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Philippe-Jean Hesse and Jean-Pierre Le Crom, Eds., *La protection sociale sous le régime de Vichy*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001. 377pp. Notes, map, bibliography and index. 150,87FF (pb). ISBN 2-86847-603-1.

Review by Lynne Taylor, University of Waterloo.

Philippe-Jean Hesse and Jean-Pierre Le Crom have compiled a useful collection of essays dealing with a little explored aspect of the history of Vichy and occupied France--the question of what happened to the social welfare system after France's defeat. In hindsight, it is somewhat surprising that this has been so little explored. It was a time of serious shortages and high unemployment, and the system of benefits and allowances made a crucial difference for the majority of the population who lived in poverty or on its edge. This work is not a social history, however. It is a history of social welfare policy and its institutions and implementation. Nonetheless, it is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the social history of this period, for it does an excellent job of explaining the nature, operations, and logic of the social welfare system. In the process, it also makes an important contribution to the discussion of how Vichy fits into the broader history of France. The authors' conclusion is that when looking at the social sphere, Vichy cannot be considered an aberration in French history but must be considered an integral part.

One of the conclusions drawn from these essays is that there was considerable continuity between the Third Republic's welfare state and that of Vichy--a continuity that continued into the period of Liberation. Much of the legislation underlying the operations of Vichy's welfare institutions was passed by the Republic, and in fact, many Republican institutions, both governmental and private, continued to operate under Vichy--the personnel and administrative structures remained the same.

Vichy did introduce its own social welfare legislation, but its purpose was to expand the coverage of the benefits to include special groups previously excluded, such as the peasant farmers and civil servants; to shift the focus of the benefits and allowances to favour certain segments of society, such as large families and the heads of large families (a reflection of Vichy's broader mandate to protect and nurture the family); and to bring order to what had become, under the Republic, a rather awkward, underfunded, inefficient, and ineffective bureaucracy. There was a special emphasis placed by Vichy on children and adolescents, reflected in the various feeding programs established--including the ubiquitous vitamin biscuits. Vichy also launched a massive propaganda campaign and established a special organisation intended to deal solely with issues of public health, such as malnourishment, preventative care, school and industrial health. These innovations were not, however, a qualitative change but a modification and augmentation of programs already begun during the Third Republic. Traditional mutual societies were the vehicles used to extend benefits to those not yet receiving them. There were also hopes that making the system more efficient would make it less expensive to maintain, although this soon proved a vain hope in light of the increasing numbers of unemployed and retired, who were in a poor position to look after themselves given the unfavourable economic climate of the war years.

The failure of the regime to break cleanly with the past ultimately doomed some of its efforts at reform.

For example, although the state argued for increased centralization, which was to be implemented through the aegis of the Charte du travail and the creation of new *comités sociaux professionnels*, few of these *comités* were ever actually created. Instead, aid continued to be distributed through the *comités sociaux d'entreprise*, holdovers from the Republican regime, which continued to operate according to the Republican social welfare legislation. Thus, the organisations remained the same, and the status quo was maintained. Indeed, another theme central to this collection was this marked disjuncture between the discourse of the regime and the practice, nothing unusual to those familiar with the politics and factionalism that permeated Vichy, but it is interesting to see it played out in the area of social welfare.

One organisation which benefited greatly from the establishment of Vichy was Secours National—a private charitable organisation. The essay by Jean-Pierre Le Crom is an excellent discussion of how Secours National came to be the most important private aid organisation in France during the Vichy regime. The organisation was very Pétainist in its orientation, favouring large families and children in Catholic schools, rather than non-denominational schools, for example. With the state's support, it came to dominate the field of private assistance, forcing many other charitable organisations into obscurity, if not shutting them down. Its original mandate was to help the victims of the war, but that soon expanded to include indirect victims—such as the families of prisoners of war and camp internees and their families. Secours National ran soup kitchens, school canteens, vacation camps for children, snack programs for mothers, workers' gardens, and distributed clothing, to name a few of its programs. The result was a very bureaucratic organisation with tremendous influence and which furthered Vichy's discriminatory practices.

There is an acknowledged tension within the work: to speak of social welfare in the general sense is to ignore the diversity of the regional responses and implementation of the programs. There had to have been considerable difference between occupation zones, as well as within each of these zones, and this is acknowledged somewhat by the inclusion of two essays, one addresses Alsace-Lorraine and the other the Alpes-Maritimes. It is ironic that a book dealing with Vichy should include two regions that fell under, respectively, German and Italian occupation, and nothing about a particular corner of Vichy. What this suggests is that there is considerable work still to be done on these questions, with this book as an excellent starting point. Further, we must be particularly careful to remember that Vichy was not all of France, but only one, albeit large, corner. The German, and for that matter Italian, perspectives and influences on social welfare would undoubtedly figure more prominently in areas more closely under their control, something that is more clearly addressed in the essay on the Alpes-Maritimes than in the essay on Alsace-Lorraine.

Another important argument made, and one which furthers a growing realization among historians of Vichy and the postwar period, is that there was considerable continuity from Vichy into the Liberation period and beyond. In the postwar period, social welfare was brought under the auspices of the *Sécurité sociale*. The authors argue that Vichy's legislation, and by inference, it would appear, the legislation of the Third Republic, played a not insignificant role in the shaping of the postwar *Sécurité sociale*. While exploring these continuities in depth is beyond the scope of Hesse and Le Crom's collection of essays, they do point to a series of pieces of legislation passed in the months after liberation which confirmed Vichy's social legislation. This was in marked contrast to other legislation which explicitly revoked other pieces of Vichy legislation, especially those that discriminated among the French citizenry. They also observe that some of Vichy's proposed reforms, which were never enacted at the time, were adopted by the postwar governments. These observations raise again a question with which historians of twentieth-century France have been grappling since the publication of Robert Paxton's work, *Old Guard and New Order*—whether Vichy was an integral part of the continuum of French history or an aberration.

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6. Jean-Pierre Le Crom, "De la philanthropie à l'action humanitaire."
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9. Marc Ortolani and Olivier Vernier, "Les Alpes-Maritimes."
10. Jean-Pierre Le Crom, "Les idées de la Résistance."
11. Philippe-Jean Hesse and Jean-Pierre Le Crom, "Conclusion."

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