. It is more appropriate to regard them as useful abstractions; ideal types which serve as a means of illuminating the nature of movements which in practice constructed their identities from a great variety of material – not always French in origin. Not only did Rémond's traditions overlap, but they also underwent significant changes and became subdivided. Such changes resulted first from the fact that the traditions in question were only ever partly embodied in historical groups and individual actors, and secondly from reinscription in new historical conjunctures. Thus traditionalists came to accept capitalism and aspects of liberal economics. Similarly the adaptation of liberal-conservatism to mass politics involved fundamental conflicts within a tradition torn between abstract commitment to sovereignty of the people on the one hand and the desire for class protection and fear of the 'law of number' on the other. Finally, by the 1930s the Bonapartist tradition had become intertwined with European fascism.

Prominent among Rémond's intentions was to contest a Marxist view which saw the right's fundamental purpose as defence of the dominant social class. In the early nineteenth century, Marxists argued, the right had been identified with the declining aristocracy. The struggle to eliminate the last vestiges of the *ancien régime* meant that the Republican bourgeoisie was on the left, and could therefore enlist the support of workers and peasants. In the longer term this conflict between feudalism and capitalism was increasingly circumscribed by assimilation of the aristocracy into capitalism and the development of popular struggles. For Sanford Elwitt and Herman Lebovics the turning point came in the 1890s when Catholic landowners and anticlerical businessmen are said to have joined forces in the face of the emergent socialist threat. By the 1930s the class struggle had been simplified still further. The left, led by the Comintern, confronted a bourgeoisie in which international monopoly capital was preponderant. That there was still no single party of the right had little significance beyond the fact that diverse vocabularies

were used to broaden electoral appeal. The same assumptions underlie the Marxist approach to fascism. Since the bourgeoisie is seen as a bloc, then the whole of the right must have turned to fascism in the mid-1930s. Leagues and parties are said to have united around Gaston Doumergue's 'fascist' proposals for constitutional reform put forward in 1934. Behind this movement, inevitably, was monopoly capital, manipulating the discontent of the petty bourgeoisie in order to secure undisputed control over the state for itself.³

Again there is no need to linger over well-known weaknesses. The modern right is certainly a significant component of a broad dominant class. Yet it cannot be identified exclusively with defence of capitalism. Other sources of social power such as the 'credentials' of the professions and gender must also be taken into account. These in turn cannot be analysed separately from political and ideological cleavages, of which the clerical/anticlerical struggle was the most important. Even in the 'economic' domain unity should not be taken for granted, for a variety of conceptions of society struggled for supremacy. Also the failure of the right to unite in response to the crisis of 1936 shows that one cannot assume a reflex of class defence. A further problem is that the Marxist view emphasises manipulation by the powerful and therefore neglects the impact on the right of socially subordinate groups.

I shall argue that there was a dynamic of unity and disunity within the right. The fact that all components of the right were, as Marxists insist, united in antisocialism, was insufficient to create political unity because various fractions of the ruling class sought to oppose socialism in different ways and disagreed even on what to defend. Challenge from the left sometimes revealed the 'fundamental unity' of the right, but, depending on context, was just as likely to cause intra-conservative conflict, as in crisis conditions competing groups redoubled their efforts to defend their own solutions. This was because of the legacy of ideological divisions identified by Rémond, together with differences of economic interests. Disunity is a feature of conservatism in all countries. But in France difficulties were especially great because of two inter-related problems. The first was the divisive legacy of the French Revolution, evident particularly in the clerical/secular struggle. The second derived from the uneven pace of French industrialisation, which created a structural imbalance in the economy and kept alive, as late as

³ Martelli, 'Peut-on connaître la droite?'; M. Margairaz, 'La Droite et l'état en France dans les années trente', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'institut Maurice Thorez* 20-1 (1977), 91-136; Sanford Elwitt, *The Third Republic Defended: Bourgeois Reform in France* (London and Baton Rouge, 1986); Herman Lebovics, *The Alliance of Iron and Wheat in the Third French Republic, 1860-1914: The Origins of the New Conservatism* (Baton Rouge and London, 1988).

the 1950s, a series of contradictory visions of social organisation. It is, of course, far from original to stress the importance of economic or ideological conflict in French history.⁴ This has not prevented many historians from reducing one source of division to the other, or from dismissing one type of conflict altogether. Pierre Birnbaum, for example, interprets French history in the light of a conflict between two universalist imaginary communities: one Catholic, the other based on fidelity to the French Revolution.⁵ Sanford Elwitt on the other hand argues that labels such as 'clerical' and 'anticlerical' are useful only for keeping track of ministries. They reveal nothing of what happened at the more fundamental level of social politics.⁶ In reality, the fragmentary nature of the right can be grasped only if the inseparability of cultural and economic divisions in the minds of historical agents is kept in mind.

The emphasis in this book is therefore upon the fragmentary and ill-disciplined nature of right-wing politics. Neither Goguel's 'political temperaments' nor his defence of capitalism provided the right with a fundamental unity. In some respects the interpretation advanced here is closer to that of Jacques Bainville, who argued that the forces of order in the Third Republic comprised a series of isolated and leaderless groups. Only in exceptional periods was a Clemenceau or Poincaré able to impose unity.⁷ This view, however, raises the question of social cohesion, since it is usually assumed that the right plays a central role in binding society together, and indeed that society must 'cohere' if it is to be viable. Bainville, writing from a royalist perspective, felt that, without a 'head', society, especially a democratic society, must sooner or later degenerate into anarchy. Modern historians have also assumed that conservative movements were essential to social cohesion, but differ from Bainville in the belief that the Third Republic *did* provide the necessary consensus and that the right was essential to its production. This is true of Stanley Hoffman's influential notion of the 'stalemate society'. This concept derives from the sociology of Talcott Parsons and Durkheim, who argued that a 'common culture' permits social groups to enjoy mutually beneficial relationships.⁸ For Hoffman there was in the

⁴ Malcolm Anderson, *Conservative Politics in France* (1974), 22–3.

⁵ Pierre Birnbaum, *'La France aux français': histoire des haines nationalistes* (1993), 9–16, 83–6.

⁶ Elwitt, *The Third Republic Defended*, 290.

⁷ Jacques Bainville, *The French Republic* (1935).

⁸ Stanley Hoffman, 'Paradoxes of the French political community', in *In Search of France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1963). Examples of the influence of Hoffman include Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France* (Cambridge, 1981); F. Monnet, *Refaire la république: André Tardieu, une dérive réactionnaire* (1933), especially 172. For the influence of Hoffman on writings about the failure of fascism in France see note 10.

Third Republic a psycho-social compromise between bourgeoisie and small producers, excluding only the extreme left and extreme right. It was based on the idea of limiting economic change in order to preserve peasants and small business as an element of social stability. Later historians have agreed that stability was guaranteed partly by the impregnation of the right with the values of the stalemated society. This deep-seated social compromise was far more important than political and ideological struggles. Indeed, for Hoffman 'political life came close to the model of a pure game of parliamentary politics . . . played in isolation from the nation at large by a self-perpetuating political class'.⁹ Hoffman's idea of a compromise between capitalists and small producers has been taken over by some Marxist historians, who give the right, as political representative of the dominant class, a still greater role in manufacturing 'hegemony'. It is argued that in the 1890s an alliance of landowners and capitalists used protectionism and an ideology of 'national labour' to incorporate the petty bourgeoisie and sections of the working class into social compromises which lasted until their destruction by the Popular Front in the 1930s. Thus both Hoffman and the Marxists dismiss political and ideological conflicts over issues such as Church and state as irrelevant to basic social compromises. In so doing they exaggerate the stability both of the Third Republic and of the right and make it hard to explain why so many conservatives should have turned to antiparliamentarian movements in the 1930s.¹⁰

As an alternative to these views I shall follow the approach of Abercrombie, Hill and Turner in their book *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, who argue that the importance of a 'dominant ideology' or 'common culture' in holding society together has been overemphasised. They argue that governments are seldom loved or supported by the masses, and that increasingly in modern society the ruling class itself is ideologically fragmented. The failure of subordinate classes to overthrow the system owes less to ideological incorporation than to political

⁹ Monnet, *Refaire la république*.

¹⁰ Some have sought to escape this difficulty by following Hoffman's view that the leagues represented merely an alternative authoritarian means of preserving a stalemated society threatened from 'outside' by economic crisis and Germany. Marxists on the other hand argue that the rise of the leagues was a response to the threat from the left in 1934-5. In both cases the roots of the leagues in the overlapping ideological and material divisions of the right are neglected. P. Milza, *Le Fascisme français, passé et présent* (1987), 224-5; Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire: les origines françaises du fascisme* (1978) 30, note 3; Allen Douglas, *From Fascism to Libertarian Communism: Georges Valois against the Third Republic* (Berkeley, 1993), xvii-xix; Martelli, 'La Droite et l'état'; Lebovics, *The Alliance of Iron and Wheat*, 190. Some of the same assumptions may be detected in the work of the non-Marxists R. Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave* (Yale, 1995) and W. D. Irvine, 'Fascism in France. The strange case of the Croix de Feu', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), 271-95.

constraint, the ‘dull compulsion of economic necessity’, and the capacity of the system to generate *some* reward for all groups.¹¹ This does not mean that the ideological strategies of the right are of no significance. On the contrary, it will be argued that the instability of the Republic resulted precisely from the belief of conservatives that society *should* cohere. Unversed in modern social theory, the various factions of the right believed that France could be saved from anarchy only if they could convert both elites and masses to their point of view. The problem was that ideas of how to achieve cohesion differed fundamentally and, when coupled with incompatible material interests, led to conflict. Bainville’s view that only overthrow of the Republic could preserve France from chaos is a particularly striking example of the problem, for royalists like him were regarded as dangerous subversives by other conservatives. Thus whereas conservative politics have most often been analysed in relation to the construction of hegemony, my concern is with the disruptive effects of ideology and material interest on the ruling elites and on society as a whole.

Difficulties were especially acute in the 1930s, when the economy ceased to deliver sufficient material recompense.¹² At this late stage divergent ideological and economic strategies took on a new importance as competing factions of the dominant classes redoubled their efforts to defend threatened advantages. Furthermore, we shall see that there was an authoritarian potential within the ideologies of all the main components of the right, so that a belief in the necessity of a reinforcement of authority developed within a broad spectrum of political opinion. It was from these circumstances that the Croix de Feu issued. It will be argued that the league represented a mobilisation of conservative rank-and-file in response to the divisions of the established right.¹³ Besides being a response to division, the league was also a product of long-term class, religious and political conflicts within the right. This book will seek to place the Croix de Feu within this context, and will therefore also re-examine the supposed stability of French society.

¹¹ Lebovics, *The Alliance of Iron and Wheat*, 7–8. Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (1980).

¹² Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (1979), 83.

¹³ In other words a socio-political crisis does not result from disruption of previously stable arrangements. Rather it consists in the fact that the normal heterogeneity of interests and activities becomes intolerable for one reason or another. If my view is correct, then the arrival in power of a fascist movement owes less to its ability to manufacture a new hegemony (as Althusserian scholars have argued, for example David Abrahams in *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (New York, 1986) than to political factors.

Definitional issues

It is customary when discussing fascism to begin with definitional questions. Yet historians have generally been content to take the concepts of the right and conservatism as given.¹⁴ Since one of my chief purposes is to explore the nature of the relationship between the right and the extreme right, such an approach will not do here. Although this book is not intended as a defence of a particular form of social theory, the understanding of conservative politics it presents is nevertheless heavily indebted to the neo-Weberian notion of 'social closure'.¹⁵ A brief introduction to this theory is therefore essential. The starting point is that the right was bound up with the struggle of advantaged groups to 'exclude' the non-privileged from access to resources and reward. 'Exclusionary social closure' involves the defence not just of material resources like the means of production and land, but also the means of coercion and access to knowledge. A variety of 'codes of exclusion' can be used to monopolise these advantages. They include legal titles to property, aristocratic birth, gender, membership of a communal group such as a religion or race, or possession of 'credentials' such as the educational qualifications necessary for exercise of the professions. In order to enforce exclusionary closure a combination of economic, legal, institutional, ideological and linguistic strategies can be used. Conservative movements may be implicated in all of these, but their particular goal as political parties is the enforcement of exclusionary systems by means of state power. Thus conservatives may defend property and inheritance laws, the legal monopolies of the professions and perhaps exclusive rights of men or of ethnic or religious groups. It is however essential to bear in mind that parties represent only one of a number of ways in which exclusionary closure can be maintained. For example informal rules such as membership of a religious or ethnic group can be used to limit job opportunities. Similarly the power of capitalists does not necessarily depend on the presence in government of friendly political parties. Big business in particular possesses immense institutional and financial power, and so can co-exist even with social

¹⁴ Exceptions are Jean-Charles Petitfils, *La Droite en France de 1789 à nos jours* (1973); Roger Eatwell and Noël O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Nature of the Right: American and European Politics and Political Thought Since 1789* (1989).

¹⁵ Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*; Raymond Murphy, *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolisation and Exclusion* (Oxford, 1988); for the first systematic application of closure theory to history see S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (1995); for a discussion of multiple forms of power see M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power I: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, (Cambridge, 1986).

democratic regimes as long as the latter leave intact basic guarantees of property. Nevertheless, powerful groups usually *believe* that they need the support of political parties. This, as we shall see, is a source of conflict.

Where conditions are favourable exclusionary closure may provoke a counter-struggle on the part of excluded groups to 'usurp' the same rewards. Usurpatory closure often involves mass mobilisation, and may lead to conflict with the state. Usurpatory closure is usually associated with the left. A third type of closure combines both exclusion and usurpation: 'dual closure' is the process by which certain groups simultaneously attempt to usurp the advantages of the elites and close off opportunities to subordinate groups. Dual closure reflects the fact that in modern society power and its rewards are not confined to a small group. With the growth of knowledge-based activities, the expansion of the state and the separation of ownership and control of capital, power is diffused throughout society.¹⁶ Many people therefore occupy contradictory locations within social relations. A classic example is that of white-collar workers, a group which will figure extensively in this book. They benefit from advantages in the labour market due to possession of credentials and share the delegated power of capitalism or the state, but at the same time are exploited as wage-earners and are subject to bureaucratic supervision.

Viewing the right in the light of closure theory has a number of advantages. First, closure theory takes account of the fact that left and right must be understood in historical terms and in opposition to each other. Exclusionary closure must be conceived of as a *process*, which has to be actively created and recreated through struggle with the excluded. All post-tribal societies are based on exclusionary closure. But only in the modern world is there a political struggle to modify the distribution of power through the capture of state power, and the precise objects of this struggle vary according to context. Second, closure theory emphasises conflict and overcomes the excessive reliance of the stalemate society thesis upon consensus. Third, it provides an alternative to the Marxist identification of political conflict exclusively with capitalism. It admits the importance of capital/labour conflict, but allows for other dimensions of power and resistance, and for conflict within each of them.

A further important advantage of closure theory is therefore that it illuminates the divisions of conservatism. Although all on the right are by definition opposed to the left, the specific advantages defended are diverse, and may result in conflicts of interest. Capitalists, for example,

¹⁶ Eric Olin Wright, *Capital, Crises and the State* (1978).

may attack the privileges of doctors in order to reduce the pressure of health care costs upon wage and tax bills. Similarly the professions may seek to expand opportunities for themselves by gaining the right to regulate and inspect private firms. Diversity of outlook also derives from the fact that social groups pursue a complex mixture of material and ideal ends. It is therefore impossible to distinguish classes from status groups on the grounds that the former seek material reward, the latter prestige: doctors may engage in struggle about fees; trade unions may be concerned with skill – partly an ideal notion. Even where a group purports to be based on a single criterion, such as class or Catholicism, it must nevertheless be analysed in the context of all the contradictions of society, none of which is primary. These rather abstract points can be made clearer by an example. In the Third Republic some businessmen used Catholic paternalism to exploit status divisions within the workforce. This does not, however, mean that Catholicism should be regarded as secondary to defence of capitalism. The businessman's view of the economy was shaped by Catholicism, and his view of the Church was shaped by material interest. Private Catholic schools played a part in the monopolisation of knowledge and access to careers in the business hierarchy; Catholic values also defined sections of the business class through marriage alliances and the transmission of property. So Catholicism was combined with material interest to produce a framework for group cohesion and for recognition of allies and enemies. Thus for the Catholic businessman an anticlerical industrialist could not be a reliable defender of property, whilst a Catholic socialist could not be a genuine supporter of the faith. It cannot be assumed that a common economic position will necessarily cause a group to unite against those who oppose its 'objective' interests.

The notion of 'dual closure' further illuminates intra-conservative conflict, and indeed both the far right and interwar Christian democracy will be examined partly in terms of this concept. Many individuals and groups occupy ambiguous positions within the right because they seek simultaneously to defend their position against the left and to usurp the advantages defended by the conservative elites. White-collar workers, organised in Catholic trade unions, were a case in point. The concept of dual closure can be extended to take account of conflict related to location within multiple networks of closure. Thus a politically weak section of the dominant class might seek to ally with subordinate groups in order to pursue a struggle against another section of the dominant class. Alternatively indigenous workers might use French citizenship to close off opportunities to immigrants. Whether such workers support the right depends upon historical context. Where they do so, it means that

they place more emphasis upon the advantages to be gained by excluding immigrants than upon collective struggles against employers.

The notion of dual closure also casts further doubt upon the use of ideological incorporation as a means of explaining the support of subordinate groups for the right. The previously mentioned worker does not so much internalise the dominant ideology as appropriate parts of it in order to further his/her own interests, and this may lead to conflict within the right. For example conservative workers may develop their own stake in the dominant ideology, which constrains the freedom of the elites: a worker who attributes relative advantage to Catholicism shared with his/her boss, is likely to be suspicious of an employer who seeks to set aside religion in the interests of unity with non-Catholic business. Conflict is further exacerbated because different sections of the conservative masses are 'incorporated' into different dominant ideologies. The concept of dual closure reveals, then, that general social struggles continue *within the right* in an altered form, constantly calling into question efforts to defend the interests of the privileged. The identity of the right is constantly undermined by the fact that it contains within itself something of that which it purports to resist – the usurpatory struggles of the left. This points to one final strength of closure theory: it allows for the fluidity of the boundary between left and right. Many movements, such as the Radical-Socialist Party, do not fit easily into the left/right division.

A potential objection to identification of the right with exclusionary closure is that some sources of privilege are defended as much by the left as by the right. In our period many left-wingers were prepared to discriminate on the basis of gender, citizenship and age. The solution to this problem is that the right/left division should be not regarded as an *objective* reflection of exclusionary and usurpatory closure. Rather it is related to political conflict at a given historical moment. Sources of reward have to be defended politically only if they are contested politically – that is where they involve conflict over state power. Gender was a principle of exclusionary closure in the Third Republic, and was contested in daily life. It also contributed to the shaping of political struggles – as Joan Scott argues, it was a means of signifying power.¹⁷ But it was less important in explaining the left/right division than was class or religion because most politicians of left and right accepted the dominant view of women's position in society and because of the notorious weakness of French feminism.¹⁸ More generally, we have seen that there was not one, but several rights. The left therefore defines itself

¹⁷ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 42–3.

¹⁸ Murphy, *Social Closure*, 111–21.