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Geoff Read, *The republic of men: gender and the political parties in interwar France*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014. x + 289 pp. Table, notes, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8071-5521-9.

Response by Geoff Read, Huron University College.

I am grateful to Charles Sowerwine for reviewing my book and to H-France for giving me the opportunity to respond. Sowerwine says some complimentary things about my study: he is impressed by the quantity of the research and seems to agree, largely, with the study's main conclusions. I will, however, concentrate my response on his criticisms. In some cases, Sowerwine has misrepresented my work.

Sowerwine catches an error I make regarding the career of Yvon Delbos. As a Ph.D. student, I misread a document from 1919 in the summer of 2004 to mean that Delbos was a Socialist candidate in the Dordogne. I knew that as of no later than 1924 he was a Radical and so thought this was an interesting footnote to his career. I now understand that what I was looking at was a local electoral list--the "liste de concentration économique et républicaine,"--of which Delbos was a part.^[1] This misunderstanding caused me to misattribute him as a Socialist in his early career who gravitated to the Radical Party by 1924; he was rather, it turns out, a left-leaning Radical from the outset. I am aware of two other similar mistakes in the book, thanks to Karen Offen who kindly pointed them out to me in an email. I call Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix a Catholic when she was in fact a Protestant (p. 104); and perhaps most embarrassingly, I name a Dr. J. Héricourt--likely Dr. Jules Héricourt--who wrote extensively on eugenics-related questions for *La Lumière*, Jenny Héricourt, creating confusion between him and the nineteenth-century feminist Jenny d'Héricourt (pp. 39, 177). I have not been able to identify how I made either of the latter two errors. Although I don't think the three blunders that have surfaced to date undermine the analysis, I certainly regret them.

In addition to calling me out on this detail, Sowerwine makes some other valid points. I agree, for example, that the book would be improved by more consistently referring to past and future connections. I certainly did not intend to suggest that the interwar period was unique, for example, when it came to the omnipresence of "racialism." If one turns to the introduction, one finds a fairly involved discussion of the nineteenth-century origins of both racialism and eugenics. As Sowerwine says, my findings offer strong evidence of "the persistence and pervasiveness of nineteenth-century race and gender discourse."

Sowerwine complains similarly of a lack of historical context around my discussion of hyper-masculinity, suggesting I should have been clearer that much of the focus on young, virile men was a product of World War I. I could return to this point more frequently. That said, I do draw this connection several times in the book. Discussing the New Man, for example, I write, "The timing as well as the substance of the emergence of [the fascist and communist new men] in French politics, moreover, suggests strongly that both...were products of World War I. Their emphases on physicality,

youthfulness, manly camaraderie, and discipline appear to reflect millions of men's wartime experiences in the military and the militarization of politics more generally" (pp. 55-56).

Continuing with the New Man, Sowerwine also takes me to task for suggesting that the fascist variant was influenced by his communist counterpart and writes, "It is not clear (and Read does not spell out) how the communists' representation of masculinity affected right-wing groups." He also asserts that the creation of a New Man was not an explicit communist project, and suggests that communist interwar militant masculinity picked up on the tradition of the pre-WWI socialists. My response is as follows. First, I should have drawn the connection to pre-1914 socialism more explicitly. Second, I could not disagree more strongly with the claim that the creation of a New Man was not part of the communists' agenda, and I think there is ample evidence in my book and in others' studies to prove that it was.[2] I will quote André Marty, whom I highlight as representative of the effort to construct a communist new man: "The new man, the socialist man, the happy man, is replacing the former wage slaves..."[3] Third, while I allow in the book that many fascist veterans came by their militaristic masculinity honestly, I do also explain the connection between the communist and fascist new men: "Given that one of fascism's *raison d'être*, and arguably its most crucial one, was to combat communism both by literally battling Communists in the street and by, it was hoped, converting Communist militants to fascism, it was natural that the fascists would emulate some of the Communists' appeals, rhetoric, and esthetic" (pp. 71-72). Fascists, in other words, imitated the hyper-masculinity of the communists as part of their attempt to win the war for the hearts and minds of working-class men. The case for this becomes even stronger when one considers Sowerwine's point that communist hyper-masculinity was rooted in the pre-1914 era.

Sowerwine is also not happy with my sources on the Radical Party. He allows that *L'Ère nouvelle* was representative of the party's right, but argues that I should have looked at other papers for the more centrist or left-wing discourses within the party. I would agree with him that *L'Œuvre* is a good source for left-leaning Radical discourse. That said, I did examine every page of the entire run of the left-of-centre *La Lumière* and not just "a few examples." Moreover, Sowerwine mischaracterizes my book as a study of the press alone, when in fact I also relied on archival sources, particularly the personal papers of key political figures. For material on the Radicals, in addition to the two newspapers I read exhaustively, I also sampled Edouard Daladier's papers and Edouard Herriot's book, *Pourquoi je suis Radical-Socialiste*. Additionally, I read over twenty-one years' worth of debates on issues of interest in the *Journal Officiel* for both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies in which Radicals featured prominently. In sum, while I could have done even more, I am confident I have captured the contours of interwar Radical gender discourse.

Sowerwine also believes that a tendency to judge past actors from a presentist position leads me astray. Returning to the person of Delbos, for example, he says effectively that it is unfair of me to judge him for his romantic views of French colonialism because these were widely shared. In this case, at least, Sowerwine misunderstands my point. I am not picking on Delbos because he was atypical, as Sowerwine seems to think, but because he was emblematic. This is, as Sowerwine notes elsewhere, the method I use throughout the book as I chart the dominant trends in the discourse. Thus, my commentary on Delbos is not meant to condemn him *per se* but to offer him as a representative example of the seemingly wilful blindness and illogic of interwar politicians and commentators on the subject of the colonial empire.

In some instances, Sowerwine has misrepresented my views. When he attacks my case for the presence of racism in the Socialist Party, for example, Sowerwine decontextualizes my remarks. He thereby makes it appear as though I suggest that the concept of "equal pay for equal work" is/was inherently xenophobic. Instead, if one looks at the passage in question (p. 98), I carefully explain, based on the work of Laura Frader, that in the 1920s, many workers pursued "equal pay for equal work" as a means of preventing foreigners from undercutting Frenchmen's wages.

Similarly, when it comes to Henri Sellier's eugenicism my evidence is much more substantial than Sowerwine's selective quotation makes it appear. Sellier mused that the state did not desire "defective" children and called for "the same precautions" to be put in place "that one takes for the selection of domesticated animals and plants."^[4] As Minister of Health for the Popular Front, he also commissioned a survey of the mentally-handicapped children in the school system, and, in the 1930s, he served on the editorial board of a eugenicist journal that published several articles endorsing sterilization. Sellier's biographers identify him as a eugenicist and, indeed, he was fairly open about his embracing of eugenics. As he stated, "I am for a eugenicist politics. It is not enough to raise the birth rate, the quality of the race must also be improved."^[5] On this basis and more, I think it is fair to speculate that Sellier "*might* have supported a policy of sterilization" (pp. 124-125, emphasis added).

Sowerwine also laments that I do not pursue, in his view, two interesting historiographical questions. With regard to women and the political parties, for instance, he finds my discussion insufficient and complains that I "accept previous organizational arguments," that the key cause of the Socialist Party's failure to gain many women members, for example, was that it insisted women join the party before allowing them access to its adjunct group for women. Sowerwine is right that I think this impeded Socialist efforts, but I offer an abundance of accompanying explanations on the very pages he cites (pp. 174-176). First, I maintain, based on my own research and others', that the rank and file in the party was hostile to women's inclusion; second, I suggest that, despite Léon Blum's vaunted appointment of three women as undersecretaries in 1936, he and other Socialist leaders were also half-hearted in their embrace of women in politics. If we look elsewhere in the book, moreover, I argue persistently that the masculine conception of citizenship that most Socialists shared was a major obstacle to women's inclusion (see, for example, p. 181).

As for the *Croix de Feu's* success with women, I don't think I could be any clearer that this was because the organization genuinely valued women's contributions and gave them meaningful roles that were central to its political goals. As I state, "thousands of women in the Croix de feu became politically involved and had their own role in a political endeavor validated" (p. 169). When the *Croix de Feu* reached out to women it was sincere, in other words, whereas the Socialists and others were not. Caroline Campbell's recent book contains further insights that I find convincing, including that the activism of *Croix de Feu* women was seen as "nationalist" rather than "feminist" in character, which was both less threatening to the organization's men and more enticing to its women. Moreover, Campbell makes clear that the *Croix de Feu* built on a tradition of Catholic women's activism that the centrist and left-wing parties could not draw upon.^[6]

With regard to the chapter on women's suffrage, Sowerwine maintains that I "dismiss" all the arguments about why women struggled to get the vote in the interwar period. This is simply not true, as anyone who reads the introduction and conclusion to the chapter will know. In fact, I state explicitly that I believe, like other scholars before me, that the masculinist construction of the citizen within republicanism was a serious obstacle to women's enfranchisement, and I give credence to other factors as well. I do not single out male politicians as the only cause of the failure to enact suffrage, as Sowerwine implies, but rather as the individuals most responsible for that failure. As I state, "No French government ever made women's suffrage a question of confidence, and no French politician, save perhaps [Radical Senator] Louis Martin, proved willing to jeopardize his career for the suffragists' cause" (p. 211). The key insight of the chapter is that the increasingly conservative and exclusionary context within which suffragists were operating in the 1920s and 1930s made it ever harder for them to make their case. This explains why in each succeeding vote on the issue in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, the support for women's suffrage *declined* rather than grew. The book reaches its narrative climax in this chapter because it is where we see the effect of the creeping gender traditionalism and racialism most clearly: among other things, this regressive trend helped ensure that women did not get the vote until 1944.

In sum, I am grateful for Sowerwine's review of my book, which contains insights into how the analysis might have been strengthened. That said, he does not do the book justice, and I am confident that colleagues who read it will agree.

NOTES

[1] For more, see: [http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/\(num_dept\)/2282](http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/2282) (accessed July 28, 2016); Bernard Lachaise, *Yvon Delbos, Biographie: 1885-1956* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Éditions FANLAC, Périgueux, 1993), pp. 75-100.

[2] See, for example: Eric D. Weitz, "The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in European Communism, 1917-1950," in Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 311-352.

[3] André Marty, "Quand de simples ouvriers..." *L'Humanité*, March 17, 1935, 8.

[4] Henri Sellier, "Ce que le code de la famille a malheureusement négligé," *La Lumière*, Feb. 23, 1940, 3.

[5] As cited in Roger-Henri Guerrand and Christine Moissinac, *Henri Sellier: Urbaniste et réformateur social* (Paris: Éditions la découverte, 2005), p. 158.

[6] Caroline Campbell, *Political Belief in France, 1927-1945: Gender, Empire, and Fascism in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), pp. 49-85.

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