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Chapter 1

The extreme right in France: an enduring political tradition?

La politique, ce sont des idées.[1]

The far right in France is not the easiest political tradition to pin down and comprehend - if it is in fact one single tradition at all. It is complex in its lineage, chameleon-like in its evolution and often contradictory in its discourse;[2] Winock argues that the extreme right is 'a hard political tendency but a soft concept' (*'une tendance politique dure mais un concept mou'*).[3] Hainsworth, hinting at the rationale behind the present study, says: 'France has experienced various cycles of extreme right-wing activity...sparking off much debate about the nature and essence of this political family.'[4] Thus, we have to be very careful about the terms we use. Throughout this study we will utilise the terms 'right' and 'extreme right', but we must remember that any attempt to delineate political labels and categories will always be open to criticism.

Defining the right and extreme right

The words 'left' and 'right' are 'central to political debate'.[5] It is customary to begin a study like this with a qualification that indicates both terms are inadequate, but also quite useful in the absence of any better *nomenclature*. And it would be sensible to keep faith with tradition because there are plenty of doubters where conventional political terminology is concerned. Sirinelli suggests that the left-right cleavage is almost *passé*, while O'Sullivan says the term 'right' is 'vague' and 'unfocused'. [6] Moreover, O'Sullivan and Winock argue that labels such as 'the right' are prone to abuse and misuse, and it is difficult to disagree with this general point. [7] Over time, the term has lost much of its value and integrity (in much the same way as 'fascism' has) but having said this it is clear that the word 'right' has come to denote a series of definable political attitudes: realism, conservatism, and the belief in established authority and traditional values such as religion, monarchy and hierarchy.

The language may be problematic – and even flawed – but it still has wide currency. Rémond explains its enduring appeal:

Right, Left...the oscillation of these two terms, indissolubly linked by their opposition, paces by its rhythmic tempo all the political history of contemporary France. Men of the Right, men of the Left, parties of the Right, parties of the Left, Leftist bloc, Rightist coalition, Right-Centre, Left-Centre, the persistent hammering of these twin words punctuates 150 years of political struggles...A fundamental principle of French political life, this traditional division of public opinion into two great contrary points of view today remains the key which opens the door to an understanding of France's recent history. This history is bewildering and incoherent if left in an arbitrary and fortuitous disorder.[8]

Rémond might have been writing in 1971, but his point retains validity today. How do we even begin to understand the complexities of France's history – both political and intellectual – without the aid of the 'right-left' political spectrum and its accompanying vocabulary?

As regards the present study, we are at something of an advantage because the term 'right' (just like the term 'left') does have innately French origins. It was during the early years of the French Revolution that the distinction emerged, with nobles and clerics sitting on the right-hand side of the National Assembly, and representatives of the Third Estate sitting on the left.[9] Those on 'the right' came to be associated with efforts to preserve the King's authority and the established social order and in time with counter-revolution. McClelland says the French right 'attacked rationality, universality and democracy and in so doing worked out an opposing position of great coherence and force.'[10]

Many books have been written about the French right – as distinct from the right in general or the French far right – and it would be fair to say that commentators have identified not just one right-wing tradition in France but many, and the Revolution is invariably the starting point and key reference point. McClelland continues: 'If, as the right argued, all France's troubles can be attributed to the Revolution, then it follows that to save the nation, the Revolution and its mythology in the present must be destroyed.'[11] From the last years of the nineteenth century to the first years of the twenty-first, this has been a fact of life.

But, what of the extreme right? What does *it* stand for? Billig outlines the scale of the problem:

The term 'extreme right' is a particularly troubling one to use in political analysis. In ordinary speech and in journalistic writing one could use the term without being misunderstood, and intuitively there seems to be a set of political parties, movements and tendencies which 'go together', for example all outwardly Nazi parties. However, in an academic context this is not sufficient: one would have to justify why such parties are being called both extreme and right-wing. And it is here that the problems start.[12]

Needless to say, it is the aim of the present study to make sense of these 'problems' in the French context. Hainsworth refers to the same issue:

The concept of the right...is elusive and, by extension, so is that of the extreme right. Of course, it would be wonderfully convenient - though academic wishful thinking - if leaders, parties and movements labelled themselves extreme right to make easier the task of comparison and analysis. Instead, organisations studiously avoid and reject extreme right labelling.[13]

Thus, we are left in a difficult situation. We want to attach labels to 'leaders, parties and movements', and also political traditions, in a relative and comparative way, but there is always the danger of being simplistic, subjective and even pejorative.

Anderson suggests that moderates on the right probably have more in common with

moderates on the left than they do with extremists on the right and seems to imply that the gap between 'right' and 'extreme right' is greater than we think.[14] This is interesting but it should not bother us unduly. We are more interested in the nature of the far right in France rather than its proximity to other traditions, but here we encounter more problems. Is there one extreme right or several? De Maistre, the *émigrés*, the Vendée rebels, the Ultras, Charles X, Boulanger, Barrès, the Ligue des Patriotes, the Anti-Dreyfusard Movement, the Action Française, the fascist *ligues*, Vichy, the Paris Nazis, *Algérie Française*, Poujadism, the FN. All these individuals and movements have, to a greater or lesser extent, been saddled with the label 'extreme right' over the last 200 years. Do they really have anything in common? And if so, what?

On balance Hainsworth says the extreme right in France is almost indefinable,[15] and given this fact we must take Winock's advice and not get too hung up on the precise definition of the term. He accepts the term is problematic but says it is still 'used by everybody', and as such is an aid to understanding.[16] Another difficulty comes in the fact that the far right in France is consistently stigmatised and demonised by political opponents, historians and social scientists. It is as if 'extreme' political traditions are devoid of ideas and theory, and exist only as battering-rams for politically correct observers. This kind of polemic is unhelpful and certainly does not assist our quest for a working definition.[17] McClelland counters this negativity and refers to 'the intellectual respectability of extreme right-wing thought in France.'[18] This is a significant statement to make and gives our study a clear rationale.

Historians such as Sirinelli and Winock have explored the extreme right tradition in full.[19] There are no easy answers as to what is of the extreme right, and what is not, but it is clear that the far right possesses many characteristics of the right, but to a more intense and radical degree. On the far right there is also an intransigence and a willingness to resort to extra-parliamentary tactics that is not a feature of the conventional right.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to construct an 'identikit' extreme right. In every generation the far right seems to re-emerge, often in a new and totally different guise, but a helpful starting-point is Winock's assertion that, whatever the overlaps and complexities, there have been continuities on the extreme right over the last two centuries. He alludes to five: the rejection of parliament, the attachment to strong government, the hatred of socialism and communism, the belief in the closure of frontiers, and a consistent desire to 'rebuild *la maison française*'. [20] We might add others as well: the ability to exploit crisis conditions, the belief in direct action, the use of violence (sometimes), a constant trust in 'charismatic' cult leaders, a tendency to communicate in both populist and intellectual terms (occasionally at the same time) and, more often than not, failure. Billig seeks to distinguish the extreme right from the extreme left, the non-extreme right and fascism. However, he acknowledges a clear overlap between the 'extreme right' and 'fascism' and distinguishes three common features: nationalism/racism, anti-Marxism/communism, and a hostility to democracy.[21]

Anderson, talking about the 1880-1970 period also moves towards some kind of general characterisation:

The extreme Right has had its own themes expressed continuously but with varying degrees of vociferousness since the end of the nineteenth century. These have

related mainly to various conspiratorial views of politics including Jews, Freemasons, foreigners, bankers and the 'two hundred families'. *Anti-Étatisme* has been a common platform, at various times, of groups threatened by economic change and the fiscal policy of the State. But all the continuities are vague and tenuous. The content of the common attitudes or traditions has been so ill-defined and so much disputed that they have not provided symbols around which durable political organisations could be built.[22]

On the basis of such views, it is possible to argue that there *is* a single extreme-right tradition in France - in effect, a linear progression, through a variety of movements and ideas, from 1789 to the present day. Winock agrees with this general line of thinking, arguing that even though the extreme-right tradition is a 'kaleidoscope', there are important elements of continuity.[23] He says that in each generation the extreme right has a newness about it, but also an element of heritage.[24]

Today's FN is a good example of a far-right movement that is both 'new' and 'old'. It has developed distinctive positions on modern issues such as Europe and immigration, embraced twenty-first century technology in the shape of the Internet, and adapted seamlessly to the world of 24-hour news. The ultimate in *mediatique* politicians, Le Pen is in many ways the personification of modernity. That said, it is also true that the FN situates itself in line with tradition. Whether knowingly or unknowingly - and for most of the time it is the former - the movement still honours the memory of *Algérie Française*, still makes use of Poujadist vocabulary, still emphasises Vichyite themes, still talks a rabble-rousing language reminiscent of the inter-war *ligues*, still imitates the populism of Boulanger, still apes the 'rooted' nationalism of Barrès, and still associates itself with anti-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary politics. The same could be said of Pétain's wartime regime and the radical right of the late nineteenth century, for they too adapted themselves to a new political context and defined themselves in modern terms but at the same time were not frightened of drawing on elements of the past to help expand their appeal.

Historians and the French right

In Europe and America Eatwell and O'Sullivan identify five 'types' of right: 'reactionary', 'radical', 'moderate', 'extreme' and 'new', and this typology will be a useful reference point for the duration of the study.[25] Eatwell says it is 'difficult to find a common linking strand in right-wing thought' because there are 'significant differences' and 'contradictions' across the spectrum.[26] Again, this point is worth bearing in mind as our examination of the French right-wing tradition progresses.

In his classic study, Rémond pinpoints three 'families' within the main tradition of the French right: Orleanism, nationalism/Bonapartism and Ultracism.[27] Interestingly, though, he rarely talks explicitly about 'extremism'; nor does he give much credibility to the notion of a French fascist tradition.[28] Sternhell, Milza and Soucy disagree with Rémond because they do identify a fascist tradition. Sternhell says that France offered 'particularly favourable conditions' for the growth of fascism (as movement and ideology, rather than regime).[29] He views French fascism as a cocktail of nationalist and socialist elements and in the period 1880-1920 discerns the birth of 'a mass movement' (*'un*

mouvement de masse) - in effect, a new 'revolutionary right';[30] Soucy locates a fascist tradition that in its early phase owed a significant debt to Barrès and by the middle of the twentieth century had given birth to a 'definite ideology' and was 'highly moralistic, highly serious-minded'.[31] Milza, meanwhile, traces the history of French fascism from the 1880s to the 1980s.[32]

Arnold's edited volume highlights the diversity of the 'radical right'. This political family is depicted as broad-ranging and home to anti-semitic, fascist, collaborationist, neo-Nazi, new-rightist and extreme-right currents.[33] For his part, Sirinelli refers to *Ultracisme*, and then Legitimism, as the 'true right'. He argues that a new right was born in the late nineteenth century and, in this regard, talks about 'the dawn of political modernity'.[34] During the last century he identifies both a parliamentary and an anti-parliamentary right; in the post-1945 period he refers continually to '*les droites*', and after 1965 he pinpoints an 'extreme right' and also a 'new right'.[35] Anderson examines the political and intellectual history of France after 1880 and locates conservative, counter-revolutionary and nationalist strands to the broad tradition.[36] He attempts to sum up the essence of the right:

A simple prejudice has been widely shared among French politicians, since the failure to restore the monarchy in the 1870s, that to be of the Right implies association with the forces of the past...Groups accrete to the Right as a result of changing circumstances. No issue or theme defines the Right for any extended period of time but there nevertheless have been threads running through the politics of the Right since the late nineteenth century. These are clericalism, nationalism, regionalism and the defence of property.[37]

In his 1994 study Winock identifies two main sub-traditions: counter-revolution ('over two centuries it has kept its vigour and its unity of thought')[38] and populism/national-populism ('the goal is not to restore the monarchy but to found a firm-handed regime').[39] He is also happy to countenance a third tradition – fascism – from the 1920s onwards.[40] The title of his 1990 book - *Nationalisme, Antisémitisme et Fascisme en France* - would suggest that he also conceives of an independent and autonomous anti-semitic tradition.[41] Austin's exclusive focus is the inter-war period and he recognises a powerful far right and conservative right. He concludes that the 'ideological differences' between these two factions was 'often buried, especially between 1934 and 1938 when conservatives and extremists shared a common commitment to recapturing political power'.[42] This example helps us to understand the way in which right-wing traditions can fuse.

Petitfils talks about the extreme-right tradition as a combination of '*le nationalisme français*' and '*la tentation fasciste*', but underpinned by 'the old traditionalist and counter-revolutionary current'.[43] He argues that these three traditions are very different and that over time far-right activists have had their fall-outs but, he says, what is undeniable is the 'permanence and renewal of ideological themes' and 'the multiple points of convergence that go to form the unity of this political family'.[44] The dichotomy at the heart of the extreme-right tradition is clear. There may be many different phases but there is also a 'tradition of thought unbroken since the Revolution'.[45]

Although historians are divided on how to break down and classify the right, it is

possible to synthesise their ideas, and it is clear that we should talk in the plural rather than the singular. And as we will discover, some right-wing traditions are particularly relevant to a study of the extreme right, while others are less so.[46]

Right-wing 'families'

The counter-revolutionary right

The counter-revolutionary - or reactionary[47] - tradition is the most enduring on the right and, at the same time, is crucial in helping us to understand the essence of the extreme right. As we noted earlier, McClelland argues that the most important characteristic of the right in general, and thus of the extreme right, is its hostility to the French Revolution and, more specifically, the values that emerged out of 1789.[48] On an intellectual level, Joseph de Maistre fired the first shots:

There is a satanic element in the French Revolution which distinguishes it from any other revolution known or perhaps that will be known. Remember the great occasions - Robespierre's speech against the priesthood, the solemn apostasy of the priests, the desecration of objects of worship, the inauguration of the goddess of Reason, and the many outrageous acts by which the provinces tried to surpass Paris: these all leave the ordinary sphere of crimes and seem to belong to a different world.[49]

It is because of passages like this that de Maistre is commonly viewed as the founding father not only of the counter-revolutionary right, but of the right and the far right in France. O'Sullivan describes him as the personification of 'reactionary conservatism'.[50]

In terms of action, the main players were the Vendée rebels, the émigrés and members of the Court (primarily, the King and Queen) - actors who exhibited an 'excessive sentimentality'.[51] It is a mistake, however, to associate counter-revolutionary values with the decade 1789-99 alone, for Counter-Revolution is an idea rather than a period of time. In the early nineteenth century the torch was passed on to the Ultras (the 'pure' émigrés of the 1790s) and they put their faith in a 'mystic conception of the monarchy'.[52] Extreme royalism reinvented itself as 'Legitimism' following the anti-Ultra revolution of 1830, and it was to trade under this name right up until its demise in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Ultracisme is examined in depth in Chapter 2, but the impact of this political force can be seen throughout the book, and throughout French history.

Extreme-right movements in the twentieth century also exhibited a strong dislike of the Revolution: from the pro-restoration Action Française through to Vichy - which banned the 1789 Déclaration and replaced the revolutionary triptych of 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' with 'Travail, Famille, Patrie' - and the FN, which in 1989 campaigned against the idea of 'celebrating' the 200th Anniversary of the event.[53] McClelland says that, 'what unites the right ideologically in France is the fundamental attack on reason and the rights of man'.[54]

Out of this basic position - an in-bred mistrust of the Revolution and all it stands for -

have emerged other related standpoints; most obviously, a critique of the left. Those on the far right have viewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century socialists and communists as the chief benefactors of the Revolution's inheritance and as such they have demonised ideas and movements of the left. This has been consistent and in different eras different organisations have suffered: the Jacobins in the 1790s, the Liberals and Constitutionals during the Restoration, Dreyfusards in the 1890s, the Cartel des Gauches and the Popular Front in the inter-war period, Resistance forces during the Second World War, and the PS and PCF in the contemporary period. At the height of the Cold War, Le Pen explained his antipathy towards the left:

Today the USSR and communism constitute the main threat to our liberties and our lives....Communism is an economic system of stupidity and imbecility and this has been demonstrated to good effect by the material results of almost 70 years of slavery and brutality.[55]

Others have couched their anti-leftism in more sophisticated terms, but the message has invariably been similar. Hainsworth recognises that anti-communism is not the sole preserve of the extreme right, but in his view it still remains 'a longstanding attribute'.[56]

In addition to anti-leftist political warfare, movements of the far right have also engaged in attacks on basic concepts like democracy. Vichy banned elections and the ligue of the inter-war years yearned for the complete overhaul of the democratic system. Some individuals on the far right have engaged with the democratic process - Le Pen since the 1970s, Poujade in the 1950s and Boulanger and Barrès in the 1880s and 1890s – but their main instinct has always been to oppose it and campaign instead for some kind of utopian alternative. Barrès is a good case in point. Campaigning as a Boulangist in 1898, he demanded: 'Revision of the Constitution with the aim of giving universal suffrage its full and complete sovereignty, particularly by means of the municipal referendum.'[57] The intention here is noble, but the language is vague.

The far right's hatred of the Revolution resurfaces in its virulent anti-republicanism. Just as today the FN offers an in-depth critique of the Fifth Republic – and actually proposes the establishment of a 'Sixth Republic'[58] – so the Poujadists and Algérie Française activists of the 1950s campaigned against the Fourth Republic on account of: (a) its 'insensitivity' to small businesses; and (b) its weakness in the face of Arab nationalists. Likewise, the Third Republic was dogged from birth by protest and agitation on the radical right. The Ligue des Patriotes condemned the regime's lack of interest in claiming back the 'lost territories' of Alsace and Lorraine, while Boulanger criticised the corruption and selfishness of parliamentary députés and Barrès condemned the 'anti-national' policies of successive governments. The Anti-Dreyfusards of the 1890s synthesised these ideas and were close to bringing the regime to its knees. Their coup d'état failed, but their assault on the hated Republic was a milestone and left a significant legacy.

Nonetheless, it was probably Maurras who crafted the most compelling critique of republicanism. In 1899 the AF leader contrasted the Third Republic with the royalist regime he yearned for:

The ridiculous republic, one and indivisible, that we know so well, will no longer be

the prey of ten thousand invisible, uncontrollable little tyrants; instead thousands of little republics of every sort, 'domestic' republics like families, 'local' republics like towns and provinces. 'intellectual' and 'professional' republics like associations, will freely administer their own affairs, guaranteed, coordinated and directed as a whole by one sole power which is permanent, that is to say personal and hereditary and with an interest in the preservation and development of the state...Whereas the citizen of the French Republic is left only with his own meagre individual powers to protect him against the mighty state machine, the citizen of the new kingdom of France will find himself a member of all kinds of strong and free communities (family, town, province, professional organisation etc.) which will deploy their strength to protect him from any injustice.[59]

The ligués of the 1920s and '30s shared Maurras' dislike of the Republic, but argued for some kind of firm executive government rather than the return of the kings.

Pétain and his acolytes blamed the pre-1940 regime for the Fall of France and in so doing absolved the military. They talked about the 'decadence' of the Third Republic and one pro-Vichy writer spoke of 'this hovel we have lived in for 70 years.'[60] For Pétain, the Republic was the Revolution by proxy, and it is no surprise that Vichy propaganda played so heavily on the weakness and fragility of the pre-1940 regime and the intrinsic stability and strength of the post-1940 regime – or so things were perceived.[61]

At certain junctures, the corollary of this critique has been a call for 'Conservative Revolution'. [62] The AF patented this slogan but Pétain and others also took it on board. The belief was that France, somehow, had to go backwards to go forwards. However, in saying this, we should note the fact that since 1880 many groups on the far-right fringes of French politics have viewed themselves not as conservatives and reactionaries, but as radicals. At one point or another, Boulanger and Le Pen have defined themselves as 'revolutionaries', and have even placed themselves explicitly within the French revolutionary tradition.[63]

As a footnote to this discussion, it should be said that extreme nostalgia sometimes substitutes itself for counter-revolutionary zeal. In the 1950s Poujade looked on small-town, pre-supermarket France as a 'golden age' and in the same decade the hardline Algerian rebels displayed a powerful attachment to France's imperial past.

But in general terms it is accurate to characterise the far-right tradition as, first and foremost, counter-revolutionary. McClelland claims that, 'if, as the right has argued, all France's troubles can be attributed to the Revolution, then it follows that to save the nation, the Revolution and its mythology in the present must be destroyed.' [64]

Nationalism and national-populism

The national-populist tradition is younger than the counter-revolutionary tradition, but equally as imposing. Nationalism is not exclusive to the extreme right - on the contrary - but it is nevertheless a core element of its heritage.

It is tempting to argue that, since 1880, nationalism has been an ever-present characteristic of the far right. Anderson writes:

The beautifully expressed and eclectic nationalist sentiments of Maurice Barrès

have been very widely held. Many of his ideas were typical of a European wide intellectual climate of the 1890s. The sense of decadence, hostility to liberal democracy and big city civilisation, and condemnation of corrupt and unheroic modern society were attitudes...(that) reached their apotheosis in the Vichy regime.[65]

Winock goes further and argues that 'two hundred years of uninterrupted "decadence" has had profound consequences for la nation française.[66]

Indeed, since the late nineteenth century, those on the far right have generally championed a bi-polar conception of the world. There is 'France' and there is 'Anti-France'. 'France pour les Français' nationalists have aligned themselves with some or all of the following: 'language', 'le peuple', 'culture', 'roots', 'le tricolore', 'religion', 'soil', 'la terre', 'blood', 'Joan of Arc', 'enracinement', 'the military', 'eternal values', 'les petits gens', 'agriculture', 'Empire', 'le chef de l'état', 'ancestry', 'the regions'. At the same time, they have attacked all evidence of 'Anti-France', whether 'Jews', 'socialists', 'immigrants', 'cosmopolitans', 'foreigners', 'internationalists', 'gypsies', 'metèques', 'revolutionaries', 'freemasons', 'Germans', 'philosophes', 'Arabs', 'half-castes', 'disease', 'mosques', 'foulards', 'the French Revolution', 'protestants', 'AIDS'. This conceptualisation is graphic but at the same time simplistic and reveals much about the black-and-white mentality of the extreme right.

According to Winock and Hainsworth, the national-populist tradition encapsulates movements of the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century (and many in between).[67] With the advent of the Third Republic and mass politics in the 1870s, a new type of right emerged - modern, radical and embodied by the new icons: Barrès, Boulanger and Déroulède.[68] It sought to adapt itself to the circumstances of the moment and to engage with democratic politics. Winock talks about the 'era of the masses': when 'the people' were viewed as the source of all authority and legitimacy and when anti-semitism emerged as a new defining characteristic of the far right.[69] This new radical right was populist and nationalist, and in line with Woods' typology it viewed the 'existing social order (as) decadent' and in need of removal.[70] It is possible, without too much trouble, to view three twentieth-century phenomena - the ligue, the Poujadist movement and the FN - as part of the same family. The language used by these groupings is significant. In the 1980s an FN propaganda poster stated simply: 'LE PEN, LE PEUPLE'.

National-populism, in the view of Winock, is the product of three core attitudes: 'we are in decadence'; 'the guilty are known'; 'the Saviour has arrived'.[71] And Hainsworth is happy to lump together national-populists from different generations:

The political rationale of Barrès, Boulanger, Paul Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes and Le Pen is premised upon the perceived decadence and moral decline of France, attributable to political mismanagement and retreat from traditional values. Furthermore, Barrès evoked the will of a great country to rediscover its destiny, a theme echoed by Le Pen in his major speeches and writings.[72]

Today, the FN is the embodiment of a virulent brand of closed nationalism and it is strong in its patriotism and vitriolic in its hatreds: North African immigration, 'Americanisation'

and the 'Brussels-dominated' EC among others.[73]

In the 1950s Poujadism was both anti-immigrant and pro-empire, while the Algérie Française movement was completely loyal to the idea of France as a pro-active imperial power.[74] In the 1940s Vichy stood as the embodiment of ultra-nostalgic patriotism. Although it was fatally compromised by its collaboration with Nazi Germany, Pétain's regime put great emphasis on 'eternal' French values. The Marshal – France's most famous soldier and 'Victor of Verdun' - was the ultimate role-model.

In many ways the backward-looking National Revolution launched by Vichy was the natural sequel to the integral nationalism of Barrès and Maurras. These two writers developed a way of thinking about France that was to influence many, not just Pétain. In the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, they argued that France had to withstand all external pressures and 'threats' (which Maurras grouped together under the epithet 'Anti-France'). They viewed patriotism as 'unconditional' and put great store on the preservation of the 'moi national', even if this meant erecting 'barriers' (more metaphorical than real). Neither Barrès nor Maurras had any truck with the notion of a 'cosmopolitan' France and yearned instead for an integral, homogenous nation, entirely free of 'alien' influences.

Although Revisionist[75] politicians like Boulanger and Barrès resorted to socialist-sounding platitudes when appropriate (when they needed working-class votes), their obsessive nationalism – and, at times, racism – placed them firmly on the far right. As such, in the decades after 1880 'patriotism' became intrinsically associated with the new radical right. This was a significant change for before 1880 the left had claimed to be the 'patriotic' party and the monarchical right had given them plenty of ammunition. During the Revolution the princes and aristocrats had shown themselves to be more concerned with cross-monarchical solidarity than the future of the nation, and in 1871 it was the left that wanted to carry on the war and the right that wanted to retreat. So, in this sense, the 1880s were a landmark. Nationalism was now associated with the far right and what is more it became a defining characteristic, but only after 1880.

Having said that, a couple of important qualifications need to be made: the inter-war ligue were pro-German in outlook, and the policy of collaboration pursued by the Vichy regime was obviously a very unnatural agenda for a 'patriotic' regime.

We could also suggest that blame-allocation is a longstanding feature of the far right.[76] Hainsworth says that, 'nourished by defeatism and anxious for redress, the extreme right has found little difficulty in pinpointing scapegoats for France's failures: Jews, Freemasons, foreigners, communists and other allegedly alien influences.'[77] This kind of mentality is a continuum. Barrès' view that foreign workers were 'parasites' (espoused in the late-1880s)[78] finds an echo in Le Pen's belief that France is suffering an 'invasion' of North African immigrants (expounded throughout the 1980s, 1990s and in the first years of the twenty-first century). There have been other graphic illustrations of nationalism veering off into xenophobia: the insularity of the AF and Vichy, the ideology of 'superiority' advanced by the ligue, and the anti-Arab discourse of Poujade and the pieds noirs in the 1950s.

Likewise, anti-semitism: a key ingredient in national-populist ideology but not exclusive to it, and not so much a characteristic as a tradition or, in Winock's words, a 'current'.[79] Byrnes explains how Drumont - arguably the most notorious anti-semite in French history - was able to connect with people in the 1880s:

(He) brought into his antisemitic books both the racy, journalistic style and the eagerness to bluster and offend which had been characteristic of some of his earlier writings...Drumont's volumes were not only skilfully written, but they were an expert blend of true and false. He scattered attractive anecdotes throughout his works, giving them an interesting concrete and personal element...Provincial readers were attracted by his intimate descriptions of Paris society at its worst, while romantic souls enjoyed his musical treatment of mediaeval France and of the beauties of the countryside...La France juive not only became the most widely read book in France, but it also prepared the way for a whole series of books by Drumont on the same theme.[80]

In many ways Drumont viewed anti-semitism as an ideal way of tapping into people's preoccupations and, thus, a means towards the ultimate end of making a name for himself. This helps us to understand the essence of national-populism.

Sternhell emphasises the importance of anti-semitism in the late nineteenth century, arguing that it was instrumental in the emergence of a 'new intellectual climate' and eventually paved the way for fascism.[81] From Drumont and the radical right of the 1880s and 1890s through to the Maurras, the ligués and Pétain, Jew-baiting has been ever-present. Even in the post-war period when the extreme-right should have known better, the anti-semitic dimension to Poujadist and FN rhetoric has been there for all to see, and it is for this reason that Wistrich entitles his chapter on French anti-semitism, 'From Dreyfus to Le Pen'. [82]

The trap we should not fall into is to view all these instances of anti-semitism as identical. The fact of the matter is that over 120 years several main 'types' are evident. We should not put too much store on the labels, nor should we assume that the 'families' are mutually exclusive, but it is possible nevertheless to identify a 'cynical' anti-semitism (as advanced by the Anti-Dreyfusards and Laval), a 'xenophobic' anti-semitism (Barrès, Maurras), a 'sensationalist' anti-semitism (Drumont, Le Pen) and an 'opportunistic' anti-semitism (Boulangier, Poujade). Overall, Wistrich confirms that 'the ideological continuity in French antisemitism has shown remarkable persistence.' [83]

We should note finally that it is not just in France that traditions of national-populism and extreme right politics overlap. Hainsworth talks in global terms:

Central to the extreme right's discourse is the question of identity, national identity drawing upon language, religion, culture, history and other aspects. Nation, national identity, ethnocentrism: these are at the core of the extreme right's value system. The rhetoric of the extreme right is based upon a vision of the nation supreme, heroic, pure and unsullied by alien forces such as Third World immigration and communist ideology...National-populism, although not simply a preserve of the extreme right, helps largely to differentiate the extreme right from the moderate or traditional right, with the former often able to attract a significant number of voters - working-class, ex-left wing, unemployed, disaffected youth, former abstentionists and first-time voters - temporarily (or otherwise) denied to the latter.[84]

It would also be true to say that many assumptions associated with the national-populist tradition are replicated on the fascist right.

Fascism

Fascism, without doubt, is the most controversial political phenomenon in France. In the words of Winock: 'Fascisme à la française ou fascisme introuvable?' ('French fascism or fascism nowhere to be seen?')

Rémond is notoriously sceptical about the existence of fascist movements, never mind a fascist tradition,[85] but other historians are willing to countenance the idea. Eatwell argues that French fascism was more an intellectual phenomenon than a practical political proposition and also identifies a buoyant neo-fascist tradition in France in the decades after 1945.[86] Sternhell and Soucy are committed to the notion of a French fascism. The former is particularly interested in the period between 1880 and 1914, in which he detects the emergence of a 'pre-fascism' that anticipates the emergence of 'full-blown' fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. His two main theses are that twentieth-century French fascism was an indigenous phenomenon and that, in its 'full-blown' state, it synthesised leftist and rightist assumptions. Soucy's research ties in with much of this, but he puts particular stress on the political ideas of Barrès, 'the first French fascist'.[87]

For his part, Milza identifies a rich, varied and perplexing orbit of movements and ideas. Writing in 1987, he talks about fascism in the past and the present tense and characterises the contemporary species as a product of post-Vichy 'fantasies, obsessions and hatreds'.[88] His main conclusion is that fascism has been remarkably unsuccessful, due mainly to its lack of numbers and the formidable 'republican culture' that exists in France.[89] Winock concurs on this last point - he talks about the 'republican spirit' and the 'reflex of "republican defence" in the face of the far right[90] - but he delineates a fascist tradition in France beginning only in the 1920s.

Nolte's contribution to the debate is important. He recognises the Action Française as one of the 'three faces' of inter-war European fascism, and remarks:

In spite of all its doctrinal rigidity, the system of Maurras' ideas is of an extent, acuteness, and depth without parallel in the Germany or Italy of that time. The practice of the Action Française anticipates, in the clear simplicity of the rudimentary, the characteristic traits of the infinitely cruder and more wholesale methods used in Italy and Germany. Seen by itself, the Action Française is not an epochal phenomenon. Yet it is, as it were, the missing link demonstrating fascism as a stage in an overall and much older struggle.[91]

This comment helps to put French fascism in a European context and, at the same time, demonstrates the significance of 'early fascism'.

So, from 'early fascism' and 'pre-fascism' - when the idea of fascism existed but the word itself did not[92] - through to 'semi-fascism' and 'neo-fascism', France is an important field of study and whatever the caveats and qualifications there is a strong case to be made for the existence of an independent, autonomous fascist tradition running through her intellectual history.

Warner says that, 'only a major catastrophe could bring fascism to power in France',[93] and pinpoints 1940 as the moment. However, fascisme français was never a reality in the same sense that Italian or German fascism was but, ironically, this has tended to

increase historians' fascination in the subject, rather than lessen it. Griffin states:

France provides a major case study in the often subtle distinctions which separate fascism from new forms of radical right that emerged after 1870 such as the anti-Semitic leagues, prototypes of national socialism associated with Boulanger and Barrès, the mainstream Action Française or the veteran anti-socialist leagues such as the Croix de Feu, which were such a feature of inter-war France.[94]

More rights

The Bonapartist tradition will be of interest to us in the present study, but most historians would agree that as political leaders Napoleon I and Napoleon III were devoid of real political ideology and were interested mainly in power and jingoism, not ideology, and as such could not seriously be considered as being of the 'right' or 'extreme right' in any meaningful sense. However, as Winock notes, Bonapartism did have a significant influence on individuals such as Boulanger and Déroulède and movements such as anti-Dreyfusardism and the inter-war leagues. In more specific terms, he identifies a strong plebiscitary, anti-parliamentary continuum.[95] Rémond thinks in the same kind of way and in Boulangist agitation, he locates a Bonapartist-style nationalism.[96]

The Gaullist right was born with General de Gaulle and outlived him. The significance of Gaullism has to be understood, but no-one could argue that it was (or is) 'of the extreme-right'. Indeed, in many senses, it was (and is) unusually hostile to the far right. Not many Algérie Française veterans would agree that the Gaullist Party is (to quote Anderson) 'the long-awaited culmination' of right-wing politics![97] There are some significant overlaps between Gaullist right and extreme right (for example: 'cult' authoritarian leadership, nationalism, and an intense belief in the grandeur of France), but we must keep things in perspective.

In the modern era - the 1980s and 1990s in particular - we should acknowledge the emergence of a new right tradition. On a global scale Eatwell interprets the New Right as an amalgam of libertarian, laissez-faire, traditionalist and mythical thinking, underpinned by a powerful anti-communism.[98] In France La Nouvelle Droite is difficult to pin down, but in de Benoist, GRECE and the Club d'Horloge, France has given birth to a new, distinct and progressive type of right that, over the years, has impacted significantly on Le Pen's FN.[99]

The liberal right - heir to Rémond's Orleanist right - is a significant continuity in French history, but it is of only limited relevance to a study of far-right politics. If it has importance it is in the sense that it contrasts so sharply with the extreme-right tradition.[100] This is not an exhaustive survey - far from it - but it does help us to understand the main traditions that have underpinned right-wing discourse over the last 200 years.

Given the parameters of this study, it would be fair to say that, of the sub-traditions referred to so far, Counter-Revolution (incorporating Ultracism), nationalism/national-populism, fascism, nationalism/Bonapartism and the new right are of most relevance. By contrast, Gaullism and the liberal/Orleanist right are of only marginal importance to us. The parameters of this particular study dictate that we leave these two sub-traditions on

one side. As we will discover, the counter-revolutionary, national-populist and fascist traditions are omnipresent on the far right, and we will now focus on these three 'families' almost exclusively.

A plethora of questions are raised with regard to these central traditions: Which is the most dominant? At what point does each sub-tradition reach its apogée? In which individual or movement does each sub-tradition find its best, most graphic embodiment? Which individuals or movements crystallise, in themselves, all three sub-traditions? Are all three sub-traditions alive today? In this chapter, and in the book as a whole, we will touch on all these issues.

It should be reiterated that the nature of these traditions is certainly not cut and dried. On the subject of nationalism, for example, Winock talks about an 'open nationalism' (associated with the left) and a 'closed nationalism' (associated with the right), and also speaks of 'variations and contradictions' within the French nationalist tradition.[101] Similarly, with regard to fascism, Sternhell talks about a 'heterogeneous' and 'ambiguous' phenomenon.[102] These remarks should serve as a warning to us as our investigation proceeds and becomes more detailed.

We should not assume either that these main sub-traditions are mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary in fact, for there are junctures at which all three do appear to intersect: most notably, in Barrès (anti-Dreyfusard, arch-nationalist and, arguably, 'the first French fascist'),[103] in the extreme right of the 1930s ('a complex galaxy', according to Winock),[104] and in Vichy (anti-rights of man, personified by super-patriot Pétain, and to some observers the best example of authentic 'French fascism').[105]

McClelland also makes an interesting point about inter-tradition relationships. He says that to link someone like de Maistre (in the late-eighteenth century) with fascism (in the mid-twentieth) would be absurd. But he goes on to claim that, in reality, there is a connection in that both early-nineteenth century conservatives and twentieth-century fascists were reacting to, and rebelling against, the French Revolution and 'certain assumptions about the nature of man and political society.'[106] Likewise, Steiner refers to the way in which counter-revolutionary ideas can emerge 'under the dubious aegis of proto-fascisms or outright fascism'.[107] We should certainly take this point on board, for it is certainly true that relationships may exist where we least expect them. Nonetheless, the fascination of the extreme right lies in the fact that, for most of the time, sub-traditions have existed in parallel with each other, each with different emphases and starting-points.

Another way of thinking about the whole issue is to conceive of a political spectrum with a 'space' or 'void' on the extreme right that has been filled by a succession of different parties, movements and ideas. The advantage of this conceptualisation lies in the fact that it takes account of the way in which the extreme right has changed and evolved over time. It also stops us trying to make erroneous connections and linkages between extreme-right movements in different eras – movements that, in reality, have little in common. It is always tempting to think in terms of an extreme-right 'tradition', and we will do exactly this in the course of our investigation. However, it could also be argued that every individual or group in France labelled 'far right' has been unique, and has had very little in common with previous manifestations of this 'thing' we call the extreme right.

Moreover, at times it would seem to be more accurate to talk in terms merely of 'protest' and 'agitation' - and forget all notions of a specific type of political ideology or a

full-blown political tradition. But that is not to deny the validity and usefulness of the schema put forward by Eatwell & O'Sullivan, Rémond, Sternhell, Milza, Soucy, Sirinelli, Anderson, Winock, Austin, Petitfils, Hainsworth and McClelland. Indeed, the frameworks put forward by these commentators will not only help us to focus on the key issues in forthcoming chapters, but will also supply us with a vital point of reference.

[1] Albert Thibaudet, quoted in J-F.Sirinelli & E.Vigne, 'Introduction' in J-F.Sirinelli (ed.), *Les Droites Françaises de la Révolution à nos Jours*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p.31.

[2] M.Winock (ed.), *Histoire d'Extrême Droite en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p.14.

[3] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[4] P.Hainsworth (ed.), *The Extreme Right in Europe and the USA*, London, Pinter, 1994, p.30.

[5] R.Eatwell, 'Right or Rights? The Rise of the "New Right"', in R.Eatwell & N.O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Nature of the Right: American and European Politics and Political Thought since 1789*, London, Pinter, 1992, p.3.

[6] Sirinelli & Vigne, *op.cit.*, pp.9-19; N.O'Sullivan, 'Conservatism' in R.Eatwell & A.Wright (eds.), *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, London, Pinter, 1993, p.54.

[7] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.7; O'Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.54; R.Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, p.21, also airs this line of thinking.

[8] Rémond, *op.cit.*, p.19.

[9] See Sirinelli & Vigne, *op.cit.*, pp.21-5.

[10] JS.McClelland (ed.), *The French Right: From de Maistre to Maurras*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1971, p.20.

[11] McClelland, *op.cit.*, p.15 & p.36.

[12] M.Billig, 'The Extreme Right: Continuities in Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory in Post-War Europe', in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.146.

[13] Hainsworth, *op.cit.*, p.3.

[14] M.Anderson, *Conservative Politics in France*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1974, p.339.

[15] Hainsworth, *op.cit.*, p.30.

[16] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[17] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[18] McClelland, *op.cit.*, p.14.

[19] Sirinelli, *op.cit.*; Winock, *op.cit.*

[20] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.11 & p.15.

[21] Billig, *op.cit.*, pp.146-8; Hainsworth, *op.cit.*, p.5, says the extreme right is not synonymous with 'fascism' or 'new fascism'.

[22] Anderson, *op.cit.*, p.344.

[23] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.16.

[24] Winock, *op.cit.*, p.7 & p.16.

[25] See Eatwell & O'Sullivan, *op.cit.*

[26] Eatwell, *op.cit.*, p.3.

[27] Rémond, *op.cit.*, p.30.

[28] And is also writing pre-FN.

[29] Z.Sternhell, *Ni Droite Ni Gauche*, Paris, Complexe, 1987, p.29.

[30] Sternhell, *op.cit.*, p.78; see also Z.Sternhell, *La Droite Révolutionnaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1978. Whereas Rémond interprets Boulangism as a pre-industrial phenomenon akin to Bonapartism, Sternhell sees the General and his movement as a product of 'new right' politics and a symptom of 'pre-fascism'.

[31] R.Soucy, 'The Nature of Fascism in France', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.1, 1966, p.55.

[32] P.Milza, *Fascisme Français*, Paris, Flammarion, 1987.

[33] EJ.Arnold, *The Development of the Radical Right in France: From Boulanger to Le Pen*, London, MacMillan, 2000.

[34] Sirinelli, *op.cit.*

[35] Sirinelli, *op.cit.*

[36] Anderson, *op.cit.*, p.17 & p.18.

[37] Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp.339-40.

- [38] Winock, op.cit., p.8.
- [39] Winock, op.cit., p.9.
- [40] Winock, op.cit., p.10.
- [41] See M.Winock, *Nationalisme, Antisémisme et Fascisme en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1990; this is reflected in Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.9.
- [42] R.Austin, 'The Conservative Right and the Far Right in France: The Search for Power' in M.Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives*, London, Hyman, 1990, p.176.
- [43] J-C.Petitfils, *L'Extrême Droite en France*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1983.
- [44] Petitfils, op.cit., p.6 & p.10.
- [45] McClelland, op.cit., p.14; A 1984 *Le Monde* survey, by contrast, splits the modern extreme right into 'royalists' (who look back to Maurras and the AF), 'nationalists' (who are inspired by the memory of the *Algérie Française* and *Pétainisme*) and 'revolutionary nationalists' (who, on the plane of ideas, connect to both anti-Marxist extremists and neo-Nazis).
- [46] See S.Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, Oxford, OUP, 1996.
- [47] JS.McClelland, 'The Reactionary Right: The French Revolution, Charles Maurras and the Action Française', in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, op.cit.
- [48] McClelland, (1971) op.cit., p.14, p.15 & p.36.
- [49] J.de Maistre, 'Considerations on France', taken from J.Lively (ed.), *The Works of Joseph de Maistre*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1965, p.71.
- [50] O'Sullivan, op.cit., p.55.
- [51] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.8.
- [52] Rémond, op.cit., p.35.
- [53] See Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.17; see also G.Steiner, 'Aspects of Counter-Revolution' in G.Best (ed.), *The Permanent Revolution: The French Revolution and its Legacy 1789-1989*, London, Fontana, 1989, pp.151-2.
- [54] McClelland, (1971) op.cit., p.36.
- [55] J-M.Le Pen, *Les Français d'Abord*, Paris, Carrere-Michel Lafon, 1984, pp.173-4.
- [56] Hainsworth, op.cit., p.12.
- [57] M.Barrès, 'The Nancy Programme, 1898', taken from D.Thomson, *Empire and Republic*, London, Harper & Row, 1968, p.273.
- [58] See *Le Contrat pour la France avec les Français: Le Pen Président*, Saint-Brieuc, Presses Bretonnes, 1995, p.5.
- [59] C.Maurras, 'Dictator and King', taken from McClelland, (1971) op.cit., pp.230-1.
- [60] P.Claudiel, 'Words to the Marshal', taken from McClelland, (1971) op.cit., p.307.
- [61] One Vichy poster featured two houses: one representative of the old Republic - decrepit and dirty - and the other representative of Vichy - solid and firmly constructed. The message was simple. Also, it goes without saying that, two centuries earlier, the main players in the Counter-Revolution had been provoked into action by the establishment of the First Republic, the political philosophy embodied by the regime, and the various pieces of legislation enacted by it.
- [62] See R.Woods, 'The Radical Right: The "Conservative Revolutionaries" in Germany' in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, op.cit., pp.124-45.
- [63] See Boulanger, 'Speech, 2 December 1888', taken from R.Gildea, *The Third Republic 1870-1914*, London, Longman, pp.96-7; Le Pen, op.cit., pp.174-6.
- [64] McClelland, (1971) op.cit., p.15.
- [65] Anderson, op.cit., p.341.
- [66] Winock, (1990) op.cit., p.103, and, more generally, pp.103-11.
- [67] See Winock, (1990) op.cit., pp.41-9, and Hainsworth, op.cit., pp.30-1.
- [68] Not to be confused with 1980s new right.
- [69] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.9.
- [70] See Woods, op.cit., pp.124-45.
- [71] Winock, (1990) op.cit., pp.43-6.
- [72] Hainsworth, op.cit., pp.30-1.
- [73] On anti-Americanisation, see Winock, (1990) op.cit., pp.50-82. Hainsworth, op.cit., pp.5-7, argues that immigration is the extreme right's issue par excellence

- [74] Hainsworth, op.cit., p.33.
- [75] Boulanger's movement, for whom Barrès was a key spokesman, was known officially as the 'Revisionist' movement because it sought to 'revise' the constitutional arrangements of the Third Republic.
- [76] Hainsworth, op.cit., p.31.
- [77] Hainsworth, op.cit., p.31.
- [78] Barrès, op.cit., p.269.
- [79] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.9.
- [80] R.Byrnes, *Anti-Semitism in Modern France*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1950, pp.152-3.
- [81] Sternhell, (1987) op.cit., p.78.
- [82] R.Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*, London, Mandarin, 1992, p.126.
- [83] Wistrich, op.cit., p.144; for background, see Billig, op.cit., on conspiracy theories and Holocaust Denial theories.
- [84] Hainsworth, op.cit., pp.9-10.
- [85] See Rémond, op.cit.
- [86] R.Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, London, Vintage, 1996, p.165 & pp.239-58.
- [87] See Sternhell, (1987) op.cit., and R.Soucy, *Fascism in France: The Case of Maurice Barrès*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972.
- [88] Milza, op.cit., p.442-3.
- [89] Milza, op.cit., p.440 & p.443.
- [90] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.302.
- [91] E.Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965, p.26.
- [92] Winock, (1990) op.cit., p.250.
- [93] G.Warner, 'France', in S.J.Woolf (ed.), *Fascism in Europe*, London, Methuen, 1981, p.320.
- [94] R.Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.133.
- [95] Winock, (1990) op.cit., p.246, and, more generally, pp.231-47.
- [96] See Rémond, op.cit., p.224.
- [97] Anderson, op.cit., p.24.
- [98] R.Eatwell, 'Right or Rights? The Rise of the "New Right"', in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, op.cit., pp.6-13; see also N.O'Sullivan, 'The New Right: The Quest for a Civil Philosophy in Europe and America', in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, op.cit., pp.167-91.
- [99] See D.Johnson, 'The New Right in France', in L.Cheles, R.Ferguson & M.Vaughan, (eds.), *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, London, Longman, 1991, pp.234-44; see also HG.Simmons, *The French National Front: The Extremist Challenge to Democracy*, Oxford, Westview, 1996, pp.207-16.
- [100] Corresponds with the type of doctrine examined in A.Aughey, 'The Moderate Right: The Conservative Tradition in America and Britain' in Eatwell & O'Sullivan, op.cit., pp.99-123.
- [101] Winock, (1990) op.cit., pp.7-8 & pp.11-40.
- [102] Z.Sternhell, (1987) op.cit., p.31.
- [103] Soucy, op.cit.
- [104] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.11.
- [105] Winock, (1994) op.cit., p.12; see also Warner, op.cit.
- [106] McClelland, (1971) op.cit., p.13
- [107] Steiner, op.cit., p.152